

CLAUDE ROMANO  
THE RISK AND RHYTHM OF IPSEITY:  
THE «EVENTIAL HERMENEUTICS»

Romano C. *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay. NY:  
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The Subject's Empty See

*What comes after the reduction?* Is there an original giving that precedes me, but truly gives me to myself? If one were to survey the many modes of reduction according to a careful delineation of all the various 'regional ontologies', he/she would discover that, *inter alia*, they together exhibit a particular danger: They all risk *stasis*. Yet, only if the reduction is continued – if one pushes on into the reduction – does one see that the world's 'drawing near' is a beckoning, a call: that *my* very selfhood is implicated in the world's unfolding. A simple step back from the world and it floods with light; it draws strangely near. The ultimate point of the 'priority of the possible' is precisely this opening to the other that is the meaning of selfhood. It is precisely *here* that the *aporia* comes to light most sharply that the reduction itself is a free act of the sovereign subject; it is metaphysical through and through.<sup>1</sup> The only way forward is to let go, and to follow the movement of events and find the reduction pushed back until it rolls over into sheer alterity, into the immemorial, where the reduction *is* finally the origin itself. We posit *a posteriori* what is in fact *a priori*: The reduction precedes us, in events. Here there is a risk involved for the self and for phenomenology, which, as we can see, still moves by the great dictum of German Idealism: «All or nothing»<sup>2</sup>. What comes after the reduction? Let us ask ourselves if a tentative answer offers itself here: *Responsibility*. Humanity in all its wonder. For if the reduction is risk – if the risking is its end, then, if the event of birth, of the «absolute non-ground» of phenomena is finally and inexhaustibly uncovered, the task of response is of course *infinite*. Responsibility is the risk that never ends; the reduction is finished only as it is unfinished, as it is 'uncondition'. The opening of oneself to the event of the world's unfolding is as long as the life of the self, as wide as the self's very possibility that precedes it as impossibility, as absolute *possibility*. This demand is already indicated by the risk implicit in all the various phenom-

<sup>1</sup> Cf.: Romano C. *Love in Its Concept: Jean-Luc Marion's The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. S.E. Lewis // K. Hart (ed.) *Counter-Experiences: On Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. P. 319.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: Franks P.W. *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. Harvard, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005.

enological *ipseities* that still are jostling for the subject's abdicated *ca-thedra*. We must learn to follow the movement of events' unfolding. *The things themselves* reveal my responsibility to them, for them – revealing myself to me.

Light shafts, shifting  
The leaves with its glances.  
Everything is shock still  
Birthing invisibility...  
Everything calls for *me*... everything calls me forth.

For Claude Romano, this responsibility to the birthing of the world is itself one's own birthing; Selfhood *is* fidelity to the event that precedes me, that gives me the world. For Romano, there is a ceaseless return to the origin that I am, a fidelity to the possibility, indeed, to the birthing of possibility that is transformative. This fidelity of risk is navigated along a particular route, which corresponds to the particular rhythms of *ipseity*. This route, for Romano, is traced by an «evential hermeneutics», which then gives us a description of «evential *ipseity*», of what he calls *l'advenant*.

First, then, an overview of the text.

*Event and World* is a translation of the first volume of Romano's masterful study of the event, written as his doctoral dissertation: *L'événement et le monde* (1998), which is accompanied by *L'événement et le temps* (1999), currently being translated. The first volume, discussed in this essay, articulates the human being from the vantage of events, as «the one to whom something happens» (1.1), and therefore as the opening of a world. The second volume describes time as that which becomes accessible to us only in events. It seeks to understand the rhythms of *ipseity* (the *advenant's* «adventure») insofar as selfhood “can itself be conceived starting from evential temporality” (3.135). It therefore only expands the analyses of volume one, but from the vantage of time.

Romano's *Event and World* has three parts. In Part One, *Event and World* begins with a general phenomenology of the event. It is therefore decisive for what follows in Parts Two and Three, viz. the unfolding of an evential hermeneutics. First, Romano unfolds the basic aspects or traits of events: their dative character, or «univocal assignation», in which one's whole selfhood is «addressed» in the encounter of events; their concomitant power to transfigure the self's world, or total horizon of possibilities; their «origin-ality», the ability of events to manifest themselves as source of their own arriving and therefore providing their own horizon, as meaning-bearing in themselves; and finally their ability to «temporalise» time itself by introducing a break in the *advenant's* diachrony, upending it and transforming it according to an absolutely new future of possibility communicated by the event itself.

