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The Problem of Illusion in the Phenomenology of Claude Romano

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Joseph Cutolo

**THE PROBLEM OF ILLUSION IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CLAUDE
ROMANO**

**Submitted to the Committee on Undergraduate Honors at Baruch College of the City
University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with Honors.**

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Abstract

The phenomenology of Claude Romano constructs a strict distinction between perceptions and illusions. This distinction is so strict that the former excludes the latter completely. Putting this distinction into play is not a local decision about our experiences and the structures of our experiences. This decision brings with it metaphysical, ontological, and phenomenological frameworks to ground it. In what follows I attempt to draw out the consequences of Romano's decisions about our experience, and to study the philosophical frameworks that underlie his decisions. In doing so, I reconnect his phenomenology with a wider terminology of phenomenology, in order to study and clarify this terminology, and to demonstrate how his terminology should function. Much of what follows is a systematic clarification of the way one should speak in describing one's experiences, as well as a clarification of the conceptual structures that are constructed when describing our experience. In this way I hope to revise and update what Romano calls a "holism of experience", that is, a conceptual holistic structure of human experience. The establishment of Romano's holism is based on the distinction between perceptions and illusions. Opting to deny his distinction, I also separate the philosophical frameworks that ground it, and attempt to bring to light their unique functions within a holism of experience. Because the research methodology and terminology of the thesis change in light of clarifications along the way, a table detailing the methodology and defining terminology would need to be composed of two possibly contradictory entries for each. As this would serve only to confuse the reader, I have opted to exclude these entries prior to the thesis, and to allow the philosophical work to guide the reader.

PREFATORY REMARKS

In what follows, I will attempt to analyze a text by the philosopher, Claude Romano. My aims in doing so are the following:

- 1) to analyze and understand how Romano uses the terms “perception”, “illusion”, “experience”, and “world”;
- 2) to show how what Romano says about these terms is not based completely in a description of how they appear to a conscious subject;
- 3) to systematically relate these terms to other terms in the language of phenomenology, in order to show how they should function in conjunction with these terms;
- 4) to challenge and update Romano’s ultimate goals in his descriptions of perceptions and illusions.

In order to fulfill these four steps it is necessary to consult other texts in the literature of phenomenology. For that reason, I will, in some sections, leave the principal text by Romano to the side to consider other philosophers’ works in the field. I will therefore explain the setup, section by section, of what is to follow.

In the first section, I begin by explaining the problem at hand. Beginning with a detailed analysis of the relevant passages in Romano’s text, I attempt to reconstitute what he means by the terms “perception”, “illusion”, “experience”, and “world”. In doing so, I also challenge some of Romano’s claims about these terms. Along the way I also pick out what I see to be contradictions inherent in Romano’s reasoning. All of this is meant to begin to show what the central problems of Romano’s philosophy are, as well as to set up clearer terms for use in later sections.

In the second section, I depart a bit from considering Romano's text. I do so in order to analyze what phenomenologists call the "phenomenological reduction". This reduction is seen to be the principal method of phenomenology. I explain its methodology, purpose, and its use by three notable phenomenologists. I then reconnect this method to Romano, who makes no mention of it, in order to see how and where it functions in his text.

Next, in the third section, I analyze the foundational phenomenological concept of "givenness". I undertake to systematically connect this term with all of the other phenomenological terms that arise in the thesis, and to clarify all of them on its basis. Doing this allows me to not only clarify the terminology I will continuously employ, it also allows me to further analyze and critique the terms that Romano uses in his text. Analyzing the concept of givenness also allows me to make conceptual decisions about perceptions, illusions, and experience that would have otherwise been unfounded.

The fourth section, "Experience and Phenomenology of Perception", first considers the languages of metaphysics and phenomenology, and shows in what ways they are incompatible. Next, I attempt to update the concepts of world, perception, and experience, with reference to the updated terminology that becomes possible with the third section.

In the fifth section I attempt to rethink what Romano calls his "holism of experience", that is, experience as a systemic whole. Demonstrating why his holism of experience is not rigorous enough to do what it sets out to do, I undertake to use all of the critiques, improved terminology, and updated concepts that have been constructed, in order to finally update Romano's holism of experience.

Finally, the conclusion recapitulates what has been gained in the preceding five sections. I make it clear that what has been said is not the last word concerning a phenomenology of experience. Rather, it is only the beginning concerning what I call “a metaphysical phenomenology of experience”. It is on this basis that a project like Romano’s can be undertaken again with more rigorous distinctions and terms.

§1: THE PROBLEM EXPLAINED

In phenomenology, perception is the most fundamental layer of experience. Since the subject matter of phenomenology is experience and its essential structures, this makes the establishment of a correct description of perception pivotal to the phenomenological project as a whole. The work of the philosopher, Claude Romano, has been exemplary in this regard. In *At the Heart of Reason* Romano develops what he calls a holism of experience, the basic thesis of which is that **a perception is only a perception if it is structurally cohesive with the entire system of perception**. This cohesiveness is what distinguishes a perception from an illusion or a hallucination. Romano explicates what he calls the “phenomenological thesis”, which states that there is “an autonomy of...’prepredicative’ experience...with respect to the higher forms of thought, and to language” (xi). The establishment of this holism and the phenomenological thesis has as its goal the refutation of what Romano calls “the skeptical thesis”, which states that the possibility of an isolated illusion, or deficient givenness of a perception, makes possible a “global doubt” as to the existence of any perception, and, at the limit, the world. For Romano, this global doubt is absurd.

It is important for contemporary phenomenology to address this issue in a satisfying manner, because phenomenology proceeds as if there is a world, and as if there are others that inhabit the world. This makes the skeptical thesis a problem of the utmost importance. The founder of modern phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, made a concession to the skeptical thesis. In §49 of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book* (hereafter *Ideas I*), he wrote that it is “conceivable that...experience might suddenly show itself to be refractory to the demand that it carry on its positings of physical things harmoniously...in short, that there might no longer be any world”¹. The nonexistence of the world is conceivable for Husserl, as it was for Descartes, and this possibility makes the being of the spatiotemporal world “merely accidental and relative”². Husserl even goes a step further, saying that the world really is “*a merely intentional being...[that] can be determined and intuited only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: beyond that it is nothing*”³. On this view, the world and everything in it exists only intentionally, so that I can only ever be certain, for example in visual perception, of the fact *that* I am seeing something, but not that the thing that I am seeing exists; i.e., that there is anything *there* for me to see. This is why the skeptical thesis is important to phenomenology: it has affected modern phenomenology since its inception, and not in a theoretically trivial way, but in a manner which determines the very process of experiential description that is essential to phenomenology.

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*. Trans. F. Kersten. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. 1982) 91. (hereafter *Ideas I*)

² *Ibid.*, 93.

³ *Ibid.*

This conception of perception, Romano claims, is anti-phenomenology itself. In order to analyze the problem adequately, Husserl should have examined the experience of illusion instead of simply subscribing to or accommodating the skeptical thesis.

A) THE STRUCTURES OF EXPERIENCE.

Romano begins with an examination of illusion in its difference from perception. Husserl believes that “experience, because of conflict, might dissolve into illusion”⁴. However, the world, for Romano, could not “dissolve into illusion”, because the experience of illusion presents its own necessary structures that are opposed to the structures of perception. Illusion, Romano tells us, “is static, and, to this extent, ephemeral, volatile, unstable” (308). Sometimes this is manifested when we judge perceptions falsely. “Entering a café, I hesitate for a split second before a person blocking my path who turns out to be my reflection in a mirror” (306). The “split second” is important here. The illusion is an ephemeral phenomenon, and so dissipates quickly. There is a perception that I simply judge wrongly to be the case. I think that the figure in the mirror is another person, when really it is me, and I notice this quite quickly, even if I was fooled initially. In this case, according to Romano, the illusion is a *misjudged perception*, not a *misperception*.

There are illusions which last longer: for example, a hallucination.⁵ The hallucination “*looks like* a perceived object, but manifests itself differently, as if on a different stage from that of the real world” (307). Someone suffering from a hallucination can, for instance, tell the difference between the hallucination of a man standing beneath

⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁵ For Romano, hallucinations are illusory phenomena. While this does pose problems, I will follow his use of these words here. An illusion is anything that appears to a consciousness as a perception, but gives itself as what it is not (for example, a perception of my reflection being given as another person before me). In this sense a hallucination is only a type of illusion.

his window, and a person imitating such a hallucination (307). Similarly, a person suffering from schizophrenia “distinguishes very well between a voice resulting from hallucinations and a voice heard” (307). These voices are peculiar. They “are not pathological phenomena within an unchanged perceptual framework, but the result of an alteration of that framework itself” (307). All this allows Romano to conclude that “(t)he illusion is by essence fleeting, labile, fluctuating, indeterminate... There is in it nothing like the ordered succession of facets that follow upon one another in an orderly and continuous way” (307). This, says Romano, is the sort of analysis Husserl should have performed upon illusions: an analysis concerning the *mode of manifestation (or mode of givenness)* of illusion in its difference from perception.

This kind of analysis is necessary because the mode of givenness of an experience, or the way in which that experience appears, is important for the way phenomenology studies experiences. The “falsity of illusion”, Romano writes, “belongs intrinsically to the illusion’s mode of manifestation⁶, which does not in the slightest keep the illusion from fooling us, but on the contrary explains that it does so” (309). That is to say, the structure of an illusion requires that its falsity *be able* to fool us, while simultaneously being distinguishable in principle from an illusion. But what does “false” mean here? Romano tells us that it means: “that deceives, that passes itself off for something other than what it is” (309). The illusion is false, the perception is real.

Here one must disagree with Romano. Is it certain that all illusions are deceptive? The hallucination is meant to be deceptive, but can be recognized as a hallucination, at which point it stops being properly deceptive. It remains false, but it does not deceive me.

⁶ A mode of manifestation is the same thing as a mode of givenness. The latter term will be the more dominant one in the language of phenomenology.

We can retain the latter determination of Romano's definition, the passing-itself-off of a thing as what it is not, for even the recognized hallucination still "tries", in a manner of speaking, to pass itself off as a physically existent thing. This is why Romano tells us that "to perceive" *excludes* 'to hallucinate' or to 'be deluded', and vice versa" (302). Therefore, we may describe the irreducible nucleus of illusion as an experience's passing itself off as what it is not.

D) Structural Invariants and the Holism of Experience

We can now begin to approach his conception of the holism of experience. This holism is based on the idea that "The world is a structural whole that is defined by its intrinsic cohesiveness" (310). Cohesiveness here means "a system of structural invariants...that underlie all variation of phenomena" (310). All phenomena are capable of being experienced in one way or another. Every possible appearance of a phenomenon is prescribed in advance by cohesiveness. The latter is "the indispensable condition for every illusion to be able to reveal itself as an illusion" (310). By that same token, cohesiveness is the condition for an illusion to *be* an illusion. This is Romano's way of signaling what he sees as the end of the skeptical thesis, and of the anti-phenomenological aspect of Husserlian phenomenology.

What, then, are the "structural invariants" of a perception that distinguish it from an illusion or a hallucination? These structural invariants are what Husserl and Romano call "material a priori". A material a priori is "an *a priori* that is grounded *in the very nature of the contents of experience* which exemplify it" (20)⁷. First, there are space and time. This is immediately noticeable in vision. "To see", Romano writes, "is to recognize

⁷ Insofar as this principle of cohesiveness is a phenomenological principle, it applies to the experiences and the contents of experience for us, that is, for human consciousness.

entities endowed with spatiotemporal continuity that offer themselves to be grasped in their constantly changing identity and their constantly identical variety” (334). I hold a pen in my hand. The pen holds itself together, so to speak, as I turn it to see its sides. It is the same pen when I remove its cap to begin writing. I notice it as the same pen when I turn away from it for a moment then return my gaze to it. It is offered to my sight as the same despite its location in space and time. It just *is* the same with every stroke written, with every passing moment. Auditory perceptions are also necessarily subject to time, which is to say that a sound *must* have a duration. This seems obvious enough. What it tells us, though, is that “‘(t)his sound has no duration’ is not a formal contradiction; it is a materially false *a priori* proposition” (22). In other words, it is not possible, given the object of the experience (the sound) and the experience itself (hearing), that there be no duration in either.

There are more structural invariants that make a perception a perception, and there are different material *a priori* for different perceptions. For example, a sound must have a timbre, pitch, and tone, so that “(w)hatever melody I could possibly imagine in any possible world, I could never imagine sounds that do not possess the three properties that define the essence of all sound as such” (23,24). Similarly, “the fact that all spatial things can be seen only through changing silhouettes or adumbrations... defines what a spatial thing *is*” (21). This gives a more specific sense to my example of the perception of a pen. I can turn it to see it from different sides, but there are always sides that are hidden from me. This is because I must always see it from a specific angle or point of view. It is a necessary material *a priori*, according to Romano, that I simply *cannot* see the spatial thing from all sides at once. Even if I could set up a complex apparatus that would reflect images of all

sides of the pen to me, it would remain that I could only see those reflections individually. Indeed, what would it be like to see a spatial thing from all angles at once? Would a thing thus seen still have the continuity and identity it has when it is seen from a certain angle?

What appears to be the final material a priori for perception, as Romano enumerates them, is also what most clearly distinguishes perception from illusion: “Perception is dynamic and orderly; it is the very manner in which I have a hold on the world through my body, it accompanies and espouses my slightest movements” (308). Is this true of an illusion? When I stop in front of my reflection, thinking it to be another person, this illusion quickly subsides, and I recognize myself in the mirror’s reflection. This is neither dynamic nor orderly. It suddenly jolts me from one understanding of my perception to another.

II): Romano’s Holism of Experience

What in this makes our experience *holistic*? Romano tells us that our originary experience, perception, is cohesive. What this means is that it excludes illusions and hallucinations from itself by virtue of its necessary structure, “(a)n *experience is a perceptual experience if and only if it is integrated without any break or hiatus into the whole of perceptual experience, and therefore if it presents a structural cohesiveness with the system of perceptual experience as a whole*” (360). An immediate inclusion in the system of perception as a whole is what makes a perception what it is, because that inclusion will only be achieved on the basis of a structural cohesiveness, or of a subjection of that experience to the particular structural invariants exhibited by perceptions. But even if all perceptions are subject to the same structural invariants, what makes them *holistic*; what makes them belong to and constitute a whole? Are they not still simply isolated experiences gathered together by reflection under the title “perception”?

Romano tells us that perceptions really do exhibit the property of being holistic. “A holistic property”, according to Romano, “is a property such that it is possessed by a part only under the condition of this part’s integration into a whole” (358). The simplest example of this is given by the perception of a constellation. In it, “each star only gets its figural factor, that is, the property of being a constituent of a *figure* integrating several stars, from its insertion into a whole possessing that figure” (358). The individual stars cannot, in themselves, explain the constellation’s configuration. The “figural factor” of the stars is the nonvisible (but not *invisible*) appearing of the constellation, which accompanies and is built upon the visible proximity of the stars in relation to each other within my field of vision. It is only because they form that figure that they can be isolated as parts of that figure (for example, as extremities therein). Before the constellation (that is, before a perceiving agent’s ability to perceive a constellation), they are just stars without any necessary relation to a constellation or the possibility of a constellation. It is here, and thus, that the whole precedes the parts.

Things are no different for perception as a whole, on Romano’s account. Cohesiveness is just this holistic property of perception, and it is on the basis of this holistic property that perception can form a holistic system: “the property of being perceived depends on cohesiveness that is first a property of the whole before being a property of the part” (360). The constellation is analogous to the cohesiveness exhibited in perception. In the latter, it is the world itself that is the “whole possessing structural cohesiveness” (360), and not any particular perception.

However, do I really perceive the world every time I perceive something? (Even if I leave Earth’s orbit to see it from afar, it is still the case that: 1) I can only see a general

picture of the Earth, and no longer, for example, what is going on in small cities on its surface, and 2) as a spatial entity, it is still hidden from view on its other sides.) Does Romano mean we literally do perceive the world as a whole every time we perceive something in it? Clearly not. In any perception there is a *horizon*⁸. Romano uses the term “horizon” to mean the “indeterminate background against which the thing and its immediate thematic borders stand out”; and this background indeterminacy is necessary, “for without an invisible depth, there would be no appearing relief, and without an implicit background, no explicit motif” (364). Of course, my body is also still present as the anchorage point of my perception, and so I am part of this indeterminacy, since a perception of my body as a whole is not given in to me in a perception, but I am still included in the perception. My body is part of the horizon, because it is only by being situated somewhere that a material thing can appear to me from this angle or that. Needless to say, we can never *perceive* the horizon: once a part of it becomes explicit in perception, the horizon moves away. Rather, a perceptual scene can become explicit only on the basis of the horizon’s moving away. Romano describes it thus: “The horizon *in-appears*...its in-appearing signifies its appearing in withdrawal and not its outright occultation” (368). Romano renames “horizon” “the Open” as the positive condition for the possibility of perception of the world. The Open is the “mode of manifestation of the world... It is that which brings all things to visibility...that full and all-encompassing presence of the whole insofar as this whole is included in each view” (368-369). Being that which makes all determination possible, the horizon is structurally included in any partial perception. “It is

⁸ The concept of horizon has been central to phenomenology since Husserl. I will not detail its history, nor will I explain its developments in various phenomenologists’ works. For our purposes it is enough to explain Romano’s concept of horizon.

because the world is the consistent and unshakable background of all appearance that there are partially tacit *perceptual situations*, and that these situations give rise to finite views for a subject always already included in them” (369).

To recapitulate, the cohesiveness of perception, which is its subjection to structural invariants (first and foremost those of space and time, in which the identity of an experience is maintained) within the system of perception as a whole (which is/gives the world, including its indeterminate horizon or openness) is that which makes it possible for an illusion to appear as well as to dissolve. Illusions, being anomalies for Romano, can only appear and be identified on the basis of the perceived world, which means they must stand out against this world. This is why perception necessarily excludes illusion.

B) THE RELATIONALITY OF EXPERIENCE

For Romano, the structures of experience – or, better, the structurations of experience – are relational. Neither the subject nor the object is the sole progenitor of an experience. As an example of this, Romano discusses the Zöllner illusion, in which we are presented with real lines that appear to converge due to oblique lines scoring the parallel lines. A subject’s relation to this figure can change how it appears. When I take the figure as a whole, I cannot help but see the lines as converging. However, “(i)f, with the help of a ruler, I undertake to measure their distance from each other, leaving out the oblique lines that ‘deform’ my perception, the lines straighten out beneath my eyes, seem to run parallel again, if only for a fraction of a second” (306). The quotations around “deform” are important. Romano does not think there is any actual deformation in my perception here. Rather, “(i)t is these same real lines that change how they look according to whether I look at the drawing as an indivisible whole or I proceed in an analytic way, leaving aside, as

much as I can, some of its elements” (306-307). Perception is a *relational* experience, and not a passive reflection of the world’s geometry. It “is the perception of the figure itself that is ambivalent, unstable by nature” (307). Perhaps the only illusion here is the illusion of an illusion, a misunderstanding about my perception of the lines, for I never really stop seeing these real lines.

Things become more complicated once Romano admits that “to perceive is always to perceive...according to a particular meaning” (372). What does “meaning” mean in this claim? It does not signify a linguistic understanding: rather, meaning is a contextual property that Romano defines as “the correlate of understanding” (350). Understanding, moreover, is not an intellectual capacity here. Understanding, as a phenomenological concept, signifies a subject’s involvement in a world in which it acts. It does not signify a passive gaining of knowledge by a subject, but that subject’s practical involvement in its surroundings and world. Understanding is a “practical intelligence” (331). The practicality of this practical intelligence signifies “being able (knowing how) to deal with something in a given situation; it depends on our goals, interests, and background capacities” (350). Romano illustrates this: if, when passing by a boulder, it seems difficult to climb, this is not because the boulder is a brute empirical fact upon which my consciousness imposes a meaning (“How does consciousness ‘know’ what meaning to confer on the given if the given has not already displayed it *its own meaning* by its very way of appearing?” (330)); rather, the boulder already has a meaning for me that is inherent in my experience of it. What gives it this meaning is “the background of my capacities” (338): it is because of the steepness of this boulder, or because I have little or no experience of rock climbing, that the idea of scaling it appears difficult. But we should not take this to mean that meaning

leads back to the subject alone. The relationality of experience signifies that the “modes of presentation” of an experience “specify the properties-of-the-thing-for-an-observer”, and not just of any observer, but of “*an agent in the world*” (332). This is why the boulder can appear difficult to climb: its objective properties (that of being much bigger than me, but also steep, etc.) are understood by me in a practical context with reference to my capabilities (I am able to walk, but not able to easily balance on a steep surface, and especially not for long). This relational encounter between an agent and their world creates a meaning inherent in the experience itself; the experience is the experience of this encounter.

This, essentially, is what Romano calls the “phenomenological thesis”: that “experience possesses an immanent logos” (xi). This immanent logos is the meaning inherent in experience in a preconceptual way. That experience is relational means that (a) the “immanent logos” of experience depends on the meaning inherent in an experience for an agent in the world, based on the objective properties of that world, and (b) that the most primal experience of this world takes place in perception. Now, meaning (which is the phenomenological correlate of understanding, in that what is understood in an understanding is the meaning of what is encountered in the world) can only be a holistic property, since it is that which is understood only within a context that includes subject, object, and world. Meaning, as defined by Romano, is “the holistic characteristic of...the system formed by the object...taken in its overall context and a subject endowed with practical capacities, among which understanding itself occupies a prominent position” (372). Meaning is not primarily linguistic but pragmatic, and it appears in accordance with a subject’s practical intelligence in a world containing objects with which she interacts.

C) ILLUSIONS AS EXPERIENCES

I have hitherto been unfaithful to Romano's analysis on one point: what counts as an experience. I have explicated him as though illusions count for him as experiences. However, according to Romano, we do not *reach the world* in an illusion: "the illusory object...is [only] *apparently* transcendent. We must not say that there are modes of givenness corresponding to this pseudo-existence, because there is no mode of givenness possible for what does not exist in any way" (306). And again: "there is no illusory *experience*, there are only illusions of experience" (308). Illusions, in other words, do not count as experiences for Romano. He provides five characteristics of experience:

- 1) "All experience has a phenomenal content.
- (2) A phenomenon is the way in which something appears.
- (3) All experience is about something, which consequently shows itself to us.
- (4) Ordinary experience is perception...
- (5) What shows itself can be considered as given, as opposed to assumed or inferred" (257).

Additionally, Romano says that what defines "the phenomenological concept of experience" is "the immanence of a prelinguistic meaning in it" (355). Now, we have already seen that meaning is a holistic property that arises in a practical context of an agent in a world. It can be seen when a boulder is given to me as difficult to climb, because my capacities do not include easily climbing it. Do similar considerations apply to illusions at all?

Let us revisit an example of illusion used by Romano. I misjudge the identity of the person who appears to me in a café, noticing a second later that it is me. What in here could point to a practical context? I hesitate in front of the reflection; perhaps I am even

startled by it. The illusion intrudes upon my experience of the world. When I hesitate before the reflection, I have stopped in my tracks, even if only for a second. I had a goal while entering the café. Perhaps I was going to buy a coffee, or walking to a table to meet a friend. Whatever the situation, the illusion has interrupted my path; it has inserted itself into my experience and stopped me short in my progress. But it does of course have a *meaning*. For what reason would I hesitate if what appeared to me did not give itself in one way or another to my practical intelligence? I would not hesitate at all if the illusion did not give itself as obtrusive to my goals, or if it did not startle me (even if I had no immediate goals in mind): that is, if it did not convey itself immediately to a pragmatic context which it could disrupt.

In that specific case, however, the illusion is a misjudged perception rather than a misperception (as I have said above concerning this example, in the context of explicating different kinds of illusions as Romano understands them). The “illusory thing” really is there. Let us attempt another analysis with an object that has no reality outside myself. Romano writes of the “mirage that trembles in the distance [which] reveals itself as being a mirage when I keep walking toward it” (309). Romano is, understandably, more concerned here with how an illusion manifests itself, and so how one can differentiate it in principle from a perception. But what exactly *is* the mirage? No illusion can be simply an illusion in an unqualified way: something must *happen*, or else an illusion has not taken place. Let us then examine a mirage. The popular figure of the mirage of a well in a desert will do. Here again, the illusion is given over to my practical intelligence. If the mirage did not interact with my entire context, the well could not tempt me, for I would not care about the water I believe to be in it. I am in the desert, it is hot, I am thirsty. This is what

makes the well such a blessing. Before it is discovered to be a mirage, I rush toward it, certain of the prospect of water. The illusion, which I have not deliberately conjured up, offers itself to my pragmatic dealings with the world. I need water. This is why the well in the desert mirage has a meaning, in Romano's terminology.

We can go further and consider *punctual* illusions, that is, an illusions which lasts for an instant, or only for a very short time (perhaps a couple of seconds or so). A point of light appears and disappears in an instant; a silhouette of an animal appears before me, only to vanish once I take a step toward it; a cold flash runs up my spine. Strictly speaking, none of these experiences holds (or need hold) a perception of something *outside* me. Romano would consider them simple alterations of my perceptive framework. Nevertheless, they each have a meaning that includes them within the phenomenological concept of experience. The light, the silhouette, the cold – they appear to me *as* light, *as* an animal, *as* cold. Just as with the misjudged perception in the café, each of these hallucinations or illusions presents itself as a distraction to my normal mode of perception. The cold seems to come from nowhere, and comes upon me in an instant, disrupting my normal perception of hot or cold; the silhouette is no more than an outline, somewhat flat and unarticulated, of an animal, and so appears odd. This is not how I am used to perceiving a material object. The light comes from nowhere, and is perhaps a phenomenon of my peripheral vision. The oddities here can be validly considered meaningful because, as Romano notes, “perceptual modes of presentation are subordinate to norms” (332). Perception is subordinate to norms because in it, the world is present “from aspects that are *evaluable* in relation to our intentional actions, and from the perspective of the ends we pursue” (333). This is why, in the perception of a landscape whose end is aesthetic, “a fog

spread through the countryside will bring me to say that I didn't get a 'good look' at the landscape" (332). Since perception is subordinate to norms, these punctual illusions of cold, silhouette, or light, have meaning by disrupting us, by thrusting us into an unusual, or abnormal, relationship to the world, and this is so, ultimately, of all illusions.

We can, therefore, ask: is the illusion always distinguishable from the perception *in principle*? The illusion acts within a certain context. It molds itself onto that context in a different way from a perception, of course, but it is part of that context nonetheless. The illusion is only distinguishable after a certain amount of time, or after a reconnection of perceptions disrupted by the illusion. In the instant of an illusion in which I am fooled into thinking I am perceiving something, the illusion is not distinguishable from a perception of that thing. This does not mean that the illusion *can never* be distinguished from the perception. It is against the background of the world that perception comes to reconstitute itself, so that any given illusion will arise and dissipate against that very background. Nevertheless, *it must be pointed out that there are two different senses of "distinguish" being used here*. The first sense pertains to an *epistemic* possibility. The illusion, while it is fooling me, is indistinguishable from a perception *within the order of knowledge*. What matters here is that I cannot distinguish the experience of perceiving my reflection in a mirror while walking into a café from the experience of perceiving another person behind glass – not immediately, that is, since I am being fooled by an illusion, even though I will soon come to be able to distinguish them. The second sense asks about *ontological* status. Even if an illusion is epistemologically indistinguishable, qua experience, from a perception, the illusion as such remains nevertheless *distinct*, and so distinguishing between the illusion and the perception becomes a distinction between the *types of objects*

at hand. My epistemic capacity to recognize an illusion as an illusion as such is possible because *the object of the illusion is the object that it is*, namely an illusory object. The illusion is permeated with phenomenological (and not merely linguistic) meaning in both of these ways. Why, then, does Romano deny the status of experience to illusions, when his own premises and concepts seem to require us to say the opposite?

D) PERCEPTIONS AND ILLUSIONS

It seems that Romano is here operating within a very narrow notion of “existence”, for, he writes, “A nonexistent or impossible object can have no mode of givenness” (266). Is this true? And what does “nonexistent” mean here⁹? Romano seems to use “nonexistent” to mean “lacking a physical substrate”, so that a mental existence might be seen as a nonexistence if it tries to pass itself off as outside an experiencing agent, or if what appears in such an experience has no existence outside an experiencing agent. This would explain why hallucinations should have no mode of givenness. In fact, Romano even says that with certain experiences where an object appears, “that object *must* not exist: and thus it goes...with imagination, illusion, and hallucination” (267). The main motivation for his interpretation of illusion as nonexperience rests in this summary assertion, which seems to be less an analyzed assertion than a presupposition guiding his analyses: “There is nothing in common between perception and illusion” (305). We seem to have little reason to believe this true: my attempts thus far have been to open illusion back into the realm of Romano’s conception of experience using only his own concepts. It is because Romano wishes to destroy the skeptical thesis that he does not wish to admit a common ground between illusion and perception even at the cost of inconsistency. When discussing the

⁹ Romano’s uses of the terms “impossible” and “object” are equally suspicious when it comes to what is at stake in phenomenology, but we will leave that to the side.

“illusory object” he says that it has no mode of givenness in principle, because “there is no mode of givenness possible for what does not exist in any way” (306). The difficulty with this claim is, as I will try to show, central to all the other phenomenological difficulties that I will draw out in his work. Romano’s phenomenology is motivated by a restoration of perception to the exclusion of illusion, and even if his descriptions of the phenomena at hand are accurate, the conclusions he draws from them are neither self-evident, nor always rigorously thought through.

I) Reconnecting Perceptions and Illusions

I would now like to show why illusion is not, as Romano’s central denial of the skeptical thesis states, necessarily excluded from perception. This can be done in two ways. The first way would consist in showing, again working with Romano against himself, that perception and illusion share identity, at least partially. Romano has said, for example, that the objects of illusions look like perceived objects. If there were no resemblance between them, then illusions as a whole could not fool us, because they would be like nothing we perceive. We may agree with Romano that “All resemblance is a case of partial or complete identity” (183). Now the question posed to him would be: since an illusion in fact resembles a perception, and if resemblance is, according to Romano, a case of at least partial identity, how could there be a case of even partial identity between illusions and perceptions if the latter *excludes* the former?

There is a second way to reject the idea that perception necessarily excludes illusion from its identity. We noted above that the irreducible nucleus of illusion is the phenomenon’s passing itself off as something it is not. A thing can appear as what it is within experience only if it is *something* to begin with. But what is a *thing*, conceived

according to Romano's understanding of phenomenology? The subject matter of phenomenology according to Romano is experience, and experience requires an object, an experiencing agent, and their contextual relation. In experience, therefore, an object becomes "a *system* of appearances" (363). There could be no experience of an object if that object did not appear. In Romano's phenomenology, as it happens, an object "is nothing but this network of structural invariants, a system of appearances prescribed in advance..." (363). It is necessary to recall here that (a) cohesiveness is this system of structural invariants, (b) structural invariants prescribe in advance all variation of appearances, and (c) cohesiveness is what defines, on Romano's account, the phenomenological concept of "world". All perceptions are subject to structural invariants, which is how they come to form a system. A perception's immediate integration within the system of perception as a whole would fail if the perception were not subject to one or more of perception's structural invariants.

However, Romano's whole argument against admitting any identity between illusions and perceptions rests ultimately on the fact that perception is cohesive and illusions are not. But are not illusions, as illusions, limited in their structure? *Illusions, as experiences, also have structural invariants, or elements which illusions must have to be what they are.* This means that illusions, too, are cohesive: they too are experiences that are subject to structural invariants and form a system of such experiences based on these elementary structures. This means, first of all, that illusions are more interior to perceptions than Romano leads us to believe, since they even fall under his definition of what a perception is; on the other hand, illusions are more exterior to perceptions, since, in order to appear, they must appear where a perception in the strict sense is *not* taking place.

Now, an experienced object is a “system of structural invariants”, so it must include *all* of the possible appearances it can take. Perception is not the only form of givenness that a physical object can have. Even in perception we know, from Romano’s own account, that illusions can occur (recall the example of seeing oneself in the mirror of the café). An object can appear in illusion as well as in perception. Romano’s interpretation of this, guided by his absolute exclusion of illusions from perceptions, would have him conclude that an object, being a system of structural invariants, can only be so on the basis of perceptions. But inasmuch as illusions have their own structure, the objects of illusions are necessarily objects. Any object is, then, a system of structural invariants including experiences of illusion as well as of perception.

Furthermore, if what is essential to illusion is a phenomenon’s passing itself off as what it is not, this essential predicate can also be applied to perception. Perception is always a perception of *something*. But once it is admitted that

1) the *something* being perceived is a system of structural invariants, and

2) in order to be an illusion, a thing must pass itself off as something else,

it must be said that perceptions are *also* “illusions”, and, at the limit, that the world, which is defined by cohesiveness, is also essentially “illusory”.

The quotation marks are important here. I am not saying that all objects and the world itself are illusions in the narrow sense: that they are false things that do not have any certain existence and that are open to rational doubt. Illusion presents itself here in another sense. If an object is what it is as a system of appearances and structural invariants, then it is what it is as both the system of perceptions and the system of illusions. Now, these are two mutually exclusive systems of appearances. Even when illusion occurs within

perception (as with the mirror in the café), it is the case that the illusion only occurs by passing off a perceived element as what it is not (in this case, my perceived reflection is passed off as another person). This is why objects are necessarily “illusory” in a certain sense: if perceptual and illusory systems of appearances are necessarily included in objects but are mutually exclusive, then a *perception* shows the object as lacking a system of *illusory* appearances, and, conversely, when an *illusion* occurs, its object is given, or appears, as lacking a system of perceptual appearances (inasmuch as that system, even if it is in fact present as the basis of the illusion, does not transpire *with* the illusion). Better, the appearing object does not *appear* as *lacking* its opposite mode of givenness; rather, it simply *excludes* this opposite mode *when it appears*. In other words, the object does not appear in such a way as to deceive me into thinking that *it could not have* another mode of givenness; it is that the object simply *does not appear* in that alternative mode of givenness. The object is a system of appearances, but never appears *as* a system of appearances. It appears as the object it is (as a pen, as a chair, for example), which means that it appears as something other than it is in its appearing as it is. The characteristics of illusions essentially communicate with, without being identical to, what I am trying to describe, namely, a broadening of what I have designated as the irreducible nucleus of the illusion.

For example, when I perceive the pen in my hand, is it possible that I could have a hallucination of this pen? Why not, since hallucinations and illusions share structural invariants, even if not completely? When I perceive my pen, a perception of my pen takes place, and this perception does not appear as including illusion in its structure and possibility. It is therefore “passed off” as a perception tout court, and not a perception open to being experienced as an illusion, as an ideation, an imagining, a dream, etc. This is why

the characteristics of illusion essentially communicate with my description of “illusion” here, a term I leave in quotation marks to show that this is not mere word play, but that an essential structure is being broadened and kept as the basis for a new understanding, and not abandoned.

This means that if illusion is a phenomenon’s passing itself off as what it is not, then any perception whatever is “illusory”, because what appears in the perception is not completely given as what it is (namely, a system of appearances including both the systems of perception and illusion). This follows strictly from Romano’s premises and definitions, and is a conclusion that can only be reached once the phenomenon of illusion is interpreted correctly: that is, without being guided by the anti-phenomenological prejudice stating that illusions and perceptions have nothing in common. This should not be taken to mean that the skeptical thesis has regained strength. But admitting illusion into perception becomes necessary once the phenomena have been adequately analyzed.

It should be stated as clearly as possible: the “illusion” that I have just admitted into perception is only a *certain* kind of falsity. It transcends the distinction of true/false that describes whether or not there is in fact an object in front of me to perceive. This generalized concept of illusion also applies to illusions narrowly. I have said that when an illusion occurs, its object is given without including the system of perception it necessarily has as part of its structure. This would make the illusion illusory as well, in that it passes itself off as only an illusion and nothing more, even though its object includes the possibility of being perceived. The true perception is just as “false” in this framework as the false illusion is, and, strictly speaking, “false” can only be used to describe this experience if one notices that it describes the fact of mutually exclusive appearances in an

object. This is because **no object can exist as a system of appearances unless it is a system of all of its possible appearances**. Once one possible experience of an object, among a set of mutually exclusive experiences of that object, is actualized, it excludes all other experiences of that object within that set, and so passes itself off as the definitive experience of that object even though alternatives to it are included in the system of possible experiences of that object. It is helpful to think of an object qua system of possible appearances more as an economic distribution of experiences rather than as a strict frontier.

An objection arises, however. What can we say about the hallucination that need not have *any* object, and therefore, no system of perceptions to be excluded? What can be said about the thing that appears before my eyes with no existence outside myself? What about the person suffering from schizophrenia who “hears” what is making no noise? Another question: what could these hallucinations be if they were not subject to at least *some* of the structural invariants of perceptions? The visual hallucination must have an extension and take place in space. The auditory hallucinations must have a timbre, pitch, and tone, even if they are so different from physical sounds that a “victim of hallucinations distinguishes very well between a voice resulting from hallucination and a voice heard” (307). It is these possibilities that count, precisely because cohesiveness, as a system of structural invariants, is “a system of possibilities of essence preceding realities” (310). Something of what appears in a hallucination *must*, therefore, be at least *possibly* perceivable, since they share structural invariants, which is the reason they can be similar to perceptions at all.

Perceptions as well as illusions share at least this: that they both inhabit objects *together* as systems of appearances. Their structural invariants are possibilities, and even

if it is true that illusions are derivative experiences that must model themselves after perceptions, it is no less true that illusion in general pervades perceptions. Romano's holism of experience is set up in diametric opposition to the thesis that illusion can be structurally included in perception. Nevertheless, it is his own concepts and definitions that, once worked out without the goal of radically separating perceptions and illusions, allow us to say the opposite: there is something common to perceptions and illusions. This common core is that of their structural invariants, even if there remain differences between the structural invariants that make perceptions perceptions and illusions illusions. Illusion, being a mode of experience that passes itself off as perception, must share some of perception's structural invariants, something that perception makes possible. This means also that perception cannot be "experience par excellence". If perception is a type of "illusion", then it can be said that this "illusory" experience is more fundamental than even perception, since it is the experiential framework of *any* experience whatever, perception included. Romano's holism of experience leads to this conclusion. This conception of illusion and perception makes experience even more holistic by making perception necessarily open to its alternatives.

§2: THE REDUCTION AND THE PHENOMENON

It is now necessary to depart from Romano's text, without leaving it behind completely. I will now begin a discussion on the phenomenological concept of "reduction". The reason for doing so is that it is necessary to explain phenomenological methodology in order to understand how phenomenology commences in its use of its concepts. It does not simply invent these concepts out of thin air, nor does it (always) dogmatically accept concepts coming from other areas of philosophy. In order to see *what*

phenomenology does and *how* it does it, it is necessary to see this “doing” in action, and to highlight some phenomenologists’ enactments of it.

Before going on to reduction, I will remark that, concerning Romano’s project, I have made what might seem to be an untenable claim in the previous section, namely, that it is possible to locate all of the problems in Romano’s book within Romano’s assertion that there is no mode of givenness possible for what does “not exist in any way”. While this problem appears to be a localized one, and so cannot be extended even to the problems I have already exposed, it in fact raises more problems than may at first appear.

First, this assertion hides two intertwined decisions, one phenomenological, the other metaphysical. The phenomenological decision is that only that which exists can have a mode of givenness; the metaphysical decision is that only that which has a physical substrate exists. Therefore, only that which has a physical substrate can have a mode of givenness: otherwise it is either nonexistent or merely a play of words whose meaning we understand but that corresponds to no object. Romano therefore makes two very consequential claims in this one assertion.

Second, the phenomenological decision is contrary to what is at stake in phenomenology, which is precisely givenness, whether or not what is being given has a real subsistence of some specifiable kind. The consequences of Romano’s decisions are far-reaching. Many questions arise concerning Romano’s understanding of phenomenology and existence. If experience is relational, what is a relation? Is it enough to answer, as Romano does, that “Something is a relation only if its *relata* exist” (265), and then to understand “existence” on the basis of a physical substrate? (Actually, in Romano’s own terms, it is not enough to say just this: we must also say that the physical substrate has

a mode of givenness because the physical is what is real, the real is in the world, and what is in the world is defined by cohesiveness.) Moreover, why should it be that only that which exists can have a mode of givenness? Is it because it is cohesive? But then illusions, being cohesive (as we have seen), should exist as well. Why should it be that only that which has a *physical* substrate can exist in the relevant sense? Can phenomenology study only existents? What is a mode of givenness? What is “givenness”, such that it can be articulated into modes of presentation? What is the difference between modes of presentation and modes of givenness?

Can any of these questions be answered at this stage? So far I have only given an outline to the problems inherent within Romano’s text, within Romano’s phenomenology. I have done so in order to outline the main problems at hand, and to show how Romano’s solutions end up in inconsistencies, unjustifiable presuppositions, and contradictions. So that we may approach questions about the phenomenological status of concepts such as “givenness”, “object”, “being”, “existence”, “presence”, etc, we must first show how phenomenology has come to understand these concepts. In order to do that, it must first be shown *how* phenomenology goes about determining its concepts. This means that we must go back to what has been understood as the principal (if not the *only*) method of phenomenology: the reduction.

A): THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

“Reduction”, as a phenomenological method, simply signifies returning to what appears in the appearance and reducing that which is not given in the appearance to that which appears. For example, in the scientific concept of a sensation, is any sense-datum given in experience or not? That is, do we experience pure sense-data, or do we perceive

objects? I am not presented with raw, meaningless givens either when my eyes are open or when my hand makes contact with something, or when I hear a sound. A *meaningless given* is a contradiction in terms. The given is that which, unfolded according to givenness¹⁰, is necessarily meaningful. When I open my eyes, I see; when I touch something with my hand, I feel; when I listen to a melody, I hear. A meaningless given, if such a thing were possible, would have to dispense with all possible distinctness. Even when I am just distractedly staring at nothing in particular, not understanding what it is that my eyes nevertheless gaze at, it is not the case that a meaningless phenomenality appears in my field of vision, and that only once I begin to pay attention does meaning spring to life. No, even here what is given to me is given to me *as nothing in particular*, precisely in the modes of distraction, ennui, detachment, indistinction. When I “come back to myself”, so to speak, and begin paying attention again, it is not the case that I remember what I saw or heard during my time of distractedness only by reconstructing it according to a norm of attention and understanding; I remember them as they appeared: somewhat hazy, perhaps even greatly obscure, but not meaningless (in fact, haziness and obscurity can only appear within a horizon of meaning, and therefore by means of givenness). *How*, then, do sense-data appear? By themselves, they do not appear at all. Phenomenology brooks no objections to a scientific concept of sense-data unless that concept is used to explain in terms of some theoretical construct what is given to our conscious experience. This accords well with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty says on the subject in his *Phenomenology of Perception*: “If we now turn back...toward perceptual experience, we observe that science only succeeds in constructing a semblance of subjectivity: it

¹⁰ A more explicit discussion of this assertion will be included in the third section.

introduces sensations, as things, precisely where experience shows there to already be meaningful wholes”¹¹. The theory of sensation would thus be a theoretical construct that is not in accord with the things themselves.

What I have done here is perform a reduction on the act of perception to see if sense-data are given in it. What I have tried to do is show that sense-data are not themselves experienced, but that perception is the relevant concept at hand. In this sense, the reduction led to a concept of perception without experienced sense-data, and this was done by appealing to the experiences of perception, even the ones that might be closest to what the scientist would call “sense-data”. The reduction is a return to what appears within the relevant experiences at hand (for sense-data, sense faculties and experiences therein). The point of returning to these experiences is to begin again concerning philosophical decisions about them. The phenomenologist reduces by showing what is given in the experiences, and what is incorporated into the concept of that experience without a recourse to that experience’s explanatory value. Doing this is an attempt to clear away obstacles covering over what is actually given in the experience, obstacles that might otherwise render that givenness unreachable or ignored. I will now briefly discuss three notable phenomenological reductions: those of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Marion. I will do this in the form of outlines for each. The goal here is to explain their various enactments of the reduction as well as the goals they set out to attain, and not to explain exhaustively their reasoning and methodology.

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Donald A. Landes. (New York: Routledge. 2014) 11.

