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Phenomenology of Perception

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PREFACE

7 What is phenomenology? It may seem strange that we must continue to ask this question half a century after Husserl's first works. Nonetheless, it is far from being resolved. Phenomenology is the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences, such as the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness. And yet phenomenology is also a philosophy that places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man[1] and the world is by beginning from their "facticity." Although it is a transcendental philosophy that suspends the affirmations of the natural attitude in order to understand them, it is also a philosophy for which the world is always "already there" prior to reflection – like an inalienable presence – and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status. It is the goal of a philosophy that aspires to be an "exact science," but it is also an account of "lived" space, "lived" time, and the "lived" world.[2] It is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer of that experience; and yet in his final works Husserl mentions a "genetic phenomenology,"[3] and even a "constructive phenomenology."[4] Might one hope to remove these contradictions by distinguishing between the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger? But all of *Sein und Zeit*[5] emerges from Husserl's suggestion, and in

the end is nothing more than a making explicit[6] of the "*natürlichen Weltbegriff*" [natural concept of the world][7] or the "*Lebenswelt*" [life-world][8] that Husserl, toward the end of his life, presented as the fundamental theme of phenomenology, and so the contradiction reappears in Husserl's philosophy itself. The hurried reader will give up trying to pin down a doctrine that has said everything and will wonder if a philosophy unable to define itself merits all the commotion made around it and is anything but a myth or a fad. 8

Even if this were the case, it would remain for us to understand the prestige of this myth and the origin of this fad, and the responsible philosopher will interpret this situation by saying that *phenomenology allows itself to be practiced and recognized as a manner or as a style, or that it exists as a movement, prior to having reached a full philosophical consciousness.* It has been *en route* for a long time, and its disciples find it everywhere, in Hegel and in Kierkegaard of course, but also in Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. But a philological commentary on texts would offer nothing, for we only find in texts what we have put into them, and if ever a history has called for our interpretation, it is surely the history of philosophy. We will find the unity of phenomenology and its true sense [*sens*] in ourselves.[9] It is less a question of counting up citations than of determining and expressing this *phenomenology for us*, which has caused – upon their reading of Husserl or Heidegger – many of our contemporaries to have had the feeling much less of encountering a new philosophy than of recognizing what they had been waiting for. Phenomenology is only accessible to a phenomenological method. Thus, let us carefully attempt to tie together the famous phenomenological themes as they are spontaneously tied together in life. Perhaps then we will understand why phenomenology has remained for so long in a nascent state, as a problem and as a promise.[10]

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Phenomenology involves describing, and not explaining or analyzing. This first rule – to be a "descriptive psychology"[11] or to return "to the things themselves," which Husserl set for an emerging phenomenology – is first and foremost the disavowal of science. I am not the result or the intertwining of multiple causalities that determine my body or my "psyche";[12] I cannot think of myself as a part of the world, like the simple

object of biology, psychology, and sociology; I cannot enclose myself within the universe of science. Everything that I know about the world,
9 even through science, I know from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which scientific symbols would be meaningless. The entire universe of science is constructed upon the lived world, and if we wish to think science rigorously, to appreciate precisely its sense and its scope, we must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science neither has, nor ever will have the same ontological sense as the perceived world for the simple reason that science is a determination or an explanation of that world. I am not a "living being," a "man," nor even a "consciousness," possessing all of the characteristics that zoology, social anatomy, and inductive psychology acknowledge in these products of nature or history. Rather, I am the absolute source. My existence does not come from my antecedents, nor from my physical and social surroundings; it moves out toward them and sustains them. For I am the one who brings into being for myself – and thus into being in the only sense that the word could have for me – this tradition that I choose to take up or this horizon whose distance from me would collapse were I not there to sustain it with my gaze (since this distance does not belong to the horizon as one of its properties). Scientific perspectives according to which I am a moment of the world are always naïve and hypocritical because they always imply, without mentioning it, that other perspective – the perspective of consciousness – by which a world first arranges itself around me and begins to exist for me. To return to the things themselves is to return to this world prior to knowledge, this world of which knowledge always *speaks*, and this world with regard to which every scientific determination is abstract, signitive,[13] and dependent, just like geography with regard to the landscape where we first learned what a forest, a meadow, or a river is.

