

Is the “Happening Subjectivity” Still a Subject? Marc Richir’s Conception of Subjective Identity

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Abstract

In contemporary French phenomenology, subjectivity is reconsidered as a receiving instance of the phenomenon understood as an event. That is why French authors characterize subjectivity as the “subject” to whom appearing is given (Jean-Luc Marion’s *adonné*), as the “happening subject” (Henri Maldiney’s existent open to events or Claude Romano’s *advenant*), or as the subject ceaselessly in movement (Renaud Barbaras’ *désir* or Marc Richir’s *aspiration infinie*). In this study situated within the framework of the work of Marc Richir, I present his dynamic conception of subjectivity, and then demonstrate why it still makes sense to speak – even in this case of an extremely dynamic receiving instance of appearing – of a “subject” in the sense of Latin *sub-jacere* (“under-throw”). More precisely, I argue that the conception of “happening subjectivity” necessarily allows for a certain type of subjective persistence or identity – in the sense of a sameness that resists or underlies all changes. In contrast to the classical phenomenology, I demonstrate that the core of this identity must be accounted for otherwise than as the temporal unity of transcendental consciousness or that of *Dasein*, that it must be understood as both a proto-temporal and proto-spatial unity of that which Richir calls “absolute here”, which is the genetic condition of Husserl’s “zero point” as the centre of all bodily orientations.

Keywords: Subjectivity; Identity; Selfhood; Event; Body; French Phenomenology; Marc Richir

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1. *Introduction: the phenomenon understood as an event*

Phenomenology in its new version practised in France today is characterized by its understanding of the phenomenon on the grounds of its evasive sense. In other words, it understands the phenomenon by virtue of its dynamism, spontaneity, and also unpredictability – features that turn the phenomenon into an event (Gondek, Tengelyi 2011; Tengelyi 2010, 2012; Novotný 2010; Sommer 2013, 2014; Maldiney 1991, 316; Romano 1998, 5; Marion 2016, 179; Barbaras 2019b, 43; etc.). This is not to say that one should consider phenomena as visible changes on the level of facts that repeat to a certain extent, and we perceive them as similar to one another. Perceived events serve as a model for phenomena only insofar as there is – apart from their repeatability – an excess of sense in each of them, something new one cannot predict. Even though one is, for instance, quite prepared for an encounter with a friend (in Heideggerian terms: the space-time of the encounter is determined by one’s existential projects encompassing the acquaintance with the friend), one cannot be prepared for the very appearing of the encountered person that transforms the “there” of “being-there” (*Da-sein*) – the emergence of the friend is, each time, the point-origin of a new space-time (cf. Maldiney 1991, 406-408). It is this excess – uncovered by means of a radicalised phenomenological *epoché* – that makes visible events into phenomena or events of sense. Hence, an event of sense is characterized by the fact that one cannot determine in advance its conditions of manifestation because an event brings these conditions with itself; an event of sense is a real encounter happening only once – always for the first time.

This new conception of the phenomenon has led to a reconsideration of all key phenomenological terms, including that of subjectivity. More precisely, it prompted French phenomenologists to definitively liberate phenomena from their captivity in all types of subjectivism. Following in the footsteps of first-generation phenomenologists in France, and above all in the footsteps of Levinas, they hold that an event of sense is neither a work of intentionality nor that of the capacity of understanding Being, but a work of that which manifests itself through the event – an event is first and foremost an expression of appearing

transcendence. Subjectivity must be accordingly reconsidered as a receiving instance of the appearing transcendence. That is why French authors characterize subjectivity as the “subject” to whom appearing is given (Jean-Luc Marion’s *adonné*), as the “happening subject” (Henri Maldiney’s existent open to events or Claude Romano’s *advenant*), or as the subject ceaselessly in movement (Renaud Barbaras’ *désir* or Marc Richir’s *aspiration infinie*).

In this text situated within the framework of the work of Marc Richir, I would like to present his dynamic conception of subjectivity, and then demonstrate why it still makes sense to speak – in this case of an extremely dynamic receiving instance of appearing – of a “subject” in the sense of Latin *sub-jacere* (“under-throw”). More precisely, I shall argue that the conception of “happening subjectivity” allows for a certain type of subjective persistence or identity – in the sense of a sameness that resists or underlies all changes. In contrast to the classical phenomenology, I shall demonstrate that the core of this identity must be accounted for otherwise than as the temporal unity of transcendental consciousness or that of *Dasein*, that it must be understood as both a proto-temporal and proto-spatial unity of that which Richir calls “absolute here”, which is the genetic condition of Husserl’s “zero point” as the centre of all bodily orientations.

2. *What kind of subjectivism is denounced by “new French phenomenology”? The first sketch of the process of phenomenalization and Richir’s criticism of symbolically instituted subjectivity*

Richir’s phenomenology is transcendental because it does not focus on this or that intentional phenomenon but on what makes the phenomenon appear, i.e. the pre-intentional process of phenomenalization (cf. Schnell 2016, 213-214, 226). As inspired by Kant’s reflective judgments, it attempts a transcendental reflection without any pre-given concepts (including those of the transcendental ego and being) determining the phenomenalization in advance (Richir 2018, 15; Richir 2006, 22). The task is, therefore, to elaborate a genetic phenomenology in a more radical sense than that of Husserl, plunge into the depth of the non-given and describe phenomena and nothing but phenomena

(*phénomène comme rien que phénomène*), i.e. phenomena as impersonal processes of the self-generation or self-formation of sense (*sens se faisant*, *Sinnbildung*) taking place in the pre-immanent sphere of transcendental consciousness (Richir 2018, 13-14; Richir 2014, 24).

Although Husserl escaped psychologism, he still preserved its essential form distorting the description of the process of phenomenalization¹, i.e. the symbolic differentiation of the world into beings as objects of consciousness: the appearing is described as the constitution of objects in the acts of transcendental ego (Richir 1998, 441; Richir 2004, 228; Richir 2018, 29-30). But the process of self-formation of sense does not give rise to a correlation within which a sense is being constituted like a noematic unity by an intentional act of consciousness. A sense emerging “in one’s head”, for example, an idea (“having an idea”), is not an intentional object; it is not situated in the momentary now nor is it the now itself. It is an evasive process or mobility. Richir picks up on what Husserl discovers in his *Manuscripts of Bernau*, where he himself focuses on pre-immanent temporal dimensions of transcendental consciousness: retentions and protentions become intertwined in that which Richir calls “presence without assignable present” (*présence sans présent assignable*). They are not retentions and protentions of a “living present” (of an already present idea) but the retentions and protentions *internal* to the ongoing process of the deployment of the idea – the idea (the phenomenological sense) is nothing complete but the process as the *interval between* retentions and protentions (Richir 2006, 20-21).

In contrast to Husserl’s analyses, Richir refuses to delineate this process “mathematically”, that is, as the uniform and monotonous flow of abstract “limit points” (“nows”) within the internal time of consciousness. In every present experience (*Erlebnis*) of the sense, there is an excess, the excess of the process of phenomenalization phenomenologically attested by the events of sense (Husserl’s primal impressions), which reconfigurates what has been given in the process so far, and which makes all particular descriptions of experiences mingled with the descriptions of all other experiences – our experience is an unceasing process (Richir 1993, 71). From a traditional point

of view, these events are nothing but inessential accidents of the sense caused by human finitude but to Richir, these accidents are constitutive of it, and without them, there would not be sense but merely “constellations of identity significativities (*significativités identitaires*)” (Richir 2006, 27, 38-44); these events give sense its proper rhythm invisible in the homogeneous succession of “nows” in which intentional “identical” objects are constituted by transcendental consciousness.

These events are therefore testimonies to the fact that more primitive intentionality, which is the ultimate reason for the continuous modification of intentional consciousness, underlies the Husserlian flow of successive “nows”. The Husserlian “primal impression” (as the source of the continuous modification) is already an abstraction, its content coming from the pre-intentional flow of phenomenization made up of a plurality of affections schematized by the savage essences (*Wesen sauvages*) of the world – the phenomenon is “constituted” both by “immanence” (affectivity) and transcendence (world). (Richir 2006, 23, 26-27; Richir 2004, 522-523). More precisely, according to Richir, the movement of phenomenization is the process of the schematisation of human affectivity in which bodily sensations pass through the filter of pre-intentional, non-figurable and non-fixable schemas of affectivity called *phantasíai*, which results in the events of sense or so-called *phantasíai*-affections. The pre-intentional schemas of affectivity are called *phantasíai* because they are not visible or sensible figures but rather shadows or silhouettes behind intentional figures produced not by intentional imagination but by non-intentional *phantasía*. That is why Richir prefers *phantasía* to imagination and even speaks – referring to Merleau-Ponty – of the “primacy of *phantasía*” (Richir 2015, 176).

I will shed more light on the process of phenomenization further below. What is needed now is to emphasize that the ultimate reason for the excess of phenomenization is the radical exteriority of “physico-cosmological transcendence” (*transcendance physico-cosmologique*) of the world – the sense is always the sense of something other (transcendence). It means that the process of phenomenization implies, besides its proper temporalization, also its proper spatialization. However, just as the process

cannot be reduced to the process of temporalization of *transcendental consciousness*, it cannot be reduced to the process of temporalization/spatialization of the subjectivity understood as *Dasein*. Similarly to Levinas (1979, 275), Maldiney (1991, 419), Marion (2013, 423), Romano (2010, 38), and other thinkers, Richir notices that existential analytic is another project excessively prioritizing human subjectivity by interiorizing the process of phenomenization, subordinating it to the ideal unity of *Dasein* (Richir 2000, 14-17; Richir 2004, 153-195). To Richir, the authentic *Dasein*, individualized by its relation to death, which also guarantees (in the case of a firm attitude towards it) the constancy of being a whole of its existential possibilities, is nothing but a hypostatized metaphysical structure with no phenomenological reality (Richir 2004, 164-181). *Dasein*’s existence cannot be totalized by the authentic signification of death because *Dasein* has no reality beyond its factual possibilities that spring from the original process of phenomenization (Richir 2004, 247) making every metaphysical ground (*Grund*) fall apart (p. 228, 237; cf. p. 185-186; cf. Richir 2018, 23).

To sum up, Richir reproaches both Husserl and early Heidegger for having replaced the selfhood of the phenomenon (in other words: the “evasive” subjectivity proper to the process of phenomenization) with the selfhood of transcendental ego or *Dasein* (Tengelyi 2010, 154-155). Nevertheless, Richir also says that Husserl’s or Heidegger’s mistake is natural as it is inherent in phenomenization itself – the illusion leading to the distortion of the phenomenon is *transcendental*. Transcendental illusion (or also “ontological simulacrum”) makes the transcendental (the phenomenon) appear as the psychological; the natural overlap between the transcendental and the psychological creates the impression that the phenomenon contains something identical, that it wraps itself around an I, and that it is the phenomenon of something (Richir 2018, 19). Thus, the phenomenon appears through what Richir calls “symbolic institution” (*institution symbolique*), which is, though, not of a purely phenomenological origin. He understands it in the sense of Husserl’s *Stiftung* or Merleau-Ponty’s *institution*, i.e. as the establishing of a new dimension of experience in whose light

new experiences make sense and constitute one history. The institution is called “symbolic” because the symbol is exactly that which integrates heterogeneous parts of the process of phenomenalization. Since humans are “symbolic animals”, everything in their experience, being, action, beliefs, thinking, is coded by various cultural symbolic systems of languages, practices, techniques, etc. (Richir 2018, 458-464; Richir 2015, 247; Richir 1993, 29-30, etc.).

For instance, already in perceptual consciousness, the phenomenon is grasped through the determinates (*déterminités*) of language significations that immobilise its movement: when I say “I perceive a table”, it is a description of my perception in which language (the word “table” and its meaning) intervenes in such a way that it puts together all the possibilities of experiencing the table, including this particular experience. This is what our experience looks like – the illusion is transcendental or natural. And yet, it is called “illusion” because the phenomenon is always more than what is given to intentional consciousness, it is, as said above, the indeterminate process of phenomenalization or the phenomenon as nothing but the phenomenon. Having effectuated a radicalised phenomenological *epoché* of all identities, I can no longer describe my experience as a perception of a table, instead of identities, there is the phenomenological concreteness of colours, forms, lines, their relations, etc., or, more precisely, the phenomenological concreteness of affections that are synthesised, always singularly, by the *Wesen sauvages* of the world (which corresponds approximately to Husserl’s passive syntheses). (Richir 2015, 178-181)

More importantly for us, this double movement of the phenomenon (which is both symbolically instituted or unified, and dispersed in the process of phenomenalization) is also a double movement of the self. The human selfhood, relying on the double movement of the phenomenon, oscillates between its symbolic unity and its phenomenological dispersion (Richir 2018, 20).² As is the case of the phenomenon itself, the transcendental illusion makes the self appear as identical with itself and the decisive role is again played by symbols. The process of identification of the self rests upon a “symbolic tautology” which

is nothing else than the absorption of the alterity in the heart of subjectivity by the Same, e.g. by transcendental ego constituting its own experience or by *Dasein* who is his existential possibilities (*Dasein* identifies with itself in the face of death, Richir 2004, 178).³

According to Richir, the problem stems from the fact that this symbolic identity of the I overshadows the real phenomenological nature of the self, the real nature of the contact of human affectivity with itself; symbolic identity says more than is contained in the contact: it says identity that gives the I being. But identity is nothing but a symbolic representation of the self detached from itself which is always already and forever at play in the process of phenomenalization (Richir 2014, 13-23; Richir 1998, 446). Therefore, to respond to the question in the title of this section, it is the symbolically instituted subjectivity – incapable of doing justice to “evential” process of sense – that is denounced not only by Richir but by all the authors of “new phenomenology”. In what follows, I will go into the real nature of human subjectivity. As said above, it is a radicalized or “hyperbolic *epoché*” (of all identities) that liberates us from the circle of the identity of the self (in which it always encounters the same self) and shows us our singular and changing style of appearing (Richir 2018, 529). Humans are symbolic animals but they are also open to phenomenal fields providing all symbolic expressions with their concrete content and life (Richir 2018, 463-464; Richir 2014, 31, 104). The real phenomenological self, the “barbaric self” (Richir 2018, 23), is the self of this dispersion or phenomenalization, in which it is no longer the I effectuating *epoché* but the self as the inner reflexivity of phenomenalization. The whole process of phenomenalization reflected by the “barbaric self” starts with what Richir calls the “moment” of the sublime.

3. *Why is the symbolically instituted subjectivity an illusion? Richir’s conception of the self as “infinite aspiration”*

According to Kant’s most famous theory of the sublime, the feeling of the sublime occurs in the encounter with “a formless object” as a presentation of a concept of reason.⁴ As no

adequate presentation of the concept of reason is possible, every such presentation does violence to the imagination as a faculty of presentation (Kant 2000, 129). In his phenomenological theory of the “moment” of the sublime, Richir develops Kant’s theory by placing the sublime within the “moment” in which pre-intentional affectivity (and not the intentionally structured imagination) encounters radical exteriority that cannot be schematized in it. However, for Richir, there is no experience of the sublime because the “moment” of the sublime constitutes the very genetic condition of all experience⁵, including the experience of the beautiful or of the sublime as depicted by Kant. The “moment” of the sublime is the most archaic genetic phenomenological register⁶ in which the movement of the phenomenon and, *ipso facto*, phenomenology begins (Richir 2010, 85). Therefore, in the following section, I will enter the realm of what could be called a “phenomenological metaphysics” in the sense of a discipline elucidating the “irrational fact” of subjectivity.⁷ That is why Richir goes beyond the borders of phenomenology and draws upon the work of psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott who deals with the problem of the birth of human subjectivity. Under the concept of the “moment” of the sublime, Richir interprets Winnicott’s (empirical) theory within the framework of transcendental phenomenology. This is how he elaborates a genetic phenomenology in a more radical sense than Husserl: relying on Winnicott’s (empirical) theory, he – to a certain degree – speculatively constructs the pre-intentional depths of phenomenalization.

According to Winnicott, in individual mental development, the mothers’ face is even the precursor of the famous Lacan’s mirror stage (in which the baby recognises herself in her mirror image). Winnicott writes: “What does the baby see when she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is herself.” (Winnicott 2005, 151) But what happens here in the eyes of the French phenomenologist? Along with her caring mother, the baby, at the beginning conceived as an animal blind affectivity not being aware of herself, constitutes what Richir calls “*chôra*”⁸ or “*giron transcendental*” (also “*giron maternel*”) in which the mother, internally empathizing with her baby, takes care of her needs. Within this proto-space of

"transcendental interfactivity", the mother feels her baby's needs, such as hunger or the need for warmth, as well as the satisfaction of these needs – she feels them in her own body. However, this somatic or affective community between the mother and her baby is not an intersubjective space shared by two people, it is more like a dream without space or reality being constituted for the baby as of yet (Richir 2006, 282): the mother's breast, for instance, is not hers, it is a breast belonging to everything surrounding it and constituting *chôra* (along with the warmth of the mother's body, her smell, etc.). (Richir 2006, 279)

The emergence of the baby's self occurs at the "moment" of the sublime (Richir 2014, 137-142). This "moment" is prepared once the baby starts feeling the satisfaction of her needs as pleasure from the mother's love. It is the affection of love that leads to the above-mentioned exchange of regards, and subsequently to the birth of the baby's archaic subjectivity (Richir 2010, 42-43, 55-57). In the light of the mother's love, needs are no longer finite and satisfiable but infinite and unsatisfiable (Richir 2010, 37-38); satisfaction fulfils needs while pleasure from love exceeds or "hypercondenses" the baby's affectivity (Richir 2010, 57), containing henceforth more than it can bear, which leads to its splitting, to the minimal contact of affectivity with itself (Richir 2010, 55; Richir 2014, 138). Affectivity begins feeling itself; the baby feels herself as regarded by her loving mother, she feels herself as regarded not from the mother's eyes or her physical body (*Körper*), which has not yet been constituted, but from "somewhere" behind the eyes, from the mother's "living body" (*Leib*) which communicates directly with the baby's newborn "primordial *Leib*" (Richir 2006, 286).

To put it another way, animal blind affectivity is now aware of itself without knowing itself or observing itself in the mirror (Richir 2010, 113); it "reflects" itself not as the sum of the condensed affectivity but as the *plurality* of its various affections felt "from the inside" (it is aware of these affections as *its* affections); affectivity in the sense of condensed affectivity reflects itself "internally" only as being schematised (in various affections) by something which is not affectivity, by the transcendence of the world. In other terms, the minimal contact of affectivity with itself is coextensive with the infinite escape of

what Richir calls absolute transcendence (*fuite infinie de la transcendance absolue*). It is solely in relation to the absolute outside, which cannot be schematised, that affectivity constitutes itself as an inside (Richir 2010, 60). In contrast to the “physico-cosmological transcendence” of the world – appearing through various affections – the absolute transcendence does not appear and cannot be aptly described other than as infinitely escaping, as *the very fact of the transcendence of the world*. The world is “the face of the absolute transcendence turned towards us” (Richir 2015, 211).⁹

The bottom line is that affectivity – as having alterity in itself – can never coincide with itself; the self is an eternal movement towards itself (Richir 2010, 91). In the “moment” of the sublime, division (*Spaltung*) of the self occurs: the first self, affectivity in its sum, the mass of the affective body, is a genetic precursor of the transcendental self that observes its own experiencing while the second self is part of phenomenalization, it is the “*ject*” of the sub-*ject*, i.e. that which is “thrown” or pluralities of affections in which affectivity feels itself (Richir 2010, 67). And it is this second self, i.e. affectivity insofar as it is schematised by the transcendence of the world, by its savage essences (*Wesen sauvages*), which keeps affectivity from the coincidence with itself and therefore thwarts all attempts of affectivity to (symbolically) identify with itself (Richir 2010, 90-91). From this follows that affectivity (entering in contact with itself or capable of “auto-affection”) cannot be absolute as affirmed by Michel Henry.¹⁰ If affectivity were absolute, it would be blind in relation to itself (Richir 2010, 68). Given that it is not blind, it means that there is a minimal distance of affectivity in relation to itself, a distance generