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# THE DYNAMICS OF PHENOMENALIZATION. THE THREE SENSES OF THE EVENT IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF J.-L. MARION

La dinámica de la fenomenalización. Los tres sentidos del  
acontecimiento en la fenomenología de J.-L. Marion

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## Abstract

This article aims to investigate the various senses of the term “event” in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. I argue, as a hypothesis, that there is a certain “evolution” in Marion’s thought that can be discerned precisely through these different senses, and that this evolution allows us to understand the dynamics of phenomenalization as such, through the overcoming of a static conception in favor of a dynamic one. The phenomenology of givenness ultimately reveals itself as an eventual phenomenology, insofar as it makes the dynamic of eventuality the ultimate meaning of all phenomenalization.

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## Keywords

Event; Banality of saturation; Phenomenalization; Evential phenomenology; Phenomenology of givenness; Saturated phenomenon; Marion.

## Resumen

Este artículo se propone indagar en los diversos sentidos del término “acontecimiento” en la obra de Jean-Luc Marion. Sostengo como hipótesis que existe cierta “evolución” en el pensamiento marioniano que puede advertirse, precisamente, en estos diversos significados, y que permite entender la dinámica de la fenomenalización en su sentido último, por medio de la superación de una concepción estática por una dinámica. La fenomenología de la donación se revela finalmente como una fenomenología acontecual, pues hace de la dinámica de la acontecualidad el sentido último de toda fenomenalización.

## Palabras clave

Acontecimiento; Banalidad de la saturación; Fenomenalización; Fenomenología acontecual; Fenomenología de la donación; Fenómeno saturado; Marion.

## Introduction

Jean-Luc Marion's proposal arguably constitutes the most fully developed form of eventual phenomenology. However, upon closer examination of his work, we find three distinct senses of the term “event.” Can one speculate about a primary or predominant sense? Which notion of the event operates behind the “evential” characterization of his phenomenology?

I maintain the hypothesis that there is a certain “evolution” in Marion’s thought that can be discerned precisely in these different senses, and that this evolution allows us to understand the dynamics of phenomenization as such. Marion’s phenomenological work operates on the basis of the category of the “saturated phenomenon.” This novel idea is presented, in an initial stage—corresponding to the article “Le phénomène saturé” and his chef-d’œuvre *Étant donné*—, from a static point of view. For this reason, at first, tensions become apparent between the notion of the event as referring to a specific type of saturated phenomenon—the historical event—and the conception of the event as a determination of everything that is given. However, in a second moment, Marion unfolds certain intuitions already present in that initial formulation and, in dialogue with some of the criticisms received, by proposing a conception of the event that overcomes these inconsistencies, develops a dynamic perspective.

With the aim of demonstrating these ideas, in the first section I will focus on the conception of the event as a type of saturated phenomenon. In the second section, I will examine eventuality as a determination of what is given. In the third section, I will explore the scope of the idea of the event as a modality of phenomenality. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

## The Event as a Type of Saturated Phenomenon

In 1992, Marion published his now well-known text “Le phénomène saturé,” as a kind of response to the accusations formulated by Dominique Janicaud in *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (1991). There, the phenomenologist from Meudon begins by emphasizing that the investigation of religious phenomena, within a philosophy of religion, compels one to confront an “impossible phenomenon.” This amounts to raising the problem of “the limit starting from which the phenomenon is in general no longer possible” (Marion, 1996, p. 103). The religious phenomenon introduces the question concerning “the general possibility of the phenomenon” (p. 103). What is at stake, then, is not the evaluation of religion, but rather the question of the limits of phenomenality: “According to whether it is accepted or rejected, the religious phenomenon would thus become a privileged index of the possibility of phenomenality” (p. 103). Within this framework, Marion proposes the category of the “saturated phenomenon” (*phénomène saturé*).

After pointing out how Kant limits the appearing of phenomena to the possibilities previously established by the “power of cognition” of the knowing subject—namely, “the play of intuition and of the concept within a finite mind” (Marion, 1996, p. 104)—and after showing how metaphysics in general restricts phenomenal manifestation through the imposition of the principle of sufficient reason, Marion emphasizes that phenomenology frees the phenomenon from these constraints by means of the “principle of all principles,” thereby overcoming a “conditional phenomenality through a phenomenality without condition” (p. 105). However, the Husserlian principle does not seem entirely capable of achieving its aim: “it still remains to be verified whether the “principle of all principles” in point of fact ensures a right to appear for all phenomena, whether it indeed opens for them an absolutely unconditioned possibility—or whether it renders them possible still only under some condition” (p. 105).

The absolute possibility opened by the validation of what is given to giving intuition—which goes beyond the principle of sufficient reason and constitutes the first characteristic of the Husserlian principle identified by Marion—is nevertheless limited by two additional features: the horizon and reduction.

First, Husserl emphasizes that there are certain “limits” (*Schranken*) within which this intuition is inscribed (Husserl, 1973, p. 51). Marion notes that these limits refer to the horizon and raises the following question:

With this horizon, is it a question of what is not looked at as not looked at, a question of the simple recognition that all lived-experience is grasped in the flux of consciousness, and is therefore oriented in advance toward other lived-experiences that are yet to arise? Or is it not rather a question of the treatment, in advance, of the non-lived-experiences that are not looked at as the subjects of a horizon, and therefore a question of the inclusion within a limit—be it that of the flux of consciousness—of anything that is not looked at, a question of the a priori inscription of the possible within a horizon? (Marion, 1996, p. 106)

The horizon imposes limits on the unconditioned character of what is given. Second, Husserl speaks of a redirection “to us” (*uns*) (Husserl, 1973, p. 51), which brings into play an operation of reduction carried out by an ego. Marion emphasizes that this “us” points to the “classical ambiguity of the *Ideen*” (Marion, 1996, p. 106), the ambiguity identified by Paul Ricœur in a footnote to §24 in his translation of *Ideen I*<sup>1</sup>:

the givenness of the phenomenon on the basis of itself to an ‘I’ can at every instant veer toward a constitution of the phenomenon through and on the basis of the ‘I’. Even if one does not overestimate this constant threat, one must at least admit that givenness, precisely because it keeps its originary and justifying function, can give and justify nothing except before the tribunal of the “I”; transcendental or not... Even if it shows itself on the basis of itself, the phenomenon can do so only by allowing itself to be lead back, and therefore reduced, to the ‘I’. (p. 106).

The ego and its reduction thus constitute, according to Marion, a second limitation on the absolute possibility that the “principle of all principles” initially sought to grant to the phenomenon. But is it then possible to think an unconditioned and irreducible phenomenon? Marion observes that the delimitation of the phenomenon according to the parameters of the ego and the horizon—both in phenomenology (Husserl) and in metaphysics (Kant)—leads to a definition of the phenomenon as conditioned and reducible, which amounts to a kind of “de-finition.” The phenomenon is thereby restricted to a “finite

<sup>1</sup> “The articulation between the two expressions—giving intuition and what is given—is striking. It contains all the difficulties of a philosophy of constitution that must at the same time remain, from another point of view, an intuitionism” (Ricœur, 1950, p. 78 n. 1).

intuition,” which results in a “deficit of intuition”: either because it is confined to sensible experience (Kant) or because it involves an ideal or lacking intuition (Husserl) (Marion, 1996, p. 111).

Faced with this “poverty of intuition,” Marion proposes to think “the possibility of a phenomenon in which intuition would give more, indeed immeasurably more, than intention ever would have intended or foreseen” (p. 112). This possibility finds a precedent in Kant’s own work with the “aesthetic idea,” understood as a representation of the imagination that cannot be grasped by a concept. Marion concludes:

The hypothesis of a phenomenon saturated with intuition can certainly be warranted by its outline in Kant, but above all it must command our attention because it designates a possibility of the phenomenon in general. And in phenomenology, the least possibility is binding. (p. 113)

The investigation of the saturated phenomenon is thus guided by the exploration of all the possibilities of phenomenality.

The text then presents the characterization of the saturated phenomenon—which will be repeated in *Étant donné* (Marion, 2002a pp.199-220)—through the inversion of Kant’s categories of the understanding:

In order to introduce the concept of the saturated phenomenon into phenomenology, we have just described it as invisible (unforeseeable) according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, but also unconditioned (absolved from any horizon) according to relation, and irreducible to the “I” (incapable of being looked at) according to modality. These four characteristics imply the term for term reversal of all the rubrics under which Kant classifies the principles and thus the phenomena that these determine. (Marion, 1996, p. 120).