This movement is absolutely distinct from the idealist return to consciousness, and the demand for a pure description excludes the process of reflective analysis just as much as it excludes the process of scientific explanation. Descartes, and above all Kant, freed the subject or consciousness by establishing that I could not grasp anything as existing if I did not first experience myself [*m'éprouvais*][14] as existing in the act of grasping; they revealed consciousness – the absolute certainty of myself for myself[15] – as the condition without which there would be nothing at

all and the act of unifying as the foundation of the unified. Of course, the act of unifying is nothing without the spectacle of the world that it unites. For Kant, the unity of consciousness is precisely contemporary with the unity of the world; and for Descartes, methodical doubt deprives us of nothing, since the entire world – at least insofar as we experience it – is reintegrated into the *Cogito*,[16] sharing in its certainty, and is merely assigned the indication "thought about . . ." [*pensée de . . .*].[17] But the relations between subject and world are not strictly bilateral, for if they were, then for Descartes the certainty of the world would be immediately given along with the certainty of the *Cogito* and Kant could not speak of a "Copernican Revolution." Beginning from our experience of the world, reflective analysis works back toward the subject as if toward a condition of possibility distinct from our experience and presents universal synthesis as that without which there would be no world. To this extent, reflective analysis ceases to adhere to our experience and substitutes a reconstruction for a description. From this we can understand how Husserl could criticize Kant for a "psychologism of the faculties of the soul,"[18] and oppose to a *noetic* analysis, which bases the world upon the synthetic activity of the subject, his own "*noematic reflection*," which, rather than generating the unity of the object, remains within it and makes its primordial unity explicit.

The world is there prior to every analysis that I could give of it, and it would be artificial to derive it from a series of syntheses that would first link sensations and then perspectival appearances of the object together, whereas both of these are in fact products of the analysis and must not have existed prior to it. Reflective analysis believes it moves in the reverse direction along the path of a previous constitution and meets up with – in the "inner man," as Saint Augustine says – a constituting power that it itself has always been. Thus, reflection carries itself along and places itself back within an invulnerable subjectivity, prior to [*en deçà de*][19] being and time. Yet this is a naïveté, or, if one prefers, an incomplete reflection that loses an awareness of its own beginning. I began to reflect, my reflection is a reflection upon an unreflected;[20] it cannot be unaware of itself as an event; henceforth it appears as a genuine creation, as a change in the structure of consciousness, and yet this involves recognizing, prior to its own operations, the world that is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real is to be described, and neither constructed nor constituted. This means that I cannot assimilate perception to

syntheses that belong to the order of judgment, acts, or predication. At each moment, my perceptual field is filled with reflections, sudden noises, and fleeting tactile impressions that I am unable to link to the perceived context and that, nevertheless, I immediately place in the world without ever confusing them with my daydreams. At each instant, I weave dreams around the things, I imagine objects or people whose presence here is not incompatible with the context, and yet they are not confused with the world, they are out in front of the world, on the stage of the imaginary. If the reality of my perception were based solely on the intrinsic coherence of "representations," then it should always be hesitant, and, delivered over to my probable conjectures, I ought to be continuously dismantling illusory syntheses and reintegrating into the real aberrant phenomena that I may have at first excluded. But this is never the case. The real is a tightly woven fabric; it does not wait for our judgments in order to incorporate the most surprising of phenomena, nor to reject the most convincing of our imaginings. Perception is not a science of the world, nor even an act or a deliberate taking of a stand; it is the background against which all acts stand out and is thus presupposed by them. The world is not an object whose law of constitution I have in my possession; it is the natural milieu and the field of all my thoughts and of all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not merely "dwell" in the "inner man";[21] or rather, there is no "inner man," man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself.[22] When I return to myself from the dogmatism of common sense or of science, I do not find a source of intrinsic truth, but rather a subject destined to the world.[23]

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From this we can see the true sense of the famous "phenomenological reduction." There is probably no other question upon which Husserl himself spent more time attempting to come to an understanding, nor one to which he returned more often, since the "problematic of the reduction" occupies a significant place in the unpublished materials.[24] For a long time, and even in his final writings, the reduction is presented as the return to a transcendental consciousness in front of which the world is spread out in an absolute transparency, animated throughout by a series of apperceptions whose reconstitution, beginning from their

results, is the task of the philosopher. Thus, my sensation of red is *apperceived as* a manifestation of a certain sensed red, which is in turn sensed as a manifestation of a red surface, which is in turn sensed as the manifestation of a red box, which is, in the end, sensed as a manifestation or as a profile[25] of a red thing, namely, this book. Thus, this would be the apprehension of a certain *hylè* [matter] as signifying a phenomenon of a higher degree, the *Sinn-gebung* [sense-giving],[26] the active signifying operation that might be the definition of consciousness, and the world would be nothing other than the "signification: world." The phenomenological reduction would thus be idealist, in the sense of a transcendental idealism that treats the world as a unity of value that is not divided between, say, Paul and Pierre; that is, a unity in which their perspectives intersect and that causes "Pierre's consciousness" and "Paul's consciousness" to communicate. This is because the perception of the world "by Pierre" is not Pierre's doing, nor is the perception "by Paul" Paul's doing; rather, in both cases it is the doing or the work of pre-personal consciousnesses whose communication raises no problems, since this very communication is in fact required by the definition of consciousness, sense, and truth. Insofar as I am conscious, that is, insofar as something has a sense for me, I am neither here nor there, neither Pierre nor Paul; in no way do I distinguish myself from "another" consciousness, since we are all immediate presences in the world, and since this world, being the system of truths, is unique by definition. A consistent transcendental idealism strips the world of its opacity and its transcendence. The world is precisely the one that we represent to ourselves, not insofar as we are men or empirical subjects, but insofar as we are all one single light and insofar as we all participate in the One without dividing it. Reflective analysis is unaware of the problem of others [*autrui*],[27] just as it is unaware of the problem of the world, because from the first flicker of consciousness it grants me the power to go toward a truth that is universal by right, and since the other is himself without *haecceity* [thisness], without place, and without a body, the Alter and the Ego are one and the same in the true world, which is the unifier of minds. There is no difficulty in understanding how "I" can think the Other [*l'Autrui*] because the "I," and consequently the Other [*l'Autre*], are not trapped in the fabric of phenomena and have a value rather than an existence. Nothing is hidden behind these faces or these gestures, and there are no landscapes that remain inaccessible to me; there is but a touch of shadow that owes its existence to the light.

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For Husserl, however, we know that there is indeed a problem of others, and the *alter ego* [the other myself] is a paradox. If another person is truly for-himself, beyond his being for-me, and if we are for-each-other and not separately for-God, then we must appear to each other, we both must have an exterior, and there must be, besides the perspective of the For-Oneself (my view upon myself and the other's view upon himself), also a perspective of the For-Others (my view upon others and the view of others upon me). Of course, these two perspectives cannot be in each of us merely juxtaposed, *for then others would not see me and I would not see others.* I must be my exterior, and the other's body must be the other person himself. This paradox and this dialectic between the Ego and the Alter are only possible if the Ego and the Alter Ego are defined by their situation and are not set free from all inherence; that is, only if philosophy is not
13 completed with the return to myself, and only if, through reflection, I do not discover merely my presence to myself, but also the possibility of an "outside spectator." Or again, this is possible only if – at the very moment I experience my existence, and even at that extreme point of reflection – I am still lacking the absolute density that would draw me outside of time; and only if I discover in myself a sort of inner weakness that prevents me from being absolutely individual and that exposes me to the gazes of others as one man among men or, at the very least, as one consciousness among consciousnesses. The *Cogito* has, up until our present day, devalued the perception of others; it has taught me that the I is only accessible to itself, since it has defined *me* through the thought that I have of myself, which I am clearly alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense. In order for the word "other" not to be meaningless, my existence must never reduce itself to the consciousness that I have of existing; it must in fact encompass the consciousness that *one* might have of it, and so also encompass my embodiment in a nature and at least the possibility of an historical situation. The *Cogito* must find me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone that transcendental subjectivity will, as Husserl says,[28] *be* an intersubjectivity.[29] As a meditating Ego, I can of course distinguish the world and things from myself, since I clearly do not exist in the manner of things. I must even separate myself from my body insofar as it is understood as a thing among things, or as a sum of physico-chemical processes. But even if the *cogitatio* [thinking] that I thus discover has no place in either objective time or objective space, it is not without a place in the phenomenological world. I rediscover the

world – which I had distinguished from myself as a sum of things or of processes tied together through causal relations – "in myself" as the permanent horizon of all of my *cogitationes* [thoughts] and as a dimension in relation to which I never cease situating myself. The true *Cogito* does not define the existence of the subject through the thought that the subject has of existing, does not convert the certainty of the world into a certainty of the thought about the world, and finally, does not replace the world itself with the signification "world." Rather, it recognizes my thought as an inalienable fact and it eliminates all forms of idealism by revealing me as "being in the world."

Because we are through and through related to the world, the only way for us to catch sight of ourselves is by suspending this movement, by refusing to be complicit with it (or as Husserl often says, to see it *ohne mitzumachen* [without taking part]), or again, to put it out of play. This is not because 14
we renounce the certainties of common sense and of the natural attitude – on the contrary, these are the constant theme of philosophy – but rather because, precisely as the presuppositions of every thought, they are "taken for granted" and they pass by unnoticed, and because we must abstain from them for a moment in order to awaken them and to make them appear. Perhaps the best formulation of the reduction is the one offered by Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink when he spoke of a "wonder" before the world.[30] Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical. Husserl's transcendental is not Kant's, and Husserl criticizes Kantian philosophy for being a "worldly" philosophy because it *makes use* of our relation to the world, which is the engine of the Transcendental Deduction, and makes the world immanent to the subject, rather than *standing in wonder* before the world and conceiving the subject as a transcendence toward the world. Husserl's entire misunderstanding with his interpreters, with the existential "dissidents," and ultimately with himself, comes from the fact that we must – precisely in order to see the world and to grasp it as a paradox – rupture our familiarity with it, and this rupture can teach us nothing except the unmotivated springing forth of the world. The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl always wonders anew about the possibility

of the reduction. If we were absolute spirit, the reduction would not be problematic. But since, on the contrary, we are in and toward the world, and since even our reflections take place in the temporal flow that they are attempting to capture (since they *sich einströmen* [flow along therein], as Husserl says), there is no thought that encompasses all of our thought. Or again, as the unpublished[31] materials say, the philosopher is a perpetual beginner.[32] This means that he accepts nothing as established from what men or scientists believe they know. This also means that philosophy itself must not take itself as established in the truths it has managed to utter, that philosophy is an ever-renewed experiment of its own beginning, that it consists entirely in describing this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection is conscious of its own dependence on an unreflected life that is its initial, constant, and final situation. Far from being, as was believed, the formula for an idealist philosophy, the phenomenological reduction is in fact the formula for an existential philosophy: Heidegger's "*In-der-Welt-Sein*" [being-in-the-world] only appears against the background of the phenomenological reduction.

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Husserl's concept of "essences" becomes muddled through a similar misunderstanding. He declares that every reduction, at the same time as being transcendental, is also necessarily eidetic. In other words, we cannot bring our perception of the world before the philosophical gaze without ceasing to be identical with that thesis about the world or with that interest for the world that defines us, without stepping back to this side of our commitment in order to make it itself appear as a spectacle, or without passing over from the *fact* of our existence to the *nature* of our existence, that is, from *Dasein* [existence] to *Wesen* [essence]. But here the essence is clearly not the goal, but rather a means; and our actual commitment in the world is precisely what must be understood and raised to the concept, and this is what polarizes all of our conceptual fixations. The necessity of passing through essences does not signify that philosophy takes them as an object, but rather that our existence is too tightly caught in the world in order to know itself as such at the moment when it is thrown into the world, and that our existence needs the field of ideality in order to know and to conquer its facticity.

The Vienna Circle, as we know, claims categorically that we can only relate to significations. For example, "consciousness" is not, for them, precisely what we are. Rather, it is a recent and complicated signification that we should employ carefully, and only after having made explicit the numerous significations that have contributed to determining it through the course of the word's semantic evolution. This logical positivism is the antithesis of Husserl's thought. Whatever shifts of meaning may have ultimately delivered this word and this concept of consciousness to us as a linguistic acquisition, we have a direct means of reaching what it designates: we have the experience of ourselves and of this consciousness that we are. In fact, all the significations of language are measured against this experience and it ensures that language means something for us. "It is the (. . .) still-mute experience that must be brought to the pure expression of its own sense."[33] Husserl's essences must bring with them all of the living relations of experience, like the net that draws up both quivering fish and seaweed from the seabed. Thus, we must not follow Jean Wahl in saying that "Husserl separates essences from existence."[34] Separated essences are the essences of language. It is the very function of language to make essences exist in a separation that is merely apparent, since through language they still rely upon the pre-predicative life of consciousness. What appears in the silence of originary consciousness is not only what these words mean, but also what these things mean, that is, the core of primary signification around which acts of naming and of expression are organized.

Seeking the essence of consciousness will thus not consist in working out the *Wortbedeutung* [the meaning of the word] consciousness and in fleeing from existence into the universe of things-said; rather, it will be rediscovering that actual presence of myself to myself, the fact of my consciousness which is what the word and concept "consciousness" ultimately mean. Seeking the essence of the world is not to seek what it is as an idea, after having reduced it to a theme of discourse; rather, it is to seek what it in fact is for us, prior to every thematization. Sensualism "reduces" the world by saying that ultimately we have nothing but states of ourselves. Transcendental idealism also "reduces" the world since, even if it makes the world certain, this is only in the name of the thought or the consciousness of the world, and as the mere correlate of our knowledge, such that the world becomes immanent to consciousness and the *aseity* [independent existence] of things is thereby suppressed. On

the contrary, the eidetic reduction is the commitment to make the world appear such as it is prior to every return to ourselves; it is the attempt to match reflection to the unreflective life of consciousness. I aim at and perceive a world. If I were to follow sensualism in saying that there is nothing here but "states of consciousness," and if I sought to distinguish my perceptions from my dreams through some set of "criteria," then I would miss the phenomenon of the world. For if I am able to speak about "dreams" and "reality," to wonder about the distinction between the imaginary and the real, and to throw the "real" into doubt, this is because I have in fact drawn this distinction prior to the analysis, because I have an experience of the real as well as one of the imaginary. The problem, then, is not to attempt to understand how critical thought can give itself secondary equivalents to this distinction; the problem is to make explicit our primordial knowledge of the "real" and to describe the perception of the world as what establishes, once and for all, our idea of the truth. Thus, we must not wonder if we truly perceive a world; rather, we must say: the world is what we perceive.

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More generally, we must not wonder if our evident truths [*nos évidences*] are really truths, or if, by some defect of our mind, what is evident for us would actually be revealed as illusory when measured against some truth in itself. For if we speak of illusion, this is because we have previously recognized illusions, and we could only do so in the name of some perception that, at that very moment, vouched for itself as true, such that doubt, or the fear of being mistaken, simultaneously affirms our power of unmasking error and could thus not uproot us from the truth. We are in the truth, and evidentness is "the experience of truth."[35] To seek the essence of perception is not to declare that perception is presumed to be true, but rather that perception is defined as our access to the truth. If I now wanted to follow idealism in basing this actual evidentness, this irresistible belief, upon an absolute evidentness, that is, upon the absolute clarity of my thoughts for myself; or, if I wanted to uncover in myself a creative thought [*une pensée naturante*] that would establish the framework of the world or illuminate it throughout, then I would again be unfaithful to my experience of the world. I would, then, be seeking what makes this world possible rather than seeking what this world actually is. The evidentness of perception is neither adequate thought nor apodictic evidentness.[36] The world is not what I think, but what I live [*ce que je vis*]; I am open to the world, I unquestionably communicate with it, but I do not

possess it, it is inexhaustible. I can never fully justify the permanent thesis of my life that "there is a world," or rather, "there is the world." This facticity of the world is what establishes the *Weltlichkeit der Welt* [worldliness of the world],[37] what makes it such that the world is a world, just as the facticity of the *cogito* is not an imperfection in it, but rather what assures me of my existence. The eidetic method is that of a phenomenological positivism grounding the possible upon the real.

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We can now approach the question of intentionality, too often cited as the principal discovery of phenomenology, even though intentionality can only be understood through the reduction. There is hardly anything new in the claim that "all consciousness is consciousness of something." In his "Refutation of Idealism," Kant showed that inner perception is impossible without external perception, that the world as the connection of phenomena is anticipated in the consciousness of my own unity, and is the means I have of coming into being as consciousness.[38] What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is that the unity of the world, prior to being posited by knowledge through an explicit act of identification, is lived as already accomplished or as already there. In the *Critique of Judgment*,[39] Kant himself demonstrated that there is a unity of the imagination and of the understanding, and a unity of subjects *prior to the object*, and that, in an experience of beauty, for example, I undergo the experience of a harmony between the sensible and the concept, between myself and another, which is itself without any concept. Here the subject is no longer the universal thinker of a system of rigorously connected objects, no longer the subject who is, if he is to be able to [*pouvoir*] form a world, the positing power [*puissance*][40] that imposes the law of the understanding upon the manifold; rather, he discovers himself and appreciates himself as a nature spontaneously conforming to the law of the understanding. But if the subject has a nature, then the hidden art[41] of the imagination must condition the categorial activity; it is no longer merely aesthetic judgment that rests upon this hidden art, but also knowledge, and this art also grounds the unity of consciousness and of consciousnesses.

Husserl takes up the *Critique of Judgment* when he speaks of a teleology of consciousness. This is not to double human consciousness with

an absolute thought that would assign consciousness its ends from the outside. Rather, it is to recognize consciousness itself as a project of the world,[42] as destined to a world that it neither encompasses nor possesses, but toward which it never ceases to be directed – and to recognize the world as that pre-objective individual whose imperious unity prescribes knowledge its goal. This is why Husserl distinguishes between act intentionality – which is the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions (and is the only intentionality discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) – and operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*),[43] the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge. Operative intentionality is the one that provides the text that our various forms of knowledge attempt to translate into precise language. The relation to the world, such as it tirelessly announces itself within us, is not something that analysis might clarify: philosophy can simply place it before our eyes and invite us to take notice.

Through this enlarged notion of intentionality, phenomenological "understanding" is distinguished from classical "intellection," which is limited to considering "true and immutable natures,"[44] and so phenomenology can become a phenomenology of genesis. Whether it is a question of a perceived thing, an historical event, or a doctrine, "to understand" is to grasp the total intention – not merely what these things are for representation, namely, the "properties" of the perceived thing, the myriad of "historical events," and the "ideas" introduced by the doctrine – but rather the unique manner of existing expressed in the properties of the pebble, the glass, or the piece of wax, in all of the events of a revolution, and in all of the thoughts of a philosopher. For each civilization, it is a question of uncovering the Idea in the Hegelian sense, not something like a physico-mathematical law, accessible to objective thought, but rather the unique formula of behavior toward others, Nature, time, and death; that is, a certain manner of articulating the world that the historian must be able to take up and adopt. These are the *dimensions* of history. And in relation to them, there is not a single word or human gesture – not even those habitual or distracted ones – that does not have a signification. I believed I was keeping quiet due to fatigue, or some politician believed he had merely uttered a platitude, and just like that

my silence or his utterance take on a sense, because my weariness or his recourse to some ready-made formula are not accidental; they express a certain disinterest and thus are still a certain taking up of a position with regard to the situation.

If we examine an event up close, then everything appears to happen by accident at the moment it is lived: that person's ambition, some lucky encounter, or some isolated circumstance seems to have been decisive. But accidents cancel each other out, and that is how this myriad of facts comes together and sketches out a certain manner of taking a position toward the human condition, or an *event* whose contours are definite and of which one can speak. Must history be understood through ideology, through politics, through religion, or through the economy? Must we understand a doctrine through its manifest content or through the psychology of the author and the events of his life? We must in fact understand in all of these ways at once; everything has a sense, and we uncover the same ontological structure beneath all of these relations. All of these views are true, so long as they are not isolated, so long as we go right to the very foundation of history, and so long as we meet up with the existential core of signification that is made explicit in each of these perspectives. As Marx said, history does not walk on its head; but neither does it think with its feet. Or better, it is not for us to worry about either its "head" or its "feet," but rather its body. All economical and psychological explanations of a doctrine are true, since the thinker only ever thinks beginning from what he is. Reflection upon a doctrine will itself only be complete when it succeeds in connecting with the history of the doctrine and with external explanations, and in putting the causes and the sense of a doctrine back into an existential structure. There is, says Husserl, a "genesis of sense" (*Sinngenesis*)[45] that alone teaches us, in the final analysis, what the doctrine "means" [*veut dire*]. Like understanding, critique too will have to be pursued on all levels. And of course, the identification of some accident in an author's life can hardly be satisfactory as a refutation of a doctrine: for the doctrine signifies beyond this life; and there are no pure accidents in existence or in coexistence, since both assimilate accidents in order to construct reason from them. And finally, since it is indivisible in the present, history is also indivisible in succession. In relation to its fundamental dimensions, all periods of history appear as manifestations of a single existence or as episodes of a single drama – but we do not know if this drama will have an ending. Because we are in the

world, we are *condemned to sense*,[46] and there is nothing we can do or say that does not acquire a name in history.

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Phenomenology's most important accomplishment is, it would seem, to have joined an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism through its concept of the world or of rationality. Rationality fits precisely to the experiences in which it is revealed. There is rationality – that is, perspectives intersect, perceptions confirm each other, and a sense appears. But this sense must not be separated, transformed into an absolute Spirit, or transformed into a world in the realist sense. The phenomenological world is not pure being, but rather the sense that shines forth at the intersection of my experiences and at the intersection of my experiences with those of others through a sort of gearing into each other.[47] The phenomenological world is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which establish their unity through the taking up [*la reprise*] of my past experiences into my present experiences, or of the other person's experience into my own. For the first time, the philosopher's meditation is lucid enough to avoid endowing its own products with a concrete reality in the world that is prior to that meditation. The philosopher attempts to think the world, others, and himself, and to conceive of their relations. But the meditating Ego and the "disinterested onlooker" (*uninteressierter Zuschauer*)[48] do not meet up with an already given rationality; rather, they "establish each other"[49] and establish rationality
21 through an initiative that has no ontological guarantee, and whose justification rests entirely upon the actual power that it gives us for taking up our history.

The phenomenological world is not the making explicit of a prior being, but rather the founding of being; philosophy is not the reflection of a prior truth, but rather, like art, the actualization of a truth. One might ask how this actualization is *possible* and if it does not in fact link up, in the things, with a preexisting Reason. But the only Logos that preexists is the world itself, and the philosophy that brings the world to a manifest existence does not begin by first being *possible*: it is present or real, just like the world of which it is a part, and no explanatory hypothesis is more clear than the very act by which we take up this incomplete

world in order to attempt to totalize it and to think it. Rationality is not a *problem*; there is no unknown behind it that we would have to determine deductively or prove inductively beginning from it. We witness, at each moment, this marvel that is the connection of experiences, and no one knows how it is accomplished better than we do, since we are this very knot of relations.[50] The world and reason are not problems; and though we might call them mysterious, this mystery is essential to them, there can be no question of dissolving it through some "solution," it is beneath the level of solutions.[51] True philosophy entails learning to see the world anew, and in this sense, an historical account might signify the world with as much "depth" as a philosophical treatise. We take our fate into our own hands and through reflection we become responsible for our own history, but this responsibility also comes from a decision to which we commit our lives; and in both cases it is a violent act whose truth is confirmed through its being performed.

As the disclosure of the world, phenomenology rests upon itself, or rather, founds itself.[52] All forms of knowledge are supported by a "ground" of postulations, and ultimately upon our communication with the world as the first establishing of rationality. Philosophy, as radical reflection, abstains in principle from this resource. Since philosophy is itself within history, it too draws upon the world and upon constituted reason. Thus, it will be necessary that philosophy direct toward itself the very same interrogation that it directs toward all forms of knowledge. It will thus be indefinitely doubled; it will be, as Husserl says, an infinite dialogue or meditation, and, to the very extent that it remains loyal to its intention, it will never know just where it is going. The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoate style in which it proceeds are not the sign of failure; they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason.[53] If phenomenology was a movement prior to having been a doctrine or a system, this is neither accidental nor a deception. Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state. As such, phenomenology merges with the effort of modern thought.