B): THE HUSSERLIAN REDUCTION

For Husserl, the reduction means, first of all, letting the phenomenon appear on its own, by “bracketing” the “natural attitude”. This bracketing means, according to *Ideas I*, the “modification” of any positing relating to the existence of what appears, where “modification” signifies that the positing, “while it in itself remains what it is, *we, so to speak, ‘put it out of action’, we ‘exclude it’, we ‘parenthesize it’*”¹². What is parenthesized does not disappear; on the contrary “It is still there, like the parenthesized in the parentheses...*but we make ‘no use’ of it*”¹³. What, then, is the point of this modification of judgment concerning what appears? This reduction, or what Husserl calls the “phenomenological epoché”, has this as its function: to “keep our regard fixed upon the sphere of consciousness and study what we find immanently within *it*”¹⁴. He holds that by doing this, the reduction will “prove itself to be the operation necessary to *make ‘pure’ consciousness, and subsequently the whole phenomenological region, accessible to us*”¹⁵. Pure consciousness, as the region of the pure science of pure phenomena in their pure phenomenality – this is what Husserl hoped to achieve with his phenomenological epoché, and this is only possible by purifying the stage of consciousness, thus by “parenthesizing” the “natural attitude”, so as not to borrow from our everyday experience any presuppositions that have not been validated by a return to the phenomena themselves.

Why, it should be asked, must we reduce what appears to a pure appearing for consciousness? What is gained by doing so? The point for Husserl is to put the phenomenon in the spotlight, and to view it, not according to how one might naturally or

¹² *Ideas I*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

normally view it, but according to the *principle of intuition*. This principle is, famously, Husserl's "principle of all principles": that "*every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there*"¹⁶ Now, intuition is "presentive", intuition "offers" objects to us. Intuition is therefore a mode of givenness. For example, Husserl tells us that "The *presentive* intuition belonging to the first, the 'natural' sphere of cognition and to all sciences of that sphere, is natural experience"¹⁷. Intuition can be understood here as a mode of givenness in which objects are presented to consciousness immediately.

Husserl therefore attempts to reduce phenomena to their full intuitive appearances, with a view to knowledge and certitude. Jean-Luc Marion, however, points out that Husserl's reduction is in fact a reduction to *objectivity*. He brings attention to the fact that "the term 'phenomenon' does not apply first, nor only, to the object that appears, but indeed to the lived experience in which and according to which it appears"¹⁸. Now, for Husserl, what appears in consciousness, and is, therefore, a lived experience, is an *object* for consciousness: "An immanent or absolute being and a transcendent being are, of course, both called 'existent', an 'object'"¹⁹. Marion poses the following question to this interpretation of phenomena: "is it self-evident that objectivity offers the only face of being?"²⁰. The answer is no.

¹⁶ Ibid., 43, 44.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 2014) 53.

¹⁹ *Ideas I*, 93.

²⁰ Ibid., 56.

C): THE HEIDEGGERIAN REDUCTION

This, precisely, is the point of departure for Heidegger, for whom what is at stake in the givenness of the phenomenon is not its presence in objectivity, but its being – better, even the phenomenon of Being. Heidegger’s reduction is a reduction to the being of beings, and, through them, to the phenomenon of Being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger seeks to formulate “The question of the meaning of being”²¹. But why of being? Why is objectivity not enough? These questions are answered in accordance with Heidegger’s understanding of phenomenology. He writes, “What is it that phenomenology is to ‘let be seen’?... Manifestly it is something that does *not* show itself initially and for the most part, something that is *concealed* in contrast to what initially and for the most part does show itself.”²². Phenomenology makes explicit, or brings to visibility, that which is concealed, and is for the most part nonvisible (rather than invisible). That which phenomenology is supposed to bring to light is, therefore, “not this or that being but rather...the *being* of beings”²³. Heidegger states his own reduction thus: “because being is always the being of beings, we must first of all bring beings themselves forward in the right way if we are to have any prospect of exposing beings”²⁴. Being is discovered through beings, which must be interrogated in order to lead to their being.

But is this move necessary? Did not Husserl already reduce phenomena to what could be argued *is* their being, namely their objectivity? Did he not already reduce them to the pure appearing for consciousness, the present objectivity for a subject? This is not

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York, 2010) 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

satisfactory for Heidegger, however. In a seminar preceding the publishing of *Being and Time*, he asks four questions that Husserl seems to have ignored in his constitution of the field of phenomenality as the field of pure consciousness: “[1.] What is the basis upon which this field of objects is secured? [2.] What is the way of securing this thematic field? [3.] What are the determinations of this newly found field of objects, of what is called pure consciousness?”²⁵ So far, all of the questions are about the field itself, and not about what appears within that field. The final question concerns neither the establishing of the field, nor its construction. Rather, he asks, “(a)s the basic field of intentionality, is the region of pure consciousness determined in its being, and how?”²⁶ The question of the being of the field of pure consciousness is raised two years prior to *Being and Time*, in which book, however, the investigation concerns not the being of consciousness but the “meaning of being”, or, more precisely, formulating the question concerning the meaning of being.

How does Heidegger formulate the question concerning the meaning of being if not in the realm of pure consciousness? Does he not at least have to be a conscious being in order to pose that question? Here it is a question also about the being who asks the question. Is the being of the human wholly reducible to its consciousness? For Heidegger, if the human is conscious, it is not the case that it is a *simple* consciousness: rather, the being of the human, that which he calls “Dasein”, “*is* in such a way that, by being [or existing], it understands something like being”²⁷. Dasein already understands being. But if this is true, surely there is no need to formulate any *question* about it, and so an investigation that has the meaning of being as its goal is superfluous. This seems to be

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1992). 102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102

²⁷ *Being and Time*. 17.

confirmed by Heidegger on the first page of his introduction to *Being and Time*: “Everybody uses [the word ‘being’] constantly and also already understands what is meant by it” (2). Nevertheless, Heidegger also maintains that what we know about “being” is “average and vague”, and so, even though we operate with some understanding of what we mean by “being”, it is not the case that we know precisely and explicitly what we mean by it when we say, for example, that “the sky is blue”, or “the cat is over there” or “consciousness is the field of pure phenomenality”. These three assertions would operate with some understanding of being, but not an explicit one: “*This average and vague understanding of being is a fact*”²⁸. Heidegger, via an analysis of Dasein, reduces beings to their being for Dasein. Without delving too deeply into what Heidegger calls his “fundamental ontology”²⁹, it is enough to point out that Heidegger chooses Dasein as the being to be investigated in formulating the question of the meaning of being, because “Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’”³⁰.

I: The Being of Beings

Concerning the Heideggerian reduction, I will focus exclusively on beings and their being. Heidegger, investigating Dasein, investigates also the way that beings appear for Dasein. Beginning with the beings closest to Dasein, beings that are used by Dasein day to day (e.g., trains, shoes, glasses, etc.), Heidegger tells us that “Phenomenologically pre-thematic beings, what is used and produced, become accessible when we put ourselves in the place of taking care in the world”³¹. This taking care is a “being in dealing with” things in the world. When we ask about the being of objects around us, however, we cannot

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ Ibid., 67.

simply answer “things”. Using the concept of “thing” as the basis for an analysis of beings that we use in our everyday tasks, which “goes on to inquire about being comes up with thingliness and reality”³². It is rather the case that what I find around me are not mere things, but “*useful things*”³³, things that have the meaning of usefulness for me. Is this analysis superior at all to Husserl’s? If the Husserlian reduction would lead these same things back to an appearing for a conscious I, then that reduction would bring these things to their objectivity, but it would miss the phenomenological fact that my shoes and glasses are not simple objects, but things that have a meaning of utility for me. In abandoning the field of consciousness and reinserting the experiencing agent back into an environment and a world in which everyday objects are encountered in the very way that that agent actually encounters them, Heidegger is able to reestablish these objects as useful things. This may be a more faithful return to the things themselves.

It is also the case that this kind of being still remains for the most part hidden. And that is precisely because when useful things are functioning properly, I do not even notice them (as I often forget about the keyboard I use to type when I am typing, or my glasses that I use to see when they are on my face). Heidegger writes: “What is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy. What everyday dealings are initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work”³⁴. The useful things, in their handiness, withdraw before the work to be done. That is why when I am seeing well, I do not notice my glasses, or when I am typing smoothly I do not notice my keyboard. Conversely, when my useful things are *not* working

³² Ibid., 68.

³³ Ibid., 68.

³⁴ Ibid., 69.

correctly, they become, not now noticeable, but obtrusive: “*Conspicuousness* presents the thing at hand in a certain unhandiness”³⁵. Now the thing has entered my field of concerns, and my field of attention. “When we notice its unhandiness, what is at hand enters the mode of *obtrusiveness*”³⁶. The handiness and unhandiness of the useful thing are not visible or perceivable; they are the nonvisible modes of being of the thing that I use. Even when the thing becomes obtrusive, it is not the case that I *see* its obtrusiveness, but that I understand it as being obtrusive, or even useless. This is the relevant reduction to what is for the most part concealed in that which is visible. The reduction to the being of beings means a reduction to the being of beings *for Dasein*. Without further exploring Heidegger’s reduction to being, or asking about the problems of his analyses – without, therefore, concerning ourselves any more with the reduction of phenomena to their being -- we should ask, is this the final reduction?

Beyond objectivity, and beyond being, to what other trace can we reduce phenomena? If what is given can be reduced to the status of presence and the manifestation of its being, is that not all that phenomenology can do? The next question to ask would be: can phenomena be reduced to their givenness? That is, can a phenomenon be reduced such that what is given in it is not its objectivity or its beingness, but rather, the givenness that makes possible both of the reductions that Husserl and Heidegger have attempted?

D): THE MARIONIAN REDUCTION

In fact, Jean-Luc Marion’s reduction is precisely a reduction to the givenness of phenomena. Marion proposes a formula for his phenomenology of givenness: “the more

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ Ibid., 73.

reduction, the more givenness”³⁷. This formula is already present at the end of *Reduction and Givenness* (“The less the reduction brackets what is in question, the less givenness will be able to render it accessible. . . . so much reduction, so much givenness”³⁸), but it is more precisely thought through, and articulated to a much wider extent, in *Being Given*.

In *Being Given*, Marion seeks to reduce what appears to its pure givenness. But what does a reduction to pure givenness mean? For Husserl, the givenness of the phenomenon was its givenness in a possible intuition, its givenness in objectivity. The authority ruling over givenness was, therefore, that of intuition. For Marion, however, “Reducing givenness means freeing it from the limits of every other authority, including those of intuition”³⁹. The question to be answered, however, is this: if Marion does not want to lead phenomena back to their objectivity, nor to their being, how can he lead them back to their givenness unless he is focusing solely on phenomena that one would call neither “objective” nor “a being”? In fact, Marion demonstrates the reduction to givenness not on an extraordinary phenomenon that would claim to escape objectivity and being, but on an everyday phenomenon: a painting.

I will reconstruct Marion’s analyses of the painting so that we may follow his phenomenological movement. This will allow us to see his reduction at work. Marion begins by describing a painting for us: “a generic, familiar scene, which depicts . . . a rustic house, a servant at the window, two animals and a man outside beside a table decked with game and produce, indeed ‘this jug full with milk, this basket full with flowers;’, all depicted in their colored splendor, according to the somewhat complex play of transparency: a late-

³⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2002). 14.

³⁸ *Reduction and Givenness*. 203.

³⁹ *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. 17.

afternoon light, warm and omnipresent, bathes all in its downpour”⁴⁰. There is a painting given in his description, one which he will use to guide his reader in its reduction to givenness. He then asks, “what phenomenon is thus given to me; or rather, in what way and to what extent does what appears to me fall within givenness – reduce to a given?”⁴¹ Indeed, where is the givenness here? Certainly what Marion has just described is an object, and an object can be reduced to its being. But how to think about the givenness of the phenomenon just described?

Marion begins by telling us that the givenness of the painting does not consist in its subsistence: “it is quite easy to modify what is essential to its subsistence as an object, first by removing or changing the frame, next by taking off the canvas and remounting it on another backing, then by removing the pigments so as to transfer them from one support to another”⁴². This does not mean that the painting is in fact different: it should be noted that it is not a question here of the *ontological* status of a thing, but of its status as *given*. This allows Marion to say that the painting “will have thus changed its subsistence entirely; its subsistence will have been neutralized by the simple fact that each of its elements will have been materially replaced by another”⁴³. This can only be interpreted as a different givenness if one ignores the fact that givenness is not itself either an ontological determination or an ontological determinant: the phenomenon, qua phenomenon, remains what it is even if the subsistence of the painting is changed. Indeed, if the painting that is hung in my home were to have its objective determinations changed in my absence in the way Marion describes, and if the work of this alteration were precise enough so as to leave

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴¹ Ibid., 40.

⁴² Ibid., 40, 41.

⁴³ Ibid., 41.

no possibility of seeing – on the basis of simply looking at the painting – that its backing and frame were changed, that its pigments were transferred, and so forth, there would be no difference in the *givenness* of this painting: if, on the basis of its appearing to me, there is no trace of its having been altered, then its givenness would remain untouched.

This is seen even more clearly when Marion asks about the *being* of the painting. Certainly the being of the painting is connected to its materiality, without being reducible to the *specific* materiality of it; it is enough that it have a backing and frame and pigments of this type. The being that is specific to the painting, its “beauty”, cannot be had in a simple gaze; Marion points this out when he writes: “to see a painting it is not enough to see it – to gather with the sense of sight the information found on a colored being”⁴⁴. But if seeing it is not enough, what could possibly be? Marion says: “To this view of a being, what must be added, by degrees or all at once, is the event of its apparition in person”⁴⁵. This is why he also tells us that, because simply viewing the painting is not enough to “see” it, “(t)o the ontic visibility of the painting is added as a super-visibility, ontically indescribable – its upsurge”⁴⁶. “Upsurge” here signifies the painting as *event*: “And each time this event occurs, the initiative always falls to the painting itself, which decides...to let us reach what is all too visible for us to be able to represent it as a mere being”⁴⁷, this “all too visible” being the super-visibility of its arising. On this note, Marion points out that in seeing the painting, its “nonontic coming forward...is confirmed by the following property...[that] it is not so much a matter of seeing...it as it is of re-seeing...it again and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 48.

again”⁴⁸. If the phenomenality of the painting consisted in its being, then “it would be enough to have seen it just once”⁴⁹.

Thus far, Marion has shown that the phenomenality of the painting is not reducible to its objectivity or being. The reduction to givenness is the last step of the analysis of the painting, and so it must show the painting as *given*, traced back to its givenness. But how is this possible if the fact of the matter is that the painting is still supposed to be an object for viewing? Marion tells us that “To different degrees but always, the painting (like every phenomenon) does not show any object nor is it presented as a being; rather, it accomplishes an act – it comes forward into visibility”⁵⁰. This is surely nonsensical. How is it possible that the painting not show any object? How is it not presented as a being? Is it not the case that I come upon the painting as something that is present, something that is in time? What could be given to me in time and presence if not a being? Again, however, this would be to privilege an ontological interpretation of appearing when the matter at hand is the phenomenon reduced to its givenness. And appearing, Marion tells us, “always has the rank and function not of a representation submitted to the imperial initiative of the gaze of consciousness, but of an event whose happening stems not so much from a form of from real (therefore imitable) colors, as from an upsurging, a coming-up, an arising – in short, an effect”⁵¹. But by what effect? Marion tells us that “effect” should be understood with all its “polysemy”: “effect as the shock that the visible provokes, effect as the emotion that invades the one gazing, effect also as the indescribable combination of the tones and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

the lines that irreducibly individualize the spectacle”⁵². What is most important about the effect is its individualizing function; reduction to givenness should mean the reduction to the givenness of *this* given appearing to me. Marion says as much: “To see the painting, to the point where it is not confused with any other, amounts to seeing it reduced to its effect”⁵³. Thus, it is not so much that the effect individualizes as that this givenness is an individual givenness because its effect is such that it cannot be confused with any other givenness.

Reducing to the givenness of the painting is a reduction to the effect of the painting. The effect of this painting is as follows: “Its phenomenality is reduced – beyond its beingness, its subsistence, and its utility – to this effect: ochre serenity”.⁵⁴ After the reduction past subsistence and beingness, we end up at the reduction to the givenness of the painting, its effect, ochre serenity. Can this really be all? Can one not feel ‘ochre serenity’ when one sees in person what Marion described, that is, when one sees it played out before one, without gazing at a painting? The effect of ochre serenity would be different here, however. One cannot exclude the world, nor the context of the appearing, in a reduction. The ochre serenity of the painting is precisely the effect of the painting qua painting, that is, insofar as it is a painting and not the scene itself enacted by real people and real things.

D): The Reduction and Relationality

We must then say that what remains irreducible in every reduction is the context. The context includes the world, it includes one’s surroundings, one’s prior experiences; it

⁵² Ibid., 49.

⁵³ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

also, by that same token, can manage to affect the given so as to allow it to unfold an effect different from the one proposed by Marion. It seems a little peculiar that the effect of ‘ochre serenity’ could come from a painting depicting a “familiar scene”, “a rustic house, a servant at the window, two animals and a man outside beside a table decked with game and produce”.⁵⁵ For whom is this scene familiar? It is the familiarity of this scene, combined with its enjoyability for the describer, that gives the effect of ochre serenity. Here we must agree with Romano concerning the relationality of experience. If the given reduced to its givenness can be experienced in its effect of ochre serenity, this must be on the basis of the one who is affected by that ochre serenity, which is neither an exclusive nor a universal affect. This is not to say that ochre serenity is not the givenness of the painting. The givenness of the painting is its effect, but the effect of the phenomenon, whatever it might be (ochre serenity for Marion), is the givenness of the given.

We can therefore agree with Romano that experience is relational without giving up Marion’s conclusion that the given can be reduced to its givenness or effect. I will, however, contest the formula “so much reduction, so much givenness”. At the end of Marion’s reduction of the painting, he concludes that “(t)o be given requires being reduced – reconducted – to this invisible effect which alone makes visible. Nothing has an effect, except the phenomenon reduced to the given”⁵⁶. But why should this be so? Must I perform a phenomenological reduction, bracketing away the theses of objectivity and being, if I wish to reach a stage where the painting is given to me with “the indescribable combination of the tones and the lines that irreducibly individualize the spectacle”⁵⁷? Is it

⁵⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 49.

not the case that great works of art can open me to this effect without my performing the least analysis on them? Moreover, is it not the case that effect as “the emotion that invades the one gazing”⁵⁸ is possible without *any* phenomenological reduction, even without any phenomenology, even without any thought of something such as a “phenomenon”? It would seem that Marion unnecessarily intellectualizes the phenomenon, unless he wishes to say that the phenomenological reduction is performed or can be performed in a simple look at a painting. This is a question of interpretation that I will leave in suspense. For my part, I will say that the effect of a phenomenon can be open to a consciousness without the necessity of passing through the reduction, and that the reduction only becomes necessary once the question about what is given in any phenomenon is posed.

II): The Law of Givenness

I note, however, that Marion’s reduction became possible and necessary only to the extent that the given had been overdetermined by other reductions as “objective”, as reducible to the “being of the being”. The reduction clears away these obstacles in order to reach greater depths of givenness. In the same way, the reduction of sense-data to experience as perception became possible and necessary once theoretical constructs coming from the sphere of science invaded the realm of conscious subjectivity in such a fashion as to occlude the explanatory value of those experiences in and of themselves. The reduction to givenness of the painting was thus a response to the intellectualizing gaze, the one that asks “what is this that appears before me?” Marion’s formula “so much reduction, so much givenness” holds up only on the basis that it responds to obstacles to the givenness of a phenomenon needing to be cleared away. But it would not follow that there is no

⁵⁸ Ibid., 49.

givenness at all except through the reduction. The reduction, if it clears away these that obstruct the absolute givenness of a phenomenon, does not begin on the basis of *no* givenness. That would be a contradiction internal to Marion's own phenomenology, and particularly of what I will call the "law of givenness" (one that we shall here uphold and adhere to), which states that "No being, no actuality, no appearance, no concept, and no sensation could reach us, or even concern us, if it did not first give [itself] to us. This would be an essential rule: nothing intervenes for or against us that is not first given, here and now....Every fact, every problem, and every consciousness begins with immediate givens"⁵⁹. If, therefore, nothing can even concern us if it is not first given, then there is still some degree of givenness that presents the givens to us so that a reduction to their pure givennesses will be possible. I here take it to be the law of all phenomenological reflection that at least some givenness of every given shines through the phenomenon, no matter what thesis is at hand in it. The job of the reduction is to clear away what is not given in the phenomenon, and to expose what is given in it.

This, however, is not to say that the phenomenological reduction is a pure, disinterested operation. The reduction to the givenness, or effect, of the painting was only possible because of the interest of reducing the painting to its pure givenness. Similarly, with Husserl, the reduction to objectivity of phenomena responded to the interest of setting up a field of research of phenomena that would take place in pure consciousness. This implies that a return to the things themselves, a return which seeks to expose the givenness of appearances, or which seeks to clear away obstacles that obstruct the givenness of the appearance, is never, finally, able to reach an "absolute givenness", if by this is meant a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 54.

final givenness that would come only from a reduction to the givenness of a given. This would not only be because a reduction to the givenness of a given would remain an operation motivated by the interests of the conscious agent, but because, even when a phenomenon is reduced to its status as pure given, it remains the case that, because experience is indeed relational, there can be no absolute center of givenness that a phenomenon would have outside of all relation and all interest. This would be to destroy the given, since its status as meaningful, and so the effect it can have on a consciousness, is inherent to experience, so that the only way to get out of this necessary multiplicity of possible, heterogeneous effects would be to escape experience altogether. This would be to destroy the given, since the given is necessarily that which is given to a consciousness.

On this point, two comments pertaining to givenness become necessary. 1) There is no, and cannot be any such thing as, an absolute givenness, understood as absolute effect. Any idea of an absolute givenness would result in the destruction of the given, and therefore of any givenness. 2) We cannot say, with Marion, that the given “*can* be reduced to a pure given, and that it must do so if it is to appear absolutely”⁶⁰. We cannot say this because (in addition to what I have argued above concerning the impossibility of an “absolute givenness”) it is also not possible to agree with Marion’s assertion that the given “gives itself”⁶¹. The given “giving itself” means, for Marion, not that the given is given by animating a relation between itself and a conscious agent in a magical or theological way, but that the reduction reducing to givenness reduces, therefore, to the “phenomenality of what shows itself in itself and starting from itself”⁶², that is, starting from its status as given,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁶¹ Ibid., 51.

⁶² Ibid., 51.

and not as object or being. But this does not justify Marion's claim that the given can be reduced to a "pure" given, precisely because that purity (which is its effect upon a consciousness) is always by definition tainted by what is *not* given in the appearance. What is *not* given is that which determines a given to have this or that effect. For example, if Marion's painting is a "familiar scene" that he reduces to the effect of "ochre serenity", this is only within the framework of the experience of one who has become inclined to experience this scene as ochre serenity. This is by no means a requirement for the painting to be experienced as given. It arises only on the background of the history of experience of the one experiencing, as well as his or her contextual present. The givenness of the given, if it can in fact be equated with the phenomenon's effect (a point I will return to), is therefore always invaded by what is not given in the given, by what is no longer given and perhaps will never be given in it. Givenness encounters an irreducible limit here: because experience is relational, any reduction to effect necessarily works on the background of what is not given and what cannot be given with the given: the entirety of experience, and the totality of the experiencing agent's historical and present context.

E): ROMANO'S REDUCTION

After discussing the reduction and its implications as concerns Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion, we must ask: how does the reduction function in Romano's work? What obstacles does he intend to clear away, and what do these obstacles block? That is, if in the reduction the "obstacles" are only obstacles to givenness, what does Romano see as being given? We have already seen that Romano believes that only that which exists can be given, and that only that which has a physical substrate exists. For Romano, the point of reducing is to reduce to the experiences that reach the world before us, the world defined

by cohesiveness. Romano tells us this clearly when discussing his realist position. He differentiates his position from a position of realism traditionally understood. For Romano, “There is no perception but *in* the world and *of* the world, because to perceive is already to explicate our primordial engagement in it, our commerce with it, our inherence in it as body” (314). The world is therefore always that which we perceive. We perceive the world that is defined by its cohesiveness, and this gives it a mode of givenness. It would not, then, be enough to say that the world is simply a structural whole, but Romano does go further. The world is not merely a structural whole, it is “a structural phenomenon” (310). What does it mean for the world to be a “structural phenomenon”? Is not Romano aiming at an ontological explication of the world?

In fact, Romano wishes to remain phenomenological through and through. The world, for him, is not an object that can be talked about from an extra-experiential point of view; rather, “the world in its relativity to us *is the world itself*” (324). We must be careful, then, in talking about Romano’s concept of “world”. It does not appear, here, to be an attempt to talk about the Kantian noumenon. Romano claims not to be concerned with this noumenon, about which nothing can in principle be said. In fact, he points out that phenomenology “pursues the Kantian critique of metaphysics by claiming that what it is possible to furnish a description of essence of is not reality in itself, envisaged from a quasi-divine point of view...but only reality *for us*” (214). What is at stake here is the only reality we can talk about, and therefore the only one that really matters: the phenomenal reality. Romano calls his position “descriptive realism”. This position “asserts only one thing: perception cannot be described otherwise than as openness to the world itself, in the absence of any mental intermediary” (314). This even explains to what Romano reduces

– reality. The world is conceived as real (“(t)he world is a structural whole that is defined by its intrinsic cohesiveness” [310]; “cohesiveness is what defines reality by essence” [310]; the cohesiveness of the real is what *excludes* illusion and only allows it to reveal itself as such” [310, 311]), the illusion is conceived of as non-cohesive (“(i)llusion is an infringement of the general cohesiveness of the world” [310]). Romano’s reduction, clearing away what he sees as the “skeptical thesis” (and so clearing away any philosophical validity the skeptic imposes upon illusions), reduces to the real world. Romano’s reduction therefore reduces to the givenness of what is real. In fact, it would be better to say that *Romano reduces to the cohesive*, because reality is defined by cohesiveness, and not the reverse. However, I have shown that illusions are also cohesive, so it would be necessary to ask why only that which is “real” or “existent”, in his senses of those words, can be cohesive.

So, does only that which exists have a mode of givenness? Manifestly this is not the case. What I have called the law of givenness presupposes precisely the opposite: anything at all, whether or not it is a thing, must be given in order for it to even be thought. What appears is therefore given, and what appears need not be a present actuality. Givenness is not dependent on presence, nor is it an ontological determinant of any kind. It is that which unfolds phenomena. It takes understanding that givenness is not reducible to physical presence in the world to be confused as to how Romano can say of the rose that appears in hallucination, that it “has neither a determined hue nor any specific consistency; and it is *because it does not possess these properties* that neither its texture nor its color varies in a regular way” (308). We might very well ask how that which does not possess properties can still have them so that they appear in an irregular way in it. Nevertheless,

the point here is that the rose that appears in hallucination *does* possess properties. A non-physical thing, as long as it appears, can possess properties. This is because what is given always exists, in the phenomenological sense, inasmuch as it is given. It is far from clear why this must be so, and the answer lies in an appropriate concept of givenness. An examination of the concept of givenness is therefore necessary before we can go on to examine how givenness ought ideally to function in Romano's phenomenological scheme.

§3: GIVENNESS AND THE GIVEN

A) HOW TO UNDERSTAND GIVENNESS

“Givenness”, “appearance”, “given”, “effect”, “phenomenon”, “appearing” – what do these terms signify, and how are they to function together? Is phenomenology a study of phenomena? What would this mean? What is a “phenomenon”? Is it the appearing of something? Then phenomena do not appear. Is it the appearance itself? Then why retain an extra term? There is nothing evident about these questions, and clarifying the terminology means putting it to use in order to clarify it along the way. The terminology must be clarified by appealing to what is given in the concepts at hand, so we must begin first with determining what is given in our concepts.

With regard to the concept of givenness, I will take my point of departure from Marion, whose work concerning givenness includes the most extensive and most explicit discussions of the concept to be found in the phenomenological tradition. We have seen that Marion's reduction to the givenness of the painting was a reduction to its effect. The givenness of the given would therefore be equivalent to its effect on a consciousness; but this is not Marion's last word on the subject.

Givenness is given in the given. Marion explains this claim thus: “Givenness does not colonize from outside the givens of the given; it is inscribed therein as its irreparable character, the articulation of its coming forward, inseparable from its immanence to itself”⁶³. Givenness is the “articulation” of the given’s “coming forward”, its happening, its uprising – in other words, its effect. But then givenness is *not* the effect itself. It must be the articulation of that effect. Marion goes on: “The given is articulated in terms of givenness – its own advent, then the production of the effect – which does not transcend it or overdetermine it from the outside, but simply unfolds the character of given insofar as given”⁶⁴. The given reduced to its givenness is the “given insofar as given”, that is, the given according to its status as given, and not as object or being. This is why the given is never meaningless, and why a “meaningless given” is a contradiction in terms. Givens are never neutral data, “(f)or from the simple fact of their arising, they already bear the mark of the event by which they are imposed on me”⁶⁵. Therefore, at the very least, the given, if it is such, is marked by the event of givenness to consciousness, and is therefore always an articulated given. This allows Marion to say that “(g)ivenness opens as the fold of the given: the gift given *insofar as* it gives itself in terms of its own event”⁶⁶. As if things were not complicated enough, we may have to add to our list of terms “event,” “advent”, “articulation”, “unfolding”, and “arising”.

It would be simple to get caught up in this network of terms and to attempt to clarify them all on the basis of their interconnections with each other. If such a method is attempted we will get nowhere, because it would only be on the basis of clarifying one

⁶³ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 64, 65.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 65.

term or one set of terms that we could move on to others; but then the previous term or set of terms would not be clarified because they would depend on the functioning of adjacent terms that have not been clarified. This can lead to two separate methods of clarification: 1) either terms or sets of terms can be clarified by degrees, or; 2) we must return to a common ground for them all, clarify that ground, and clarify the rest of the terms based on their functioning with respect to that common ground. But then the burden moves from 1) to 2), since it is not at all certain that this ground can be clarified all at once, without recourse to the functioning of the terms it employs or controls. Nevertheless, as long as we have a common ground, clarifying it by degrees will not be a problem, since, if all of the terms must lead back to it, the degree of its clarification can be assessed by seeing if it clarifies the terms that fall under it, and if it is itself clarified thereafter. Moreover, this common ground is in fact available, since that ground is givenness itself. This would not make givenness independent of the rest of the terms to be clarified; indeed, givenness can only be analyzed on the basis of a given, since by definition that is the only place that givenness appears, because it is always the givenness of a given.

Before going further, it is necessary to ask whether in Marion's explanations of givenness being "inscribed" in the given, there is hidden an ambiguity between two different kinds of "givenness". The first kind of givenness would be what we have already followed Marion in grasping: the reduction of the painting beyond objectivity and being to its pure givenness. This pure givenness is understood as its effect for a consciousness, starting from the given itself. The second kind of givenness is that which "unfolds" or "articulates" the given. If the first kind of givenness is the phenomenon's effect, the second

would be the unfolding of this effect. Givenness would then articulate givenness through the given.

However, this explanation cannot get at the heart of what Marion wishes to describe. Marion's desire is not to split up givenness; he wishes to make its ambiguity function in a univocal way: "if one wanted to clarify this ambiguity by dividing it into equivocal terms, givenness would not be clarified – it would be lost, since what is at stake in it resides in articulating its possible meanings in a single plot"⁶⁷. How, then, do we make sense of the two senses of givenness above? By saying that the givenness of the phenomenon and its unfolding are but one: its effect. Givenness articulates the given *not* by articulating its effect, but precisely *is* this effect which articulates the given. But what could "articulate" mean here? "The given is articulated in terms of givenness"⁶⁸; "articulated" here signifies that givenness "unfolds the character of given insofar as given"⁶⁹. The burden has moved from "articulate" to "unfold". If givenness articulates the given by unfolding its status as given, and if its status as given can be understood as its effect, then what does it mean that givenness "unfolds" the effect of the given? Should we speak simply of the given *and* of givenness? That is, should we separate these two terms, on the one side the given, on the other, givenness? Perhaps there is a problem in approaching the terminology this way. It is not the case that there is first a given and then that givenness gives it; nor is it that there is first givenness and that givenness gives a given. Rather, it is the case that "The given is not emancipated from givenness and cannot be. It [the given] leads back to it [givenness] because it [the given] comes from it [givenness],

⁶⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 65.

bears [givenness's] mark, or rather is identified with it [givenness]"⁷⁰. It makes sense conceptually that the given would be identified with givenness only if the given, in its capacity as given, is its effect, and therefore its givenness. Since the given is its givenness, inasmuch as it is its effect, it would therefore unfold itself, articulate itself.

Marion says as much: "Givenness unfolding itself articulates the gift given...along the progress of its advent"⁷¹. This is why the question of the givenness of the given "consists solely in investigating the relation of the gift given with the process of advent"⁷². What is at stake in understanding givenness is understanding the given's arising, its advent – in a word, its effect. The given would therefore be not a mere thing to appear as a phenomenon, but would itself be an effect on consciousness, in this form or that. This allows Marion to say that "Givenness opens as the fold of the given: the gift given *insofar as* it gives itself in terms of its own event"⁷³. Being given in terms of its own event – this signifies being given in terms of its arising for a consciousness, being given in terms of its *effect*. All leads back to the given and its effect; the given arising only as effect; the given, therefore, arising only as its givenness, and being only this effect – being, therefore, identifiable with (its) givenness.

Is this phenomenologically incontestable? Yes and no. No, because if the given can have more than one effect, then it is not necessary to consider that effect as absolute, and it is therefore also not necessary to consider the effect as *equivalent* to the given, if they are simultaneous and inseparable. In fact, they can only be simultaneous and inseparable if they are distinct, and therefore, separated. They can be unified only if they

⁷⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁷¹ Ibid., 65.

⁷² Ibid., 65.

⁷³ Ibid., 65.

are different, and if they are different they will accord to make one appearance, but will perhaps have different phenomenal structures. I see no reason to identify the given with its givenness; from the fact that they cannot be separated it does not follow that they are not already distinct. If they always appear together it does not follow that they are one *thing*, rather, that they are always two sides of one appearance. There is no given such that it has an absolute givenness, no given with a final effect, no appearance that does not have both a given and givenness inscribed in the given. I am not simply dissociating the given and givenness; I am saying that they are distinct because the one is not reducible to the other. To say that the one is reducible to the other would be like saying that because Marion's painting is reducible to the effect of ochre serenity that the painting is therefore ochre serenity. It is truer, and simpler, to say that the painting has the effect of ochre serenity without itself being ochre serenity, precisely because what appears is a painting accompanied by the effect of ochre serenity.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to answer "yes" to our question. What Marion describes is also phenomenologically incontestable. This is because no matter what effect is produced by the given on consciousness, and even keeping in mind that there are many such effects and none of them is absolute, it is still the case that this given is what it is only on the basis of its producing an effect upon consciousness. In this way, Marion's painting *is not* ochre serenity, but it *is not otherwise than* ochre serenity, precisely because, when it is reduced to its givenness for him, its effect is ochre serenity. Is this not to say that the appearance and the being of something are equivalent? But we must not understand the "is" here as the correlate of an *ontological* state of affairs. It is not the case that Marion's painting is ontologically equivalent to the effect of ochre serenity; rather, in its status as a

given, in its role as a given reduced to its pure givenness, and not considering its being or objectivity, Marion's painting *appears with the effect* of ochre serenity. If this effect is inseparable from the painting at the moment of its appearance for Marion, then the painting's givenness is not otherwise than ochre serenity. This is what it means to say that the given and its givenness are distinct but inseparable, that it is identifiable with (its) givenness while remaining different from it: when Marion's painting arises with the effect of ochre serenity, the painting is given as a painting accompanied by ochre serenity, an effect inseparable from the painting, and because this effect is inseparable from the given, *the effect and the given cannot be separated in the phenomenon*. This is what phenomenology means: to study phenomena, the phenomenon being the total scene of the arising of the given.

B): GIVENNESS IN ROMANO

Now we must see how Romano understands givenness. Approaching his phenomenological terminology will help us to both keep the critique focused on Romano's phenomenology, and help us clarify the terminology I will continue to employ. Now, he has no explicit discussions of givenness as he understands it; he speaks more of *modes* of givenness. Nevertheless, he does articulate what he means by something being given: "In all experience something is self-given, present in person – as opposed to assumed or inferred" (257). We might then say that the givenness of a phenomenon in Romano's work is that phenomenon's immediate appearance for a consciousness, one that does not pass through any mediating uncertainty. The given would then be that which is absolutely certain. This accords well with what Romano has said about illusions. It is not always certain whether an illusion or a hallucination is the givenness of an appearance. That is

why it is necessary to either confirm or deny the validity of such experiences. The perception would be given because it is certain; the illusion would have no mode of givenness because it is not certain. One might ask about confusions about perceptions. Have I really seen, felt, heard, tasted, smelled, what I thought I did? Even here what is at issue would be merely a doubtful perception, an uncertainty about what *judgment* to apply to that perception. In fact, what Romano reduces to – the cohesive – does not fall into the epistemological opposition of certain/uncertain. For Romano, the world (and, therefore, the cohesive, and therefore, perception), “is not certain in the sense in which its existence could be demonstrated, silencing all possible doubt; it stands not beyond doubt, but on the hither side of it; it is something that, because it is given to be experienced before any belief, is such that a doubt about it does not make any sense” (312). Epistemological certainty as concerns an ontologically prior world does not exist, according to Romano; there is only the phenomenal world, situated beyond the epistemic possibility of doubt/certainty. The main point to keep in mind, however, is that of cohesiveness: determining the world, the real, and, therefore, perception, “all that is not endowed with structural cohesiveness is not a *doubtful* perception: it is *not a perception at all*” (362). And this would be because an experience cannot be a perception for Romano if it is not cohesive.

If what is at stake in Romano’s work is not givenness itself but cohesiveness and modes of givenness, then a discussion of givenness must be imported into any critique concerning his work. It is because Romano wishes to construct a new framework for understanding perception and experience that he is not concerned with extended discussions of givenness. Nevertheless, there are decisions about givenness in his framework, and they lead to serious phenomenological consequences.

Let us go back to what I have said is the central problem in Romano's work, and construct a framework of givenness against his doubts. Again, Romano's assertion is that "There is nothing in common between perception and illusion, no neutral sense of 'to appear' in which one might be able to say of a thing and of a mere appearance that they both *appear*" (305). This sentence actually hides two decisions again: one ontological, the other phenomenological. The ontological decision is that there is nothing in common between perceptions and illusions; the phenomenological decision is that there is no "neutral sense of 'to appear'" that describes the appearances of both. I have already dealt with the ontological decision; but before discussing the phenomenological decision, I will let this sentence guide my discussion of givenness.

C) CLARIFYING OUR PHENOMENOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY

We have already seen that givenness is always the givenness of a given; that the given and its givenness cannot be separated, and that the given, givenness, and the effect of a given, are in fact able to be identified with each other. It is only on the basis of an arising that there can be a given for consciousness; givenness is the effect of a given; and the effect of a given is not separable from the given, so long as the given is appearing. Now, is there an effect of a perception? When I see my pen, I can see it in terms of Husserl's objectivity or objecthood. It is a physical thing that exists in space and time, I can handle it or set it to the side, etc. When I see it in terms of its Heideggerian being, it appears to me as a utensil for writing, as a tool which I can use to finish or continue my work. It is therefore a tool, a means to an end. But when I see my pen in terms of its effect, I let go of the dispositions of objectivity and being; it is neither simply this thing in space and time, nor is it simply a tool for my work (though it still remains both of these). In

seeing the pen by virtue of its givenness, by virtue of its effect, I let the pen affect me, I let it appear to me simply. It becomes, in its appearing, something familiar, something even aesthetically pleasing, feeling, as I often do when using it to work on something I enjoy, a feeling of satisfaction, of accomplishment. The pen then appears to me no longer as a tool or an object but as laden with academic meaning. This is its reduction to its effect, to its givenness. Of course, this is not the only reduction to its effect. In fact, a more primary effect is the pure and simple arising of the pen, its appearance within my phenomenal field. *This* effect is not simply one effect among others, since it is always present when the pen is given to me. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered an “absolute effect” or “final effect” because it is precisely only the *initial* effect on the basis of which the experience becomes possible at all.

But what of illusions? When the illusion appears, it might fool me, but it might not. What is essential to the phenomenality of illusion is that it tries to pass itself off as what it is not. The *phenomenality* of the illusion is therefore the way of appearing of the illusion. A *phenomenon* is therefore not a way of appearing, but the total phenomenal scene, including the given, the givenness, and the phenomenality. The way of appearing of something cannot stray from what is essential to the appearing thing. This is why, when the illusion appears, even if it is a familiar hallucination that no longer fools me, it is still the case that it at least attempts to pass itself off as something physically existent. Now, the appearing of the illusion, its rising-up to consciousness, has the effect of abnormality with respect to my perceptual experiences, which are taken to be a norm. The voices that people with schizophrenia suffer from, the false judgments on perceptions that occur everyday, the flashes of light coming from nothing in my peripheral vision – all of these

are abnormal occurrences when the standard for normality is taken as my perceptual experiences. And this must in fact be the norm, because, as Romano tells us, it is only on the basis of my perceptions that illusions can stand out.

If, however, the illusion can have an effect, and if we are right to agree with Marion in identifying the effect of a given with its givenness, then we can say that *the givenness of an illusion is its abnormality and that the mode of givenness of illusion is the mode of givenness of abnormality*. I have already said as much above, when tying illusory experiences back into the realm of experience as Romano understands it. We can then say, using our clarified terminology, that illusions do have a mode of givenness. Illusions are the givens of certain experiences; their way of appearing, their phenomenality, essentially includes the effect of abnormality, such that the phenomenon of illusion is thereby the phenomenon of abnormality (the standard for normality here remaining perception), with differing givens. This abnormality may be simply phenomenological (that is, abnormal in its way of appearing), or it may be epistemological (that is, within the order of knowing what is real and what is not). The advent of the illusion is its appearing for consciousness, which is only possible against the background of the advent of perception. The advent, the appearing, is the rising-up. Now, the appearing of the phenomenon is its happening for a consciousness. If a system prescribes in advance the ways of appearing of this or that thing, this only means that it prescribes in advance the *ways in which a phenomenon happens to a consciousness*.

Are the terms I am claiming to clarify being clarified on the basis of givenness? One might object to me that I am simply giving definitions as I go along, when what is necessary phenomenologically is that I clarify with recourse to experience. In fact, all of

my clarifications remain on the basis of givenness. The given is the “what”: that is, what is given in the appearing. The phenomenon is the total scene of the appearing, including its given, givenness, etc. The effect is a given’s effect on consciousness. All of these terms lead back to givenness: givenness gives the given; the effect of the given is its givenness; the appearing of a given is the happening of the given that is given by givenness to a consciousness; the phenomenon is the total scene of the play of givenness to a consciousness.

This terminology should suffice to describe what is at hand in Romano’s work, namely, the givenness of perceptions and perceptual experience to an experiencing agent. This givenness is the givenness of cohesive structures to the one who experiences, and must also be the givenness of cohesiveness to the phenomenologist. We will not say, with Romano, either that illusions are not cohesive, nor that they lack a mode of givenness. We will not say that they do not exist in any way, since it is at least with respect to their effect on consciousness that they exist. Their existence resides in their appearing for consciousness, and their appearing resides in their effect. The phenomenon of illusion manifests their existence, since it is only with respect to their effect that they are present for consciousness.

This said, it is necessary to delve back into Romano’s phenomenological scheme. If all of what has been said so far is to remain relevant to what is at issue in his phenomenology, then it is necessary to revisit Romano’s holism of experience. Clarifying the basic terms of phenomenology will not be enough to revisit and recast Romano’s phenomenological project, however. If it is true that his implicit phenomenological, metaphysical, and ontological decisions in fact ruin his holism of experience, then it is

necessary not to label his project as failed and set it to the side, but to see what still works within it, and to determine: 1) if such a project is still tenable once the proper meanings of “cohesiveness” and “world” are put into play, and; 2) if so, to rework a holism of experience on the basis of an updated distinction between perception and illusion. This would require more precise analyses of perceptual experience and illusory experience. We will recall that the latter term is absurd for Romano, and that what we call “illusory experiences” are for him really just “illusions of experience”. This is because, for Romano, all experience must be an experience of the world. But if we do not wish to exclude illusions and hallucinations from the realm of experience, it is necessary to rethink what is meant by “experience”.

§4 EXPERIENCE AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

A) PHENOMENOLOGY OR METAPHYSICS?

Before going further, have we clarified what is meant by the terms “being”, “existence”, or “presence”? Is there only one clarification in order here? In other words, are these terms univocal? We must first point out an ambiguity in their functioning. There is, on the one hand, their metaphysical usage. In this case, these terms would have a significance centered around things that *are* in one way or another, things that would be in some sense “prior” to a phenomenology if not totally extraneous to it. But because Romano’s text is phenomenological; since, as he has said, the world is such only in a phenomenological way; since, therefore, what is at stake here is phenomenology and not metaphysics, we will have to make rigorous distinctions in our terminology between metaphysical and phenomenological usage, then pose the question whether the two should really function together. Nevertheless we must understand that there are senses to many

words that, while they may be *primarily* metaphysical or phenomenological, have proper senses in other fields of philosophy. “Presence”, for example, would, under the same signifier, operate differently in the fields of metaphysics and phenomenology. In phenomenology “presence” would signify something like the current appearing of a phenomenon to a conscious agent. This need not be the case metaphysically.

For this reason, however, we cannot simply transpose the terminology of metaphysics, *mutatis mutandis*, into the field of phenomenology if we wish to avoid unnecessary confusions and misunderstandings. But even so, it is not necessary to create a completely new terminology. We already have some terms at our disposal that should help us to navigate the field of phenomenology and to keep it as distinct as possible from metaphysics. For instance, if we wish to speak of a “being” phenomenologically, we already have the term “given”; if we wish to speak of “existence”, we may speak of a given’s givenness, because in phenomenology being comes down to being given. To illustrate, in the Heideggerian distinction between being and the being of beings, the being *is*, it is what exists; the being of beings is not something existent because it is not a being. But this is only acceptable within metaphysics. Phenomenologically, this distinction boils down to the appearing to consciousness of givens. On the level and status of the given, beings as well as the being of beings *are*; they *exist*. It is because the being of the phenomenon is not metaphysical that one should be wary about ascribing metaphysical determinations to conscious appearances. One should be cautious about basing phenomenological necessities on metaphysical states of affairs. With a phenomenological terminology ready to hand we need simply distinguish where we need to speak phenomenologically and where we need to speak metaphysically and/or ontologically.

So, when Romano tells us that a nonexistent object can have no mode of givenness, we can see that this assertion makes a claim that straddles two philosophical fields whose ranges of operation are not equivalent or symmetrical. The object may be nonexistent metaphysically, but it is not nonexistent phenomenologically. The illusion does not “exist” in a thick metaphysical sense (if “exist” in metaphysics must lead back to a “real” or “physical” existence – even this premise has nothing self-evident about it), but because illusions do in fact concern us, because they are experienceable and thinkable, they are given, and because their being given is their existence, their appearance is their presence. This is perhaps a linguistically motivated misunderstanding, an effect of the French (and English) terminology concerning the phenomenon that appears “in person” and “in the flesh”, which makes of this phenomenon a physical thing. In French, one does not merely say that the perceptual phenomenon appears in the full sense “in person” but also that the phenomenon appears “in flesh and bone”. For example, in posing a question about perception, Romano asks, “si la perception se définit par la donation en personne et en chair et en os de son objet, comment une perception pourrait-elle demeurer une perception en l’absence de tout objet?”⁷⁴ (“if perception is defined by the givenness in person and flesh and bone of its object, how can a perception remain a perception in the absence of all object?” [my translation]). And because Romano takes the perceptual appearing as experience par excellence, as originary experience, he makes all phenomena that do not, or cannot, appear “en chair et en os” non-phenomena. But this is acceptable only if: 1) we are talking about a metaphysical phenomenology, and not a phenomenology purely; 2) if metaphysics defines “existence” as “physical existence”, and 3) if a metaphysical

⁷⁴ Claude Romano, *Au coeur de la raison: la phenomenology*. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard. 2010). 487, 488.

phenomenology has reason to accept the terminology and conceptual decisions of metaphysics dogmatically.

In this way, illusions both do and do not exist. But this can only be said on the basis of an ambiguity of our philosophical dialects: on the one hand, the dialect relevant to thinking about the nature of beings without according an explanatory value to those very things and our experiences of them (metaphysics), and on the other hand, the dialect concerned with nothing other than our experience (phenomenology). This distinction will aid us in the following discussions of the phenomenological concepts of world and experience.

B): THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND THE METAPHYSICAL WORLDS

For Romano, is the world phenomenal through and through, or is it an entity that is ontologically prior to our experience of it? And if it is the latter, can it be the former? In the first case we would be dealing with the world as it appears to us in our experience, the world that is given to us -- the world, as Romano says, in its relativity to us. In the latter case we would be dealing with a world that is not given to us except a posteriori, one about which we can only assume that it preceded us and was “there” prior to our births. But these two worlds are not equivalent. The question, then, is: which of these worlds does Romano wish to talk about? The immediate answer would be, in accordance with evidence already provided, that Romano is speaking of the phenomenological world – better, that this phenomenological world is *the* world and that to speak of it as only a type of world is misleading. In a sense, this answer would be correct. In another sense, it would be false. When discussing the practical capacities of a bodily subject in a world, for example, Romano tells us that “they are capacities such that it makes no sense to attribute them to a

subject independently from a world in which it is situated: these capacities are those of a subject that is *essentially* in the world” (349). So far, there is no problem here. These capacities can be had and used in a phenomenal world, because they would be phenomenal properties of a subject. But Romano goes further: “In order for such a subject to have the capacities it has, a world must exist in which these capacities are actualized – *end of the skeptical argument*” (349). This, for Romano, really is the end of skepticism concerning the external world.

Can the solution really be so simple? In fact, it is more than a little misleading. No non-trivial skeptical thesis has ever denied that a world *appears* to me. Rather, skeptical theses concerning the existence of the world tend to attack precisely the concept of appearance; it is not that there is nothing appearing to me, but that what appears to me has perhaps only an existence in my mind, or in the mind of God, or in the mind of some other entity, so that the “external world” is a fiction constructed in the mind. In such a case, a phenomenological world cannot satisfy the epistemological arguments produced by skeptics concerning an ontologically prior world because the two kinds of worlds are not the same. If, therefore, Romano is responding to the skeptical argument, he must be talking about an ontologically prior world, not a phenomenological world, because the skeptic does not attack the phenomenological world. It follows, then, that Romano here envisages an ontologically prior world existing on the basis of *at least* a bodily subject’s capacities in a phenomenological world.

This evidence might seem weak, however. One might object that Romano is simply identifying the phenomenological with the ontological world. But there is more evidence. Recall Romano’s descriptive realism, which states that “perception cannot be described

otherwise than as openness to the world itself, in the absence of any mental intermediary. The perception of the world presupposes the existence of the world and is indissociable from it” (314)⁷⁵. He goes on to say that “the world is what we perceive. Consequently, the world exists – as we do” (315). In sum, Romano tells us that we must have a world to perceive before we perceive, and that if we perceive, a world therefore exists. This, however, can only be so within a metaphysic of the world, not within phenomenology. It is only by making the metaphysical decisions that perception is sensory experience of the real, and that the real is an extra-mental object, that one can say that we only perceive the world. I am not saying that this conclusion is not to be accepted; I am only suggesting that what is being done here is not a pure phenomenology. In fact, this conclusion *can* be reached starting with phenomenology, but it is not through phenomenology that Romano reaches this it. It is, rather, the metaphysical basis for his phenomenological investigations.

But *must* a *pure* phenomenology be practiced? This question should be posed and answered explicitly. It is because Romano does not entertain this question as posing a problem that his terminology switches between the phenomenological and the metaphysical and ends up being for the most part a metaphysical phenomenology, while claiming to be simply phenomenological. In fact, in what could a phenomenology instruct us if it did not teach us something about our tendencies to think metaphysically, even in an everyday way? We believe, for example, that places do not move around. If I wish to go to the same library I visited last week, I travel to the same place. Perhaps the library has closed down, perhaps I ended up in the wrong place; whatever the case may be, the location of the library, as a node in a network of spatial relations, remains where it is. Being a

⁷⁵ First discussed above in connection with an explanation of the reduction in Romano’s phenomenology.

physical location in a physical world, open to being experienced by a bodily agent, the location of the library is still able to be visited at least in principle. Romano says as much about objects of our perception: “In order to be able to appear to me, this vase must exist, but its existence does not itself depend on its being perceived; it depends, at most, as existence of a vase as *phenomenal thing*, on the mere *possibility* of being perceived” (326). For the object of my perception, its *esse* is not *percipi*; rather its existence depends on this possibility *in principle*. This is a metaphysical phenomenology, that is, a phenomenology centered around metaphysics and metaphysical problems. What is the physical object here? It is an object such that it has the possibility of being perceived by an agent with perceptual capacities.

For all this, however, we cannot agree with Romano’s characterizations of the world. The world, as my phenomenological locus, is neither an ontologically prior thing, nor is it “*the necessary spatiotemporal a priori structure of all appearing of something*” (297). This means that the world is also not “the totality of essential possibilities governing factual possibilities and realities” (310), and this is because the world is not an a priori principle of appearing. Rather, the world is the very locus of my existence. Between the phenomenological and metaphysical determinations of “world” in Romano’s philosophy, he has done to us what he has accused Husserl of doing in the phenomenological reduction: “As if by a magic trick...[he] has modified what we meant by ‘world’” (295). In what sense is the “world” an a priori principle of appearing? This is an inadequate phenomenology of the world, because one never acts, thinks, perceives in a principle of appearing. No, it is *because* there is a principle that precedes and determines the possible forms that experiences take that we may act, think, perceive; my experiences take place *in*

a world. If Romano wanted to uphold this thesis, then “world” would mean both the a priori principle determining all experience as well as the place where experiences happen.

What is the world, then? Is it the place in which I act? Romano: “The world, as the locus of a shared intelligence and of potential behaviors...” (351). But the world is also frequently the locus of my non-actions as well, things that happen to me but which I do not *do* – sleeping, dreaming, dying. If the world is not an a priori principle of appearing, if it is not the stock of essential possibilities governing facts and reality, if it is not merely the place in which I act, what, then, is it? It *is* the place in which I act, but it is also much more: the world is my physical planet, it is my universe, it is my local and global environments, it is the totality of my spatial and temporal relations, it is the environment of my experience – in short, the world is the total environment in which events happen to me, whether I am actively involved in them (as when I perceive and choose to perceive this or that), or I am not (as when I sleep). The world is both phenomenological and metaphysical; it is phenomenological because it is the locus of all experience and appearing for a phenomenal agent; it is metaphysical because it is that “there” that precedes me, that into which I am brought without my choosing it. It is in this metaphysical-phenomenological world that experience takes place. But do we have a fair enough handle on what “experience” should mean?

C): HOW TO UNDERSTAND EXPERIENCE

We have seen that for Romano all experience is in the world and of the world. Experience is a relational event between the world and an agent. This is why an illusion is not an experience; its object does not exist in the world, and so it is not a communication with the world. But can this not be reduced? I at least exist in the world, and if I am part

of the world and the illusion is part of me, is not the illusion part of the world? This is not Romano's point, however. He wishes to make experience a relation to the extra-mental thing. In Romano's example of the vase as phenomenal thing, the thing whose existence depends on the possibility of being perceived, if this is what a phenomenal thing depends on, and if illusions by definition cannot be perceived, it follows that illusions: 1) are not phenomenal things for Romano, and; 2) do not appear. But if illusions do not appear, and if they are not phenomenal things, and if, also, they do not exist, what exactly are they? This would be a contradiction internal to Romano's text, for an illusion cannot exist as the "alteration" of a perceptive framework if it has no existence at all, neither phenomenal (in which that alteration would appear), nor mental (wherein that alteration would take place).

More problems come up when experience is considered as the relation to the extra-mental thing. What about the experiences of dreaming, of subconscious movements? In my dream, nothing that appears needs to correspond to anything in the world, and very frequently the things that appear do not precisely correspond to the world. When places appear, they are not always exactly the same as when I saw them, even if they are very similar. And even when they do appear in exactly the same way as I remember, it does not follow that this is a dream-perception, because what is at play is not a seeing of this place, but a recollection of it. Nevertheless, the place, for example my bedroom, does appear to me. I can navigate it in the dream, deal with its surroundings, perhaps treat it like my physical bedroom. But it is only a dream world, and a dream world is a mental existence, not a physical existence. It is not in the world in the same sense in which I am in the world. This is why we cannot agree with Romano when he speaks of experience "as such, that is, as openness to the world (in me and outside me)" (449). What is this "in me" that Romano

mentions? It is the “private dimension” of experience, the dimension “of sensations that are accessible to me alone – pain, blindness, burning, afterimage, muffling, proprioception in general” (449). Dreams do not correspond to any of these internal experiences, nor do such things as daydreams or punctual imaginings.

Now, what of the experiences of subconscious movements? Can these really be considered “experiences” if they happen in a way that I neither demand nor notice? Of course, they happen to me and by happening to me I experience them. For example, when waiting in a room to meet someone, I tap my finger as I look around the room. Very often I can go on for quite a while like this without noticing that my finger is doing anything. It is only once my attention is turned toward my finger for whatever reason that I notice that it has been tapping this whole time. What in here is a communication with the world? When my finger is tapping, almost of its own accord, I am neither feeling a surface, nor am I using my finger to do anything consciously. I do not feel uncomfortable when my finger is not tapping, and so it is not a mechanism of comfort. It is merely a movement that comes from I know not where, one which comes upon me, but one I do not ask for. This experience can perhaps be explained by a causal-genetic argument appealing to my subconscious psychological structures, but the *content* of this experience cannot; that is, what I feel, what is given to me in this experience cannot be explained by my subconscious structures. In what way, then, is this an experience? It is an event that happens to me, an event of my body acting in the world, but not for the purpose of relating to an extra-mental thing, a surface or my surroundings. It is precisely an experience of subconsciousness: that is, an experience of not willing an experience, an experience of a bodily mechanism escaping me. Nothing in this is experience as “openness to the world”. And so we must

say that not all experience is an openness to the world, because it is not always a relation to something outside me that constitutes my experience.

Experience is the appearing of a given to me: it is the givenness of this or that to a conscious subject. Experience is the conscious happening of something to a subject. We must not conclude from this that experience is not relational: it remains relational through and through. There could be no happening to me, no given appearing to me, without something to which I relate, even if that to which I relate is myself. Experience remains relational; it simply is not defined by the openness to the world. The interpretation of experience as necessarily involving an openness to the world is, I will maintain, an interpretation that makes of experience as a whole only the reflection of perceptual experience for the express purpose of destroying the skeptical thesis. It is for this reason that Romano conceives of experience in such a way as to ignore the most obvious phenomena to contradict his thesis: he wishes the skeptical thesis to have no possible argument. This is also what allows Romano to say that “(e)xperience is neutral with respect to the I/other distinction, since it is the experience of a world in which I and the other both appear, can exchange our places, espouse one another’s respective points of view, meet and coexist pacifically” (450). What can be said about this passage?

First, that Romano is right about experience being neutral in this sense. I stand and see this view from a place where another person can stand and see the same view; I smell this scent from a place and with an intensity that can be duplicated by another person; I feel this surface with a stroke and force that another can simulate. Experience does not care that it is I who does this, because experience will not call the next person “other” except from my point of view; from their point of view they will be “I” and I will be

“other”. We can go even further: it is conceivable that another person can have a sensation identical to mine, a dream, an imagining, a hallucination identical to mine. Experience has no qualms about this, precisely because it is not a living agent that determines with its will what gets to happen to whom. So long as you and I are existents of the same kind, with similar bodily and neurological structures, with the same or similar existential capacities, we are able to experience things in the same way; the structures of our experience remain the same.

It is by this same token, however, that absolute singularities exist in experience. There are things such that they will never be identical to any other’s experiences. For example, my birth, my death. These are events such that, if all of the elements within the experience are identical to another, it is simply mine that is happening, because they imply *this* subject here to which these events happen. Can we go further? In the appearing of a phenomenon to a subject, is it possible that it be an absolute singularity? Take a banal phenomenon, the seeing of a train passing by. We have already agreed with Romano that “The meaning of the least experience is a function of the context of my experience as a whole” (344). In this sense, any experience implicitly refers to the whole of my experience, the whole of my timeline. Should all of the elements of my experience be duplicated, they will not be duplicated by another but by me, because I and all of *my* experiences and times will be the elements reconstituting this timeline. The seeing of a train will be an absolutely singular phenomenon for anyone, because the seeing of the train will refer to an entire history of experience, and this is made possible by the neutrality of experience. Every experience is absolutely unique and singular *because* every experience is neutral and indifferent.

To recapitulate, the world is the metaphysical-phenomenological locus of my existence. It is the “there” that precedes me as well as the phenomenal whole in which I act and in which events happen to me. Experience is this happening to me. It is the absolutely unique and singular, because neutral and indifferent, happening-to-me. Experience is relational, but is not exclusively a relation to the world outside me, even if it is primarily this. Having dealt with the concepts of world and experience as they are determined by Romano, let us delve back into his phenomenology to see whether or not a holism of experience is still feasible for his phenomenological project, and for ours.

§5: A HOLISM OF EXPERIENCE

It should be noted that we have retained an essential thesis related to the holism of experience as Romano conceives it: namely that “(t)he meaning of the least experience is a function of the context of my experience as a whole” (344). I will call this “the holistic principle”. Now, retaining the holistic principle shows already that Romano’s holism of experience is not being set to the side completely in favor of a new holism of experience that would not share any properties with his. Rather, what I wish to do is to update his holism of experience, with a revised concept of cohesiveness (which includes what it was meant to exclude: illusions and hallucinations, imaginings, ideations – things that are not outside of myself), of the world (the metaphysical-phenomenological locus of my existence and experience), and of experience (the pure happening-to-me of events). In this way, Romano’s holism of experience is even *more* radically holistic than he allowed it to be. Experience now includes within its described structures such events that do not take place “outside me” “in the world”, but that are precisely interior phenomena. Accordingly, the

whole of human experience is a system, and not simply those that relate to the extra-mental thing in terms of my sensory capacities.

Now, in order to go further I will follow Romano's descriptive movement of his holism of experience. To start this I will recall his definition of a holistic property, namely, "*a property such that it is possessed by a part only under the condition of this part's integration into a whole*" (358). Within the whole of my experience, a perception can be *this* perception only on the basis of the rest of my perceptions and experiences. For example, the perception of a painting has a meaning on the basis of my perceptions of other paintings, on my ideas about what a painting should be like, and even (why not?) on dreams, if any, that I have had about paintings, similar to this one or not – perhaps even a hallucination I may have had of this or some other painting. If any of these elements are missing, the meaning of the perception changes, even if only slightly, because it no longer carries the history of these experiences that give this painting its *specific* meaning within the whole of my experience. Or, as a more local example, in the experience of a falling object, its successive positions are only successive and subsequent on the basis of the time-consciousness which allows appearances to appear with before/after meanings, and so the next refers always to the prior. This kind of holistic perceptual system might be described as a "local" holistic system.

A holistic system, as Romano describes it, must have at least either holistic properties that are produced if at least some elements in the system possess the same properties, or if they possess different properties (359). The former can be illustrated by the local holistic system I have just described, in which the successive positions of a falling object depend on the same property of perceiving this object in different appearances

within a network of before/after relations. The possession of different properties can correspond to the perception of the painting, which draws upon non-perceptions, such as dreams, hallucinations, ideations. Ideations cannot, in fact, be missing from the meaning of the perception of the painting, because it is only on the basis of a conceptual decision about what a painting is or should be that one can have the meaning of perceiving a *painting* and not perceiving a mere painted object.

I): Perception and the World

We have now reached the point where Romano tells us that “An experience is a perceptual experience if and only if it is integrated without any break or hiatus into the whole of perceptual experience, and therefore if it presents a structural cohesiveness with the system of perceptual experience as a whole” (360). Cohesiveness remains the a priori structure of all possible appearances, so we object to nothing in this formulation. We will simply keep in mind that cohesiveness also determines the system of illusion. This is why we must now disagree with Romano. He writes: “If perception is by nature endowed with structural cohesiveness, then all that is not endowed with structural cohesiveness is not a doubtful perception: it is not a perception at all” (362). The disagreement here arises from what cohesiveness signifies. If it is, as Romano tells us, and as I have recalled before, “a system of structural invariants...that underlie all variation of phenomena; hence a system of possibilities of essence preceding realities” (310), then it must be said that a doubtful perception is not only a perception, but it is protected by the principle of cohesiveness.

What allows me to make such a claim? My own experience of a doubtful perception. Not all doubtful perceptions are illusions or hallucinations. It happens quite often that a phenomenon of my peripheral vision is doubtful because I am not certain of

what judgment to apply to what I have just seen. For example, when a fly passes by me very quickly, and if I am not paying much attention, I see only a sort of shapeless black patch move past my field of vision. I turn to try to find what it was, if it was anything, but, unable to locate anything small, black, and floating, I begin to wonder if I really saw anything at all, or if I was in fact hallucinating. However, in the same way that the existence of the vase as “phenomenal thing” depends at least on the possibility of being perceived, so the fly that moved past me has at least the possibility of being perceived, and so of playing the role of epistemological validator of what I saw. What in this leads back to cohesiveness? A better question might be: how can this confusion about what I have seen, this perception that I am doubting (this doubtful perception) happen to me if it escapes the a priori principle that determines in advance all possible appearances? No, this doubtful perception is protected by cohesiveness because “doubtful perception” is a kind of phenomenon at the intersection of perception and epistemology.

With this development, we may also challenge what Romano has said about horizon, or “the Open”. For Romano, “the Open” is “*the world’s mode of appearance*, its phenomenalization for a finite, situated ‘subject’” (368). It is the positive mode of manifestation of the world. Romano designates “horizon” as “*the latency proper to all display of the world in its structural cohesiveness*” (369). What allows Romano to say this is his idea that “the world is the consistent and unshakeable background of all appearance” (369). But is this necessarily so, and in what sense? It should be pointed out that Romano appears to be using “world” here as synonymous with “cohesiveness”, namely, as the a priori principle of all possible appearing of phenomena. This does not accurately describe

the situation, as we have already seen⁷⁶. I will limit myself to pointing out that in the appearances of dreams, for example, the “world” against which they appear is not the same world as the one I perceive or in which I act. The world, when I dream, is not the background of the appearing of my dreams; it is the locus of my experience. The world is where I am when I am dreaming, but it does not itself appear in my dream, for the simple and good reason that my dream is a mental appearance, whereas the world is not. With this in mind, we may revisit Romano’s thesis of experience as relational, and the idea of subjectivity he argues against.

II) Experience and Subjectivity

Romano distinguishes his concept of experience from four acceptations of “subjective”. These are: 1) “*purely subjective*, that is to say...identical to a mental or psychological state”; 2) “that experience belongs to a transcendental subject, which is determined in its essence by intentionality” (this is the Husserlian position); 3) “*phenomenally subjective*, that is, appearing as a characteristic of myself in the field of experience”; 4) “*genetically subjective*”. Thus, according to neuronal ‘subjectivism’, experiences are produced by complex neuro-physiological processes that take place in the body/brain of the individual” (446, 447). He then goes on to say that there is a “fifth, weaker sense in which it can be said that experience is subjective”, that is, “in the sense of *relative to a subject*” (448). He therefore returns, in a way, to his thesis of the relationality of experience, going on to say that the fact that “experience is *for me* does not entail in that case that it is *from me* (448). Experience, on Romano’s account, is not genetically subjective, so it always implies an encounter between an “I” and a “non-I”. Experience

⁷⁶ Pg. 71 above.

always requires that which is objective and subjective, “But the phenomenally objective and subjective poles both enter into the structuration of a single experience, about which one must not say that it is ‘subjective’ *in its very stuff* – in the sense, this time, of *genetically subjective*” (448).

Every experience, then, requires that there be an I, as receiver of the given, and a not-I, as given. Experience is structured via this economy: I encounter the given, the given appears to me; without me, the given is not, it does not appear, and so does not exist phenomenally; without the given, I have no experience, so that even in experiences of myself, if no given is possible, I would not exist phenomenally. We must not forget Romano’s wish to keep experience as the relational event to *the “real” world*, however. He goes on to say that experience “is the very modality of my incessant transaction with my surroundings; it is born, so to speak, at this point of juncture where my body projects itself onto things; it is the continuous event of that encounter under the auspices of an agile, acting body” (449). Again, is this a tenable conclusion? That experience is relational – very well; that this relationality means that a subjective pole and an objective pole always structure every experience – very well again; that this objective pole must be a direct relation to the world – this is where the problems arise.

I have already objected to this with the examples of dreams, daydreams, punctual imaginings, and subconscious bodily movements. Romano wishes to think of the first three as non-existences, and so non-givennesses. But in every dream, in every daydream and imagining, is there not something that appears to me? And precisely in the mode of a picturesque appearance? In all of these examples *there is always* a given that appears, otherwise the experiences yield nothing, and if they yield nothing, then nothing has taken

place. Without the given there is no experience, and if there is no experience we cannot even say that this or that experience has no (mode of) givenness. What is problematic here, as we have seen, is that Romano transposes into phenomenology metaphysical conceptual decisions about the existence of beings and the world, and then treats these decisions as phenomenological necessities. But I could never experience a dream if a dream was not given to me. I could never experience, for example, one of my belongings as *missing* or as *misplaced* if I could only experience existences. An absence is in no metaphysical sense an “existence”; but an absence is phenomenologically an “existent”, in the sense of a “given”. I could never know or understand that something that should be in a specific location but is not is missing or absent if knowing this meant having to know an existence.

We can go further. What would the experience of things in space be like if every point were occupied by a single thing? That is, how could I ever experience locative relations of things if a single substance were to occupy every possible point of space? First of all, there would be no space for me as a physical body. But what I am trying to show is that an experience of things in space requires at least: 1) things, that is, a multiplicity of objects, and; 2) spaces between them, so that I, as an embodied subject, may exist in their midst. The experience of things in space always requires, then, not simply *things*, but space, spacing, absence, non-existence. If so, then a perception of a thing, for example, is never a perception only of that thing. It is also an experience of the non-thing, that is, non-existence that gives existence its breathing room, so to speak. Romano is wrong, then, on two accounts: 1) he is wrong to think that experience is a relational event between a subject and a “real”, physical existence, because there are non-physical givens that exist as interior to me, and; 2) he is wrong to think that this relation to a physical object or surroundings is

not an experience of non-existence that allows presence to arise. In this case, experience is *not* “both something I *have*⁷⁷ and something that *takes place* on the occasion of my encounter with things, with others, with myself; it is the continuous form taken on by that encounter” (449). Against this, I maintain that experience is always something that I have before being something that I do. In fact, I could never have a deliberate encounter and use of my surroundings if these surroundings were not first *presented to me* in a manner that predates and is independent of my will. I did not ask to be presented with a world, but here it is, and because it is here, because I have a world before being able to do anything in it, because I have experience before being able to be an actor in experience, I am able to encounter, in the full sense of that word, the objective pole of my experience.

§6: CONCLUSION – AN UPDATED HOLISM OF EXPERIENCE

Experience is my grasp on and my communication with the world. Experience is a relational structure in which the world appears to me, or in which sensations, as changes within myself, appear to me. But it is not primarily this. Experience is the happening-to-me of events. Experience is something I have, in order to be something I do by taking part in it. Experience always takes place in a world, because the world is precisely the locus of my existence, which is another way of saying that it is the locus of *all* of my experiences. And *all* of my experiences are protected by the thesis of cohesiveness proposed by

⁷⁷ The relevant French passage is the following: “l’expérience...est à la fois quelque chose que je *fais* et quelque chose qui *se produit* à l’occasion de ma rencontre avec les choses, avec les autres, avec moi-même, elle est la forme continuelle que revêt cette rencontre” (*Au coeur de la raison* 810). This translates to: “experience...is at the same time something that I *do* and something that *happens* on the occasion of my encounter with things, with others, with myself, it is the continuous form that this encounter assumes”. The reason for this is to point out an inadequacy in the translation which has the effect of proposing a conceptual decision about experience that Romano did not in fact make, since, for Romano, experience is “*something we do* rather than something we *have*” (260) – “l’expérience est *quelque chose que nous faisons*, plutôt que quelque chose que *nous avons*” (*Au coeur* 479). This is significant for my interpretation, because what I maintain, against this, is that experience is a happening-to me. In this sense experience is something I have *before* and *in order to be* something I do.

Romano. *All* possible experiences, *all* possible happenings-to-me are prescribed in advance by a structure that Romano glimpsed, but did not see fully.

I have tried to show that illusions and hallucinations, dreams, daydreams, subconscious movements, and more, are all cohesive within the basis of Romano's phenomenological framework, because this framework supposes an openness to experiences. However, I have also tried to show that Romano's work was held back by a desire to destroy the skeptical thesis (the thesis stating that a punctual illusion entails an epistemologically valid global doubt concerning perception), and, because of that, to admit nothing in common between perceptions and illusions. Romano constrained a true holism of experience because he did not want to admit that the skeptic could be right about anything concerning illusions or perceptions. But if what I have tried to do above is correct, we need not admit the skeptical thesis in order to admit illusion into experience. What I have tried to do – my ultimate goal here – is to expand a phenomenological system of the description of experience, not to simply admit an excluded element within a particular philosopher's work.

This has meant undertaking a critical approach to phenomenological concepts, laying bare the presuppositions Romano took for granted, and distinguishing unequal philosophical fields that Romano set into play without explicitly recognizing that he was doing so, and without, therefore, being able to question them or justify their tactical use. This can only be the beginning of a metaphysical phenomenology of experience and the world, but it is on the basis of Romano's holism of experience that it can be started and explicitly stated as such. Only this metaphysical phenomenology can instruct us in our experiences concerning metaphysical problems and frameworks. Contrary to what

Romano tells us, “the structural properties of experience” *do not* “depend by nature on the understanding we have of experience and on the descriptions we can give of it” (361). It is only because we have experience before every understanding of it that we can uncover its structures, and these structures are complex and form a system. Our continuous encounters with givens will lead us to descriptions of our experiences, and will allow us to uncover their structure. This description, however, can only be undertaken within a holism of experience that takes into the description *all*, and not merely some, of our possible experiences.

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