In the extensive second part Romano articulates the meaning of the «human adventure» from the «guiding thread» of events whose four-fold contour was adumbrated in Part One. Taking what he observes

about events, Romano here seeks to understand the individual human as the one who «happens to himself» insofar as that, which happens to him, happens. Basing his phenomenology of the *advenant* on the basic distinction, articulated earlier, between events «in the proper sense» and mere inner-worldly facts, Romano, echoing Levinas, notes, importantly that the *advenant* has a basic *possibility* that comes before the distinction between passive and active that dominates the eventual (natural) attitude (2.31). Ipseity, for Romano, arises from and is ever reshaped by the occurring of events. Yet still, the selfhood of the *advenant* is the capacity to appropriate possibilities in the world. The difference with *Dasein*, however, is that the *advenant* is not its own origin, but rather, its possibilities are opened to it through the opening of the world («evential possibilities») by events. Selfhood, then, is the coming to oneself («adventing») through the capacity to respond to the reconfiguring of the world by events. Selfhood is precisely this adventure of making one's own the horizon of possibilities first disclosed by events. *Birth* is demonstrated to be the «arch-event», the original and immemorial making of a world of possibilities of which the *advenant* is not himself/herself the measure that sets the adventure of ipseity in motion. Birth, in other words, ties together the *advenant* with the world and makes an eventual hermeneutics possible. The most important implication of this, strikingly, is that the «phenomenological transition» from one world to another by the transfiguring birthing of possibilities brought forth by events is not a «subjective procedure», i. e., not a *reduction*, since «in its eventness, an event 'is' itself this transition» (2.25). Thus we may note that a sort of 'negative phenomenology' is developed within which the possibility of losing selfhood is brought to light and analyzed. Paradoxically, this possibility is disclosed through the accompanying fundamental phenomena that register the collapse of the world and self as the inability to appropriate events (despair, terror, bereavement etc.). In this way Romano sets in relief the very dimensions of eventual ipseity all the more sharply by analyzing what eventual ipseity is not.

In Part Three, Romano discloses the resultant meaning of experience for the *advenant*. Here, Romano takes as his point of departure the observation made earlier (§ 11) that «understanding» of the meaning that surges up in events is the «most fundamental characteristic of the relation between an *advenant* and the world» (2.8). Experience, then, is primarily an 'intellectual' phenomenon, of the order of *Erfahrung*, defined as «risk» and «traversal»: the risk of putting one's very self on the line for the sake of self understanding; the traversal from «self to self» that is ex-per-ience, the movement of self-happening that is the human adventure. These analyses open the way for a new discourse, what he calls «transcendental empiricism», composed solely of events as 'conditions for possibility', that evades the classic alternative of realism and idealism (insofar as it lies outside of the «facts of experience»):

«What is universal in humanity is precisely this capacity to singularize oneself through what happens to us» (3.31).

An analysis of speech (as an event that «makes sense happen» and therefore central to the hermeneutical adventure) is followed by profound analyses of what he decidedly calls, after Blanchot, Bataille or Foucault, the «limit experiences» of suffering and death that again exemplify a sort of *negative phenomenology*: The vantage of the loss of speech serves to further illumine the intimate ties between speech and selfhood. Finally, Romano briefly describes the genesis of historical empiricism and its concomitant contemporary phenomena (journalism and biography) that conceal the primacy of events for human meaning today. In this way he lays the groundwork for the second volume, in which the temporality disclosed by events is thoroughly analyzed as a more original characteristic of the human adventure than the temporality of Being.

### Turning after Heidegger

Clearly, the best way to approach this demanding and insightful text is to consider it first as a faithful transgression of Heidegger. The *adventant* is, from this vantage, a 'third reduction' as it were, a movement past the ontological reduction of *Dasein*, which was itself a move back beyond Husserl's transcendental reduction. However, as adumbrated above, this 'third reduction' is not carried out by a subject at all, and is therefore, according to Romano, not properly a reduction at all, at least in the classical sense. Rather, it may be best understood as a *reversal of the reduction*, akin to Levinas' «reversal of the gaze», and which can only be brought about by events, and is attained only insofar as the subject lets itself be shaped by the horizon of possibilities that events themselves bring forth, realizing that, as subject, it is only closure to events which precede it. This 'reversal' brings about a wholly new vantage on traditional problematics that phenomenology has always striven to reform, yet which have always been still intrinsic to phenomenological discourse. Throughout the text Romano exhibits many Heideggerian characteristics, as his embrace of hermeneutics (even if reordered) and his eventual interpretation of *Dasein* (cf. §3) make plain, to mention only the most apparent. At the very least, a cursory reading of this text will disclose that Romano is in constant dialogue with Heidegger from beginning to end.<sup>3</sup> A more thorough reading will demonstrate that Romano understands eventual hermeneutics to be the authentic legacy of Heidegger's thought, the threshold, so to speak, to which Heidegger himself approached but, in the end, shrank back from into a metaphysical subjectivity, unwilling to risk the self in the abandonment to alterity required by fidelity to events that precede being.<sup>4</sup> For Romano, Heidegger fails his own definition of phenomenology, as articulated in § 7 of *Sein und Zeit*, to «let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself» by constricting phenomenality to the modalities of *Dasein*,

<sup>3</sup> See, for this reading: Beaudoin N. L'herméneutique événementiale de Claude Romano et sa critique de l'ontologie fondamentale // *Revue Phares*. 2004. Vol. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. of course, Heidegger's claims in the *Kantbuch*.

and thereby reducing phenomena to the shape of *Dasein's* own horizon. Accordingly, events for *Dasein* cannot be events in the true sense, but only «inner-worldly facts» that are still interpreted at the level of causality and empirical observation. The human self is therefore *reduced* to the mere unfolding of its own intrinsic possibilities. The upshot is that Heidegger's *Dasein* should ultimately be understood as self-originating self-projection, in the end not at all unlike the Cartesian *causa sui*. In other words Heidegger begins his inquiry already knowing the answer to his question. There is no real risk.

To see the eventual reduction of Romano as its own sort of «third reduction» is, of course, to draw a comparison with Jean-Luc Marion. Indeed there are many points of agreement between Romano and Marion and this is only one of them (There are also, to be sure, just as many important differences).<sup>5</sup> One could probably suggest that Romano, by his brilliant 'reversal of the reduction' that gives absolute priority to the self-disclosure of phenomena and simultaneously makes interpretation the very task of self, forges a middle way between the phenomenologists of pure donation, on the one hand, and the hermeneutical phenomenologists on the other, particularly by locating self-hood in the response as act of interpretation. Concerning this, let us only make the tentative observation here that Romano proffers a mode of phenomenology that very well might successfully hold in tension the demands made by phenomena to be allowed to appear only as themselves without restriction, as the donationalists insist, *and* the necessity of interpretation for the meaning of things themselves, as the hermeneutists insist, by positing an immemorial moment of «delay» at the origin of the world, the self and the event that gives them both.<sup>6</sup> The tension of this three-fold interrelation, for Romano, constitutes the whole adventure of the *advenant*, who, in fidelity to the arriving of events, strives to open itself completely to the purity of this arriving, refusing to hold on to, or constrict the meaning of its own *ipseity* and thereby receives itself as a task of hermeneutical adventure. *Precisely here* the *advenant* encounters the unfolding of the world in the excess that is its inexhaustible fullness from

<sup>5</sup> For a basic comparison in terms of events and the 'subject', see Romano's translator, Shane Mackinlay's essay: Mackinlay S. Phenomenality in the Middle: Marion, Romano and the Hermeneutics of the Event // I. Leask, E. Cassidy (eds.) *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. P. 167–181.

<sup>6</sup> One should compare Jean-Louis Chrétien's call-response model of religious experience, for which similar remarks could also be made. The point, or rather the question, is specifically how deeply implicated is phenomenology in the metaphysics of subjectivity, given its (metaphysical) origin in the transcendental turn of Kant? And then, how far does Romano or Chrétien (or even Marion) actually lead us beyond it? In short, it could be argued, that instead of going «back» beyond the phenomena (like Marion, and then radicalized indefatigably by Henry) Romano, picking up the reins more or less where Heidegger dropped them, goes *forward* into an immersion in time and experience and act. The redolence with Blondel is important to observe, I think, as well as the dialogue this may open with the 'post-transcendentalists' like Badiou or Mellièsseux.

the origin of events. For Romano, the *advenant* follows upon, but *never catches up with* events as they unfold a world, mediating the *advenant* to himself/herself, as he/she follows upon the unfolding «kernels» of possibility they disclose. The meaning of things unfolds as the *advenant* strives after the meaning of events for himself/herself. So like *Dasein*, the meanings of things are discovered as the meaning of human being is disclosed to itself, but unlike *Dasein*, the meanings of things precede ontology, and are found precisely in their excesses over human possibilities and therefore human being, as the self allows events to totally “upend” its horizon and rearticulate its world. This dramatic tension between hermeneutical and donational discourses, though roughly put here, seems to be a key implication of this text for the wider phenomenological community, though the degree of the success (as well as the importance) of this *aufgehoben* needs much careful investigation.

### Questioning after Romano

Romano, as we have seen, describes events as the disclosure of the meaning of the world to which the *advenant* is implicated in his very selfhood. The *advenant* is, therefore, this capacity to hold himself/herself open to the startling excesses of events and, further, to respond to them, accordingly, as promised meaning for his/her own self insofar as events are the sole ‘condition for the possibility’ of his/her own selfhood in the first place. So ipseity is the final meaning of events, though, importantly, they begin anonymously and only call the *advenant* forth as the *advenant* interprets them as meaningful to the adventure of self-understanding. Though Romano consistently safeguards against a reduction ‘of the other to the same’ by the irreducibility of the three-fold order of events and their original anonymous character etc., he still reads the world, ultimately, as simply a stage for the unfolding of human ipseity. This is no doubt correct, if one does not fail to maintain the significance of events outside of the individualized *advenant*, for other alterities, inexhaustible in themselves, which would then serve to document the excess of the meaning of things in a way that is not sheer overpowering sublimity but rather in a way that casts excess precisely as meaningful, as promise, as beckoning – and consistently open, without closure. Romano fundamentally gestures towards this dimension but of course leaves much more to be developed. In any event, the question is whether the mere observation of their radical excess is enough, or whether one should develop a sort of ‘relation without relation’ motif in order to document the radical play of alterity and ipseity as reciprocally and dynamically constitutive.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Romano indeed describes events in this way, as «the condition without condition» from which the very ‘subjectivity’ of the ‘subject’ is constituted in the disparity between self and self that is constitutive of the ‘Self’ itself, as delayed response to what happens to us, ‘responsibility’, in which alone lies the selfhood of the *advenant*» (2.23).

One is then tempted to ask whether there is an extant 'secular humanism' in Romano's *advenant* (the dark side of his relentless focus on the «human individual») which is still not in the end in danger at least of disintegrating into a sort of banal myopism that only reinforces, finally, the vapid notions of freedom, of the individual, of the journalistic understanding of events, of modern necrophilia, of biography etc. that Romano has so astutely exposed. If this is the case – which we can only raise here as a question – it would mean that Romano is not faithful enough to his most basic insights, viz., that the demand of events is infinite and that the responsibility to alterity is only that which makes selfhood of the *advenant* possible. The *advenant*, must always, as Romano seems to suggest, only hold its generating ipseity as a gift and understand this as the means by which it can cast itself back into the adventure of events. The *advenant* only finds itself as it forgets itself in the total risk of abandonment to the meaningfulness of events.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps only a description of the demand and task of events as something very much like that which we tend to call love has the capacity to supplement Romano here and complete what he already indicates.

Related to this is another question. Romano, throughout the text, seems to presuppose that events tend to possess only univocal determinations, which seems to be a deduction based on the identity of the *advenant*, itself univocal, as sole receiver of his own meaning. But why, one should ask, must events have only one meaning, even if one that is inexhaustibly rich? One could probably just as convincingly argue that, phenomenologically, events do not have this sort of univocality, but rather actually indicate an inexhaustible play of refracted potentiality and hidden possibilities. At the very least, there is no necessity that events do not disclose meaning in coherent, polysemantic richness that should therefore be vigorously explored. If this is the case, and to be fair it is less than clear in the text, the suspicion is that Romano inherits this assumption from modern theories of meaning and he may thereby be constricting phenomenality in a manner which he explicitly repudiates. Adding credence to an all-too modern perspective coloring Romano's phenomenology is what appears to be an unrelenting but implicit bias against the classical, especially religious tradition of the West, exemplified by recourse to much of his literary examples, especially in the early part of the text, which describe events as completely taking leave of what has come before through the human experience of life-transforming technological invention (cf. 1.19; 2.13). This is extenuated in the third part when Romano insists that «ex-per-ience obliges me to 'learn' at each instant *ex novo*, to undo myself and to distrust all my prior

<sup>8</sup> It is tempting to see a still static binary dialectical view in the vacillation in the event for the *advenant* between self-reception and self-abandon. This seems to still reflect aspects of the metaphysical subject still to be shaken off. If he were to relate these two dimensions in a polarity structure in a more complete manner, where self-reception in the event is also already movement in self-abandon (as in the 'liturgical subject' of Jean Yves Lacoste), it may be that Romano would be more faithful to the original insight of his eventual hermeneutics.

knowledge» (3.9). To locate meaning and the alterity of the self solely in a forward oriented trajectory is still redolent of an Enlightenment model of progress, perhaps rooted in a failure to question Heidegger deeply enough: The adventure of the *advenant* would still be circumscribed by the Heideggerian *Entwurf*.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Romano reduces all «pre-understanding» to the bare knowledge of events located originally in the «arch-event» of birth in order to guarantee the universality *and* «virginality» of eventual hermeneutics. Further, Romano's use of the metaphor of «conquest» to describe the acquisition of knowledge also seems to give traction to this reading (cf. e. g., 3.23, 26). At the very least, Romano should more clearly extricate his thought from such problematic positions. Similarly, as we have already seen, the price of eventual selfhood seems to tend toward a Heideggerian individualized destiny, a stark solitude in which the adventure of ipseity is only for solitary individuals. Accordingly, Romano should continue to develop the accounts already within this text that describe the irreducibly *shared* dimensionality of events and of the world, as well as the basic paradox of the «polarity» of alterity-ipseity that the phenomenology of event first uncovers.

Related to these questions, perhaps a further observation can be made concerning the need for a delimitation of the concept of *Erfahrung* which is absent from the third part of Romano's text. A parable from literature might help. Despite Romano's statement that the adventure of ex-per-ience is «not an odyssey», (3.78) which is true enough in context, it nevertheless seems that the *advenant* has much in common with Odysseus, as Dante makes clear in an important aside in *Inferno* (XXVI). According to Dante, Ulysses sought the meaning of the world through mere experience of it and hence closed himself off to the possibility of the world's own deepest truth. Dante's lesson is that to pursue a Goethean-like self-expansion and self-knowledge is not enough, and in the end one only loses oneself in the chaotic turmoil of the sea of experience. Clearly Romano, siding with Heidegger contra Husserl, is right to reject *Erlebnis*, «lived experience», as a guiding model of human experience on account of its inability to rise above inner-worldly factuality, but how does *Erfahrung*, as self-knowledge «first of all», not fall prey itself to a Romantic *titanisme* that interprets all experience of worldly phenomena as mere media for the expansion of self-knowledge? Romano delays this problematic by first defining experience as «undergoing what cannot be experienced» (3.1), i. e., as «ex-per-ience», self-transformation as it struggles to catch up with the events which provide its possibilities. It is unclear whether the positing of an immemorial interruption between events and hermeneutical unfolding solves the problem or rather

<sup>9</sup> Here is a text that exemplifies this, and though at an important remove from Kant, still harnesses the passion of the *sapere aude*: «It is only where the incomprehensible is found, and in the name of this incomprehensible, that it is possible to question the pre-understandings that form the legacy and tradition which orient comprehension, by revoking these pre-understandings in classing them as misunderstandings. Any understanding is possible only as a progression beyond an initial incomprehension, from which it is inseparable» (3.23).



merely suspends the possibility of answering it. It seems to me, again, that a delimitation of *Erfahrung* by way of *caritas* (understood neither univocally nor uni-directional) would help. Otherwise, it is arguable that the eventual opening that defines ipseity would double back over itself in self-aggrandizement, and, in effect, irreparably tend toward its own closure and the veiling over of the world. The likeness of Romano's distinction between inner-worldly facts («evental») and proper events in the eventual sense to Heidegger's ontological difference has been noticed before, but it may apply here as well.<sup>10</sup> If it is true that «experience is the risk of exposure to what touches me in the depths of my heart» (3.5), then the promethean temptation to arrive at a static self-sufficiency in one's capacity to continue into the «Open» of the world, may eventually distort the «finitude» of ipseity intrinsic to its openness; *Erfahrung*, left to its own, may be tempted to a self-sufficiency in navigating the human adventure that disfigure the fundamental characterization of that selfhood. This question should be directly addressed. The expansion of phenomenality to the radical openness of non-experience must continue to be radicalized, but that cannot happen only as the pure expansion of self, as Romano himself is already aware. One arresting option is to continue the adventure, in the direction it arguably points, by opening, more radically, to the possibility, after all, of a 'religious turn' (if not 'theological').

### Turning After Romano

It is interesting to note Romano's illuminating theological allusions at significant moments in the text. I will present three of the most evident here. In delineating his brilliant phenomenology of birth, Romano, echoing the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus in an early episode in the Gospel of John, says:

«If every subsequent event gives an *advenant* the possibility of being born again, by submitting himself to a transformation, and appropriating the possibilities which thus befall him; the question arises of how we

<sup>10</sup> See: Greisch J. L'herméneutique événementiale: De la mondification à la temporalisation du temps // *Critique*. 2001. 57.648. P. 404. Mackinlay, appealing to Greisch, also notes this comparison in *Phenomenality in the Middle*, 177. The likeness is probably not lost on Romano himself, who self-consciously follows Levinas' interpretation of Heidegger's *Sein* in a «verbal» or «existential» way, though he believes his distinction precisely escapes the ontological problematics of Heidegger's, insofar as the 'reduction' of events precedes any subjective act: «Heidegger's fresh approach to the question of Being tends to confer a wholly *evental* sense on Being. ... It is because 'Being' denotes the very event of being, and not *what is*, that Being is not to be found in the realm of beings, as one being among others: Being is not; only beings "are". What Heidegger calls the "ontological difference" is located in this discrepancy» (Intr. 20–21). Whereas Heidegger's distinction is still stuck within the metaphysics of presence as *Dasein* is its 'condition of possibility', Romano's events precede a causal connection with «inner-worldly facts» to which Heidegger reduces events. Thus, Greisch's suggestion that Romano's eventual difference is itself «ontological» is not necessarily the case.

should conceive such a 'rebirth.' Evidently, it is not a matter of a 'second birth,' but rather this capacity to undergo an event, at the risk of a radical transformation of my possibilities and of myself, which capacity is the original phenomenon of selfhood» (2.49).

The point of this allusion seems to be that the «new birth» of self inaugurated by events is not a religious phenomenon itself but rather an intra-mundane adventure that defines all ipseity whatever. The point is its universality. However, it does shed considerable light on this quotidian phenomenon to suggest that Romano nevertheless recapitulates the order of 'supernatural' μετάνοια (conversion), at the 'natural' level which, he implies, exhibits a similar structure: Selfhood is received in one's total self-abandonment to events. To hold onto one's selfhood is to lose it, to have it veiled over by the illusion of self-originality. This μετάνοια is the order of ipseity. Nicodemus' confusion of the nature of the 'second birth' («How can a man be born when he is old?») is thus likened to the one who still exhibits traces of metaphysical subjectivity and doesn't see the absolute priority and radical nature of events for the meaning of one's self-*Erfahrung*.

Later Romano echoes the eschatological ethics of the New Testament and suggests that the *advenant* «gives and ceaselessly gives himself» in order «to die to oneself and to others, to break away from a concluded past by opening oneself to a future that transcends any projection, to renounce all mastery or hold on one's adventure and on the temporality temporalised by events» which is, paradoxically, the way an *advenant* becomes himself (2.167). For Romano, an eventual hermeneutics reveals a new order of selfhood that must respond to the rhythm of the structure of the world disclosed by events. The echo of religious themes is again essential to the meaning of the phenomenon.

Finally, at a critical point in Part Three, Romano describes events as being «like the world itself, at the same time more internal to me than any 'interiority', and more external to me than any 'exteriority'» (3.7; cf. 3.41). It is the radical alterity of events (their "impossibility") that makes human selfhood possible. As he says later:

«We are truly *bound only* to the impossible... The eventuality of the possible, opened by and from an event, is what truly binds me, by calling me to be more than my capability and even to the impossible» (2.61).

Clearly Romano is indebted here to St. Augustine's oft-repeated exclamation that God is *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.<sup>11</sup> The correspondence with theology is illuminated further when one notes that, for Augustine, the divine presence is more inward than my innermost self since the self is constituted by experience, whereas the divine presence itself is the condition before all conditions that enables human experience at all. Thus the divine presence within is a moment of its very

<sup>11</sup> «More inward than my innermost self and higher than my highest» cf. *Confessiones* 3.6.11; *Enerrationes in psalmos* 118.20.6. This has become more or less a universal expression in contemporary French thought.

exteriority, radicalizing all the more its transcendence, its inexperiencable quality.<sup>12</sup> This dimension is strikingly akin to events, as Romano analyzes them, particularly birth, which, one should suggest, suggests an illuminating comparison with the 'enstatic' phenomenology of Michel Henry. Romano's events could again be seen as carrying much of the import of Augustine's theological reflections, but recapitulated in the phenomenological experience of the world.

What does all this mean? Is Romano's proximity to a 'religious turn' closer than understood at first glance? Perhaps only Romano himself can make this clear. It may be that Romano is merely following Heidegger (and Levinas) in observing a sort of sacral tinge to the shape of phenomenal experience and thereby (rightly, at least from this vantage) asserting a quasi-religious provenance to his philosophy.<sup>13</sup> Romano's essential move beyond Heidegger already makes this solution seem facile. Or is he rather investing his phenomenology (like Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida) with an indistinct, sacral halo in order to add an alluring mystification to his thought? A re-investment of the 'merely natural' with elements of the rejected supernatural? It is precisely here that one is unavoidable confronted with the question: Can any investigation that penetrates deeply enough into human experience *honestly* do otherwise? Though always an open question and strictly without final proof (this openness is all-important, concomitant with its prooflessness), Romano's own descriptions are suggestive. It may also be that theology has, even today, penetrated philosophy to degrees that are still startling.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See: McMahon R. *Augustine's Confessions* and Voegelin's Philosophy // *Modern Age*. 2006. 48.1. P. 37–47.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of aspects of this thesis, see my essay: To Be Called Again: On the Call and on Interpretation // *ALEA: Revista Internacional de Fenomenología y Hermenéutica*. 2008. Nº 6. P. 127–156, esp. 132–138.

<sup>14</sup> It could be argued that Romano is indebted to the basic structure of Christian theology for his account of the *advenant*: The alterity of possibility that reconfigures the *advenant's* ipseity, *elevating* the *advenant* to a new horizon that he has in no way projected, *preserving* and *supporting* his selfhood, casting him forward to an otherwise impossible destiny and *healing* his 'fall' into the illusions of metaphysical subjectivity. This view makes the very structure of ipseity of the *advenant* very much like a 'suspended middle,' simultaneously more than itself as it is itself, a paradoxical play of same and other. The *advenant* is the becoming other by a total reconfiguration of itself by the event of total alterity. Here at least it may be indebted, subterraneanly, to recoveries made in French theology in the middle of last century, particularly advances by the so-called *nouvelle théologie* into negative theology and especially the relation of nature and grace. It may indeed be demonstrable that without the recovery of the 'supernatural paradox' of Fr. Henri de Lubac, along with similar explication and expansion of this fundamental 'form' of the theology by theologians and philosophers as diverse as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Etienne Gilson, Karl Rahner, Maurice Blondel, Gabriel Marcel et al. that Romano's own phenomenology of the event, its overcoming of the metaphysics of subjectivity in Heidegger could not be possible. At least, an investigation into the various tributaries of cultural influence that this theological renaissance had on the wider fields of thought, particularly phenomenology, especially the religious and quasi-religious

In any event these reflections suggest that Romano, at some point, must face these questions in the forms in which they have already been brought forth by the phenomenologists of the ‘theological turn.’ Fidelity to his own philosophy of adventure and ex-per-ience urges that he does so with the same radical openness to the *possibility* of Events as he has to the intra-mundane events so incomparably analyzed here.<sup>15</sup> Though perhaps not absolutely necessary for the integrity of his philosophy, if understood ‘regionally’ the extension of this adventure – perhaps already begun implicitly – would surely afford deep enrichment of an eventual hermeneutics by following along the process already inherent in the ‘reduction of the reduction’ that we have seen lies at its heart: the ‘step back’ from a religious phenomenon is already a definitive movement into it.

### Time After Birth

There is so much more to commend this text: Romano’s critique of empiricism, as purely theoretical, as only interpreting experience within a discreet horizon of cause-effect and repeatability, and as abstracting experience from the totality of the world, which reduces it to bare sense-data, is incisive, even if his attribution of it to the whole of the Western tradition, from Aristotle to Heidegger, like so many post-metaphysical phenomenologies, though still exciting and indeed insightful, will need for some readers a much thicker genealogy to underwrite its comprehensiveness than he gives it in this text. Romano’s phenomenological descriptions of despair, trauma, bereavement, romantic encounter, poetic speech, suffering and death, of journalism and modern biography, are all likewise penetratingly astute. The depth and rigor of these analyses alone demonstrate the importance of eventual hermeneutics for phenomenology.

Of course, the most important of all these phenomenological descriptions is that of birth, the «Ur-ereignis», which definitively discloses the «opening» or «fissure» between the original and the originary that puts the *advenant* in play, and which is therefore nothing less than the «sole object» that Romano seeks to explicate (2.26; Intr. 36–37).<sup>16</sup> A phenomenology of birth, as we have seen, is the *sine qua non* of eventual hermeneutics and is, by his own admission, the particular locale of his overcoming of *Dasein* and the metaphysics of the subject that still plague it (cf. Intr. 35–36). For Romano, Heidegger’s delimitation of the possibilities of events, by making them intrinsic to *Dasein*, directly

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phenomenologies of Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, Marion and their diverse progeny is, if even possible, desperately needed.

<sup>15</sup> See Romano’s insightful essay on Marion’s *Erotic Phenomenon* in which he himself indeed calls forth such a provocation. He ends the text with these words: «Even if love *is* not, when it falls into our lap, when we discover it like a hair in our soup, how can our not believing help us?» See: *Love in its Concept: Jean-Luc Marion’s Erotic Phenomenon*, op cit.

<sup>16</sup> See: Dastur F. *Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise // Hypatia*. Fall 2000. 15.4. P. 178–189.

stems from his misinterpretation of the implications of birth in *Being and Time*, and which alone can definitively place alterity at the center of one's own origin and thereby maintain a radical openness to exterior possibility for the meaning of one's own adventure. Because of this, Heidegger cannot even allow death to escape the horizon of mineness of *Dasein*, thereby simultaneously losing its radical alterity and the just as radical particularity of its significance for selfhood, since death is merely an appropriable possibility of *Dasein*, rather than an event that, even in others, can totally recast the shape of one's own possibilities.

The basic phenomenological insight that governs *Event and World* is that in allowing things to show themselves from themselves, in letting events happen, we discover that we are, in some fundamental and unforgettable way, implicated wholly in *their* self-disclosure as events, and in the same way events, though inexhaustibly rich, are nevertheless meaningful only in the human attempt to comprehend them. Meaning unfolds only as we pull back and find that it already unfolds for us what we are. Thus, Romano, by way of an eventual hermeneutics, radicalizes and transfigures the basic phenomenological insight that the reduction, *eventially* understood, intimately involves the human with the world of meaning in a way that gives alterity and identity a new order of relation, a way of thinking about meaning that does not denigrate alterity at the expense of identity and vice versa, which perhaps until now has not been possible without an implicit appeal to onto-theology.

Thus time itself will likely justify my conclusion that this text truly is a tour-de-force. Lucidly written, it tells us more about ourselves and our world than perhaps we are often willing to accept. In the final analysis, *this* is indeed very much the point. Romano, however, makes it easier to believe that the adventure of discovering ourselves in the rhythms of the world's disclosure is well worth the risk.

*W. Hackett*