With the notion of the saturated phenomenon, Marion takes himself to have identified the unconditioned and irreducible phenomenon that finally fulfills the aim of the “principle of all principles” by enabling the givenness of a possibility without restrictions:

Thus, in the guiding thread of the saturated phenomenon, phenomenology finds its ultimate possibility: not only the possibility that surpasses actuality, but the possibility that surpasses the very conditions of possibility, the possibility of unconditioned possibility— in other words, the possibility of the impossible, the saturated phenomenon. (p. 120)

In “Le phénomène saturé,” Marion introduces a classification into three static types of phenomena, similar to the topical classification of the phenomenon proposed in *Étant donné* (Marion, 2002, pp. 221-247): 1) “The phenomena that are deprived of intuition or impoverished in intuitions”, which include formal languages (endowed with categorial intuition by Husserl), mathematical idealities (whose pure intuition is established by Kant) (Marion, 1996, p. 121), 2) “The common law phenomena”, in which the signification (aimed at by intention) can ideally receive an adequate intuitive fulfillment, but that, right at the start and most of the time, do not reach such fulfillment (p. 121), 3) “the saturated phenomena, which an excess of intuition shields from objective constitution” (p. 121).

Within this last category, in this initial text, Marion proposes distinguishing two modalities and, in doing so, introduces the first notion of the event.<sup>2</sup> 3.1) First, “pure historical events” (*événements historiques purs*). These phenom

by definition non-repeatable, they occur most often without having been foreseen; since through a surfeit of intuitive given they escape objectivation, their intelligibility excludes comprehension and demands that one move on to hermeneutics; intuitive saturation surpasses a single horizon and imposes multiple hermeneutics within several horizons; finally, the pure historical event not only occurs to its witness without the latter comprehending it (the non-constituting ‘I’), but itself, in return, comprehends the ‘I’ (the constituted ‘I’): the ‘I’ is comprehended on the basis of the event that occurs to it in the very measure that the ‘I’ itself does not comprehend the event. Pure events offer a type of saturated phenomenon that is historical and thus communal and in principle communicable. (p. 121).

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, before mentioning historical events, when discussing the inversion of the categories of relation, Marion speaks of the “pure event”: “an event or a phenomenon that is unforeseeable (on the basis of the past), not exhaustively comprehensible (on the basis of the present), nor reproducible (on the basis of the future); in short, absolute, unique, occurring. We will thus call it a pure event” (p. 116). The passage is repeated identically in *Étant donné* (p. 207). It is a striking passage because it clearly anticipates the use of the term event in the sense of a mode of phenomenality—applicable to all saturated phenomena—yet Marion does not develop it in these texts and limits himself to this single mention.

3.2) Second, there are the “phenomena of revelation”. Marion clarifies that this is a phenomenological notion of “revelation,” defined as “an appearance that is purely of itself and starting from itself, which does not subject its possibility to any preliminary determination” (p. 121).<sup>3</sup> Within this category, in “Le phénomène saturé,” three types are distinguished: 3.2.1) the idol, “he picture as a spectacle that, due to excess of intuition, cannot be constituted but still can be looked at” (p. 121); 3.2.2) the icon, “a particular face that I love, which has become invisible not only because it dazzles me, but above all because in it I want to look and can look only at its invisible gaze weighing on mine” (p. 121); 3.2.3) the theophany, “where the surfeit of intuition leads to the paradox that an invisible gaze visibly envisages me and loves me” (p. 122).

Marion thus initially employs the notion of the event to designate a type of saturated phenomenon characterized by its irrepeatable nature, its unpredictability, the inversion of intentionality, and its plurality of horizons, which calls for a hermeneutic approach. This hermeneutics has a communal and communicable character. Some of these features will also be highlighted in the characterization of the historical event as a saturated phenomenon in *Étant donné* and *De surcroît*.

In *Étant donné*, the event is associated with the inversion of Kant’s categories of quantity, but it is primarily presented by emphasizing the necessity it imposes of a communal hermeneutics. Marion refers to the description of a historical event in *The Charterhouse of Parma*: “nobody ever saw the battle of Waterloo” (p. 228). Neither Fabrice, nor Napoleon—no single perspective is sufficient to account for what occurred:

Consequently, in recorded and transmitted history (*Historie*), the battle will demand additional horizons (this time conceptual) of an indefinite number: military horizons (the strategy adopted since the return from exile, the tactics concerning this place), diplomatic, political, economic, ideological (reference to the Revolution), etc. The

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that this way of determining revelation in a phenomenological sense refers back to *Totality and Infinity*. According to Levinas (1961), the revelation of the Other stands in opposition to the logic of unveiling or disclosure and its objectifying procedure: “To recognize truth to be disclosure is to refer it to the horizon of him who discloses. ... The manifestation of the *kath’auto*. . . does not consist in its being disclosed, its being exposed to the gaze that would take it as a theme for interpretation, and would command an absolute position dominating the object. Manifestation *kath’auto* consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, expressing itself. . . . The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form” (pp. 64-66).

plurality of horizons practically forbids constituting the historical event into one object and demands substituting an endless hermeneutic in time; the narration is doubled by a narration of the narrations (p. 229)

This “endless hermeneutics” requires an interobjectivity that integrates “agreements and disagreements among subjects partially constituting a nonobject always to be re-constituted” (p. 229).<sup>4</sup>

*De surcroît* is a transitional text in which Marion begins to rethink the static character of the topical classification of the phenomenon presented in *Étant donné*. This becomes evident, first, in the shift from the category of the historical event to that of the event as such—that is, to any occurrence that has the character of an advent. Marion points out that there are three types of events: historical events, which are collective in nature; intersubjective events (exemplified through the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie); and private events (Marion, 2002b, pp. 36-38). All three types of events share the same features already outlined in “Le phénomène saturé”: (1) they are unique and unrepeatable; (2) they require an infinite hermeneutics, since it is not possible to assign them a single cause; and (3) they cannot be foreseen (p. 36).

This newly expanded category of the event seems to foreshadow the problem of the “banality of saturation,”<sup>5</sup> insofar as it responds to a more dynamic conception of phenomenality, one that focuses more specifically on the process of manifestation. The text examines, in particular, the operation of coming into visibility, which proceeds from a self in this type of phenomenon. According to Marion, the event makes it possible to account for the scope of Heidegger’s definition of the phenomenon as *das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*, “that which shows itself in itself” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 38). This saturated phenomenon, more than any other, allows us to think this “self” of the phenomenon that governs its phenomenalization and that can be traced back to givenness:

<sup>4</sup> Matias Pizzi (1979), in his article “Reflexiones sobre el concepto de historia en la fenomenología acontecimental: Jean-Luc Marion y Jean-Louis Chrétien [Reflections on the Concept of History in Eventual Phenomenology: Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Louis Chrétien]” insightfully proposes the possibility of applying the category of the historical event to history itself and to the eventual manner in which Marion reads the history of philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> This issue would be explicitly addressed three years later in Marion’s 2004 lecture, “Saturation and Counter-Experience,” delivered at the conference *In Excess: Jean-Luc Marion and the Horizon of Modern Theology*, held at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana, USA). The text, in its final version, was published as a chapter in his book *The Visible and the Revealed*, under the title “The Banality of Saturation.”

But can one detect such a positive transformation from the phenomenizing *self* to the giving *self*? Which phenomena keep within them the trace of their givenness, to the point that their mode of phenomenization will not only open such an access to their original *self* but render it incontestable? I propose the hypothesis that it is a question of phenomena of the type of the event. Actually, the event appears in effect as other phenomena, but it is distinguished from objective phenomena in that which, in it, does not result from a production, which would deliver it as a product, decided and foreseen, foreseeable according to its causes and as a consequence reproducible following the repetition, of such causes. To the contrary, in happening, it attests to an unforeseeable origin, rising up from causes often unknown, even absent, at least not assignable, that one would not therefore any longer reproduce, because its constitution would not have any meaning. (Marion, 2002b, p. 31)

The event thus exemplifies, in a paradigmatic way, the coming-to-pass of the saturated phenomenon from its own self. Anticipating, now more explicitly, the idea of the “banality of saturation” that will be formulated a few years later, the chapter pauses over an example. It proposes analyzing a “simple and banal” phenomenon, one that can be objectified, yet which, in Marion’s description, presents itself as an event: the lecture hall (p. 1). The hall becomes a “hall” in which

what happens is neither walls nor stones nor audience nor speakers, but the impalpable event, which their word goes to capture, in order to make the event understood or to spoil it... Tonight, on *this* theme and no other, between us and no one else, an absolutely unique event is played out, unrepeatably and, for a large part, unforeseeable—for in this precise moment when I say ‘precise moment,’ neither you nor the dean who presides, nor I, know yet if this will be a success or a failure. What appears in this given moment before our eyes in this way escapes all constitution: although it has been organized, following clear and amicable intellectual and social intentions, it shows *itself* from itself, starting from itself. And in the *itself* of its phenomenality is anticipated—better, is announced—the *self* of what gives” *itself* (Marion, 2002b, pp. 32-33)

Marion once again emphasizes the defining features of the event: its irrepeatable character, its unpredictability, and the inversion of intentionality (its appearing from itself). But what is decisive, in this chapter of *De surcroît*, is the inquiry into that self of the phenomenon, in order to ultimately account for the self of givenness.

A few pages later, the text introduces an example that enjoys a particular “phenomenological privilege” (p. 43). The inquiry into the eventual self leads to an investigation of temporality in a way that exceeds the Kantian analysis. According to Marion, the task is to think the time of the self without assigning its function to objective synthesis and by extending its operation to subjectivity itself (pp. 38-39). This objective requires identifying a type of phenomenon that temporalizes itself in such a way “provoke the ego to phenomenalize itself according to this unique eventmentality” (p. 39). That unique phenomenon is birth.

Marion points out that this event—which does not show itself directly, which is never present but always past, yet a past that addresses us as an enigma to be deciphered<sup>6</sup> and, in that sense, is always yet to come—constitutes our “non-originary origin,” that origin which does not appear but affects me to such an extent that it “defines my ego, even produces” (p. 42). In this sense, birth is the exemplary phenomenon sought, since it brings together certain distinctive features:

(a) The phenomenon of birth gives itself directly without showing itself, because it happens as an event par excellence (origin originally non-original), but this excellence comes to it from the fact that it gives me to myself when it gives itself. It is phenomenalized in affecting me, it affects me in giving me not only to myself, but (since without it I would not yet be there to be affected by it) in giving, so to speak, prior to me a me, a myself, who receives itself from what it receives.<sup>12</sup> (b) The phenomenon of birth carries directly to its limit the inclusion of the ego in eventmentality, in founding it exemplarily according to its status of being given over [or “gifted”] [son statut d’adonne]: the ego that is itself received from what it receives. The phenomenon of birth exemplifies the phenomenon in general—that which is only phenomenalized as far as it gives itself—but, at the same time, it institutes I’adonne [the given over, or gifted one], originarily a posteriori, since receiving itself from what it receives, as the first phenomenon (rendering possible the reception of all others). (c) The phenomenon of birth thus rightfully gives itself as a saturated phenomenon (or paradox). In effect, its event, first original impression and thus more original than any other instant, renders possible an indefinite, indescribable, and unforeseeable series of original impressions to come—those that are accumulating throughout my life and define me to my end. In this way birth opens the course of life to innumerable temporal intuitions, for which I will seek without end, but always too late, meanings, concepts, and noeses inevitably missing (pp. 43-44).

<sup>6</sup> “My birth presents itself even as a privileged phenomenon, because, in an essential sense, my entire life is devoted exclusively to reconstructing it, attributing meaning to it, and responding to its silent call” (Marion, 2001, p. 52).

In this extended passage, not only are the features emphasized that allow us to recognize the phenomenality of the event as that which best accounts for the self of givenness—by affecting and constituting my own ego—but, in this way, the dynamic conception of the event is once again anticipated. For this reason, Marion affirms that “the phenomenon of birth exemplifies the phenomenon in general” (p. 43). We will return to this point in the section “The Event as a Modality of Phenomenality.”

## The Event as a Determination of the Given

Book III, “Le donné I: Déterminations”, of *Étant donné* enumerates the five determinations of the given (anamorphosis, arrival, the accomplished fact, the incident, and the event), “the characteristics of given, by which each phenomenon would clearly attest that it is unfolded starting from the fold of givenness—showing itself inasmuch as it gives itself” (Marion, 2002a, p. 118). These characteristics, which determine every phenomenon insofar as it is given, appear to be applicable only to saturated phenomena. In this respect, Book III contradicts the static analyses of Book IV, “Le donné II: Degrés,” where the topical classification of the phenomenon already mentioned is introduced, since that classification posits the existence of phenomena that can only be given as poor phenomena or as common-law phenomena. These two types of phenomena refer to a givenness that does not seem to conform to the traits of the given that must apply to every given phenomenon. The resolution of this tension will come with the new topical classification of the phenomenon introduced through the idea of the “banality of saturation.” Only from a dynamic perspective on phenomenality, and by affirming that “givenness is always accomplished in excess” (Marion, 2016, p. 186), is it possible to understand how these determinations of the given are compatible with the various modes of phenomenization.

Let us now turn to §17 of *Étant donné*. The event constitutes the final determination of the given, the one that accounts for the self of the phenomenon’s coming into presence from itself. The phenomenon becomes visible from itself according to anamorphosis; it is individuated in its arrival; it imposes itself

irrevocably as an accomplished fact; and it rejects all construction by arising as an incident (Marion, 2002a, p.159). What remains, however, is to establish the modality in which the phenomenon takes the initiative in its giving and showing from itself: “the *self* of the phenomenon is marked in its determination as event. It comes, does its thing, and leaves on its own; showing *itself*, it also shows the *self* that takes (or removes) the initiative of giving *itself*” (pp. 159-160).<sup>7</sup>

To investigate this characteristic—this self that “would in no way be equivalent to the *in itself* of the object or the thing” (p. 159)—Marion emphasizes the way in which the event calls into question the metaphysical principle of sufficient reason. The given phenomenon is characterized by not having an assignable cause. But more than that, eventmentality reveals the phenomenological primacy of the effect over the cause:

The event *precedes* its cause (or its causes). The temporal privilege of the effect-it alone arises to and in the present, gives *itself-implies* that all knowledge begins by the event of the effect; for without the effect, there would be neither meaning nor necessity to inquiring after any cause whatsoever... The effect alone imposes itself with certainty; consequently, one rests on it in order to “deduce,” after the fact, the cause, whose function consists less in producing it than in understanding it... the cause remains an effect of meaning, assigned to the effect by the will to know, or rather, imposed on the event to compensate for its exorbitant privilege—namely its arising as being, its having come forward as phenomenon—which an epistemological dependence. The cause does not merely come after the effect so as to secure its belated and hypothetical commentary, but above all to mitigate or deny it the status of event—the *self* of the given phenomenon. (pp. 165-166)

The given phenomenon appears by itself, from its own self, in its eventual character, without the need for one or more causes to be assigned to it—or better yet, it appears as such precisely because no cause is assigned to it. In this sense, what phenomenalizes itself is an effect without a cause. Moreover, through these reflections, Marion opens the way to a dynamic inquiry into phenomenality by glimpsing the excessive, non-objectifiable, and originary character of givenness. It is the procedures of objectification that assign causes

<sup>7</sup> As can be seen, the thematization of the event as a type of saturated phenomenon in *De surcroît* results from the integration of the problem of eventmentality as a determination of the given with the features of the event as a phenomenon. In this way, Marion takes up the tension between these two conceptions of the event and begins to glimpse the solution that will emerge with the shift from a static to a dynamic view of phenomenality.

and determine phenomena as effects of those causes (that is, as objects). The given phenomenon has the event as one of its determinations because it comes to pass beyond all foresight and dispenses with any cause.

The paragraph concludes with the enumeration of three characteristic features of the event as a determination of the given. First, its irrepeatable character. Precisely because it is irreducible to a cause, the event is not repeatable (p. 170). Second, the event is characterized by its excess. Although it is possible to identify antecedents, there is an event only insofar as it exceeds them: “The level of evenness—if one can speak thus—is measured by the amount of the phenomenon’s excess over its antecedents” (p. 171). Finally, the event always opens a new possibility, one that was not registered as a condition of possibility of what is actual. The event does not inscribe itself within the situation that precedes it, but instead offers a different one, not previously foreseen (pp. 172-173).

## The Event as a Modality of Phenomenality

In 2005, Marion published “La banalité de la saturation” as a response to criticisms regarding the extraordinary character of saturated phenomena and the neglect that this category allegedly entails with respect to the analysis of ordinary phenomena—those in which no excessive character is registered<sup>8</sup>. According to Marion, there is a “serious reason” that explains the resistance to the hypothesis of the saturated phenomenon. It consists in a certain “unjustified” fear that saturated phenomena might correspond to “exceptional intuitions” (Marion, 2008, p. 133), and therefore be experienced only rarely, through a kind of unusual and confused ecstasy.

Marion responds to this objection by distinguishing between frequency and banality. Indeed, poor phenomena and common-law phenomena are the most frequent, but this “frequency” has a decisive consequence:

<sup>8</sup> This is the critique advanced by Emmanuel Falque in “Phenomenology of the Extraordinary.” There, Falque questions the pertinence of conceiving the saturated phenomenon as a paradigmatic phenomenon. What are the consequences of making the exception the norm? Establishing a paradigm based on the extraordinary experience of saturation is, according to Falque, not a sound decision, because it does not help us understand the most common human experience—the ordinary experience of human finitude (cf. 2003). A similar objection can be found in Anthony Steinbock’s article “The Poor Phenomenon” (2007) and in Christina Gschwandtner’s book *Degrees of Givenness* (2014). For an analysis of these critiques, see Murga (2024).

It could even be said that the world is covered with an invasive and highly visible layer of poor phenomena (namely, the technical objects produced and reproduced without end), which ends up eclipsing what it covers. And what does it cover over, if not other phenomena (e.g., the event, the painting, the flesh, or the other [*autrui*]), which I proposed naming saturated phenomena? (Marion, 2005, pp. 154–155)

It is only in this sense—namely, as a kind of “concealment”—that saturated phenomena may be thought of as infrequent. But this lack of frequency does not prevent us from considering them as banal.

Marion explains that banality differs from frequency. “In the strict sense, what becomes banal... concerns all and is accessible to all” (Marion, 2008, p. 125). This type of banality, available to all, is not equivalent to frequency; on the contrary, it may even stand in opposition to it:

To speak of a banal saturated phenomenon therefore does not imply that it becomes current and frequent nor, *a contrario*, that it must become exceptional and rare and therefore be confined to the margins of common phenomenality, which supposedly fixes the norm. The banality of the saturated phenomenon suggests *that the majority of phenomena, if not all* can undergo saturation by the excess of intuition over the concept or signification in them. In other words, the majority of phenomena that appear at first glance to be poor in intuition could be described not only as objects but also as phenomena that intuition saturates and therefore exceed any univocal concept. Before the majority of phenomena, even the most simple (the majority of objects produced technically and reproduced industrially), opens the possibility of a doubled interpretation, which depends upon the demands of my ever-changing relation to them. Or rather, when the description demands it, I have the possibility of passing from one interpretation to the other, from a poor or common phenomenality to a saturated phenomenality (Marion, 2008, p. 126)

Thus, Marion introduces the notion of the banality of saturation, which brings with it a dynamic conception of phenomenality: every phenomenon can appear in one way or another. However, this clearly entails modifying the static topical classification of the phenomenon and reducing it to “two modes of phenomenization” (Marion, 2008, p. 130).

Indeed, a few years later, in his book *Certitudes négatives*, published in 2010, Marion proposes replacing the static classification of *Étant donné* with an updated one:

In this way, we would lay out a new table of phenomena. On the one side, the phenomena of the object type, comprising the poor phenomena (logical forms, mathematical idealities, etc.) and the common-law phenomena (objects of the 'natural' sciences, industrial objects, etc.). On the other side, the phenomena of the event type, comprising the simple saturated phenomena (the event in its restricted sense, according to quantity; the idol or the painting, according to quality; the flesh, according to relation; and the icon or the face of the other, according to modality), but also the phenomena of revelation (which combine several saturated phenomena, such as the erotic phenomenon, the phenomena of revelation, Revelation, etc.). This table would complete and complicate the one found in *Étant donné...*, by binding saturation and eventness: a phenomenon shows *itself* to be all the more saturated when it gives itself with a greater eventness. (Marion, 2005, p. 262)

**This new proposal reduces all phenomena to two types—objects and events—but also introduces a dynamism between these categories that allows for transitions from one to the other.**

**As argued in “La banalité de la saturation,” this transition can be carried out through interpretation:**

the distinction between the modes of phenomenality (for us, between object and event) can be joined to the hermeneutical variations that, as existentialia of Dasein, have (ontological) authority over the phenomenality of entities. That even a stone could sometimes appear as an event depends only upon my gaze... The distinction of phenomena into objects and events thus finds a grounding in the variations of intuition. The more a phenomenon appears as an event (is eventialized), the more it proves itself to be saturated with intuition. The more it appears as an object (is objectivized), the more it proves itself to be poor in intuition. Or we could say: eventness fixes the degree of saturation, and saturation varies according to eventness. This distinction thus has a strictly phenomenological status. But then it is immediately necessary to note that eventness does not characterize only one of the types of the saturated phenomenon (the event in the strict sense, as opposed to the idol, the flesh, and the icon): not only does it determine each of these types, which each put it into operation, but it already defined the phenomenon as given in general. For all phenomena, to one degree or another, appear as they happen—since even technological objects cannot completely erase in themselves the vestiges of something that happened, however obscured it may be. (Marion, 2005, pp. 199-200)

**Since the publication of *Certitudes négatives*, the event constitutes a modality of phenomenality in which phenomena appear by “eventializing” themselves—that is, from their own initiative.**

Nevertheless, this dynamic approach to phenomenalization, in which it is possible to pass from one mode of phenomenality to another through “hermeneutical variations,” also introduces a priority: eventuality is the originary mode, because it corresponds to the originary—and always excessive—modality of givenness. In this sense—as I have argued elsewhere—“every phenomenon is a saturated phenomenon” (Roggero, 2020, pp. 183–187), since every phenomenon proceeds from the excess of its givenness and can, at least potentially, phenomenalize itself as an event, that is, as a saturated phenomenon.

## Conclusion

Indeed, one can discern a certain “evolution” in Marion’s thought, one that is reflected in his conception of phenomenalization, which moves from a static to a dynamic view. In “Le phénomène saturé” and in *Étant donné*, Marion proposes a static characterization of the event by circumscribing it to a type of saturated phenomenon. The event is, first of all, the historical event—the phenomenon that allows for the characterization of the saturated phenomenon that inverts Kant’s categories of quantity.

However, this thematization of the event generates a certain tension with the conception of the event as a determination of the given, also introduced in *Étant donné*. On the one hand, the use of the same term with two distinct senses within a single work creates a degree of confusion. On the other hand, these two conceptions appear to stand in opposition, since the topical classification of the phenomenon proposes a static taxonomy of types of phenomena that fails to articulate coherently with the various determinations of the given—which should apply to every phenomenon insofar as it is given, but in fact operate only with respect to the saturated phenomenon. To maintain that every given phenomenon is characterized by ascending from itself into visibility (anamorphosis), by its individuation (arrival), by imposing itself irrevocably (accomplished fact), by rejecting all construction (incident), and by coming to pass from itself (event), amounts to attributing to poor phenomena and

common-law phenomena characteristics they do not possess. In this sense, the conception of the event as a saturated phenomenon remains embedded within a static framework, one that includes other types of phenomena but fails to successfully integrate with the logic introduced by the notion of the event as a feature of all that is given.

De *surcroît* constitutes an initial attempt to resolve this tension by reformulating the idea of the event as a saturated phenomenon. To this end, Marion expands the category of the historical event into that of the event as such (whether collective, intersubjective, or private). Moreover, he incorporates from the thematization of the event as a determination of the given the idea that it is a modality of phenomenalization that accounts, in particular, for the way in which the phenomenon takes the initiative, referring back to the self of givenness.

Nevertheless, the true resolution of the problem is achieved with the proposal of the banality of saturation, introduced in the 2005 text. It is on the basis of this idea that Marion is able to reformulate his classification of phenomena from a dynamic standpoint, one that pays particular attention to the dynamics of phenomenalization. The new topical classification of the phenomenon, which distinguishes only two modalities of phenomenality—objects and events—better explains the way in which the self of givenness takes the initiative in the operation of phenomenalization and allows for the resolution of the tensions between the idea of the saturated phenomenon and its correspondence with the determinations of the given.

The dynamics of phenomenalization necessarily involve a receptive instance, a subjectivity, which Marion rethinks through the category of the gifted (*adonné*). This receptivity is both passive and active:

To accede to it, not only must a gaze know how to become curious, available, and enacted, but above all it must know how to submit to the demands of the figure to be seen ... [One must] renounce organizing visibility on the basis of free choice or the proper site of a disengaged spectator, in favor of letting visibility be dictated by the phenomenon itself, in itself. (Marion, 2002a, p. 124)

This curious, available and enacted gaze—which undoubtedly entails an ethical responsibility—<sup>9</sup> must decide, in each case, whether it is necessary to surrender to the eventuality of the phenomenon's coming to pass from itself, or whether, through a "hermeneutical variation," it is appropriate to objectify it by containing its excess of meaning within the category of the object. In this way, the dynamic conception of phenomenality introduced by Marion through the notion of the banality of saturation provides a comprehensive account of the process of phenomenalization by fully capturing its dynamism. The phenomenology of givenness ultimately reveals itself as an eventual phenomenology, insofar as it makes eventuality the ultimate meaning of all phenomenalization.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares the absence of any conflict of interest with any institution or organization of any kind. Likewise, the Universidad Católica Luis Amigó assumes no responsibility for the management of copyright by the authors in their articles; therefore, the accuracy and completeness of citations and references are the responsibility of the authors.

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<sup>9</sup> This is the insightful thesis developed by Ezequiel Murga in his article "Hacer justicia a los fenómenos. La responsabilidad de fenomenalizar en la fenomenología de la donación de Jean-Luc Marion [Doing Justice to Phenomena: The Responsibility of Phenomenalizing in Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology of Givenness]" (forthcoming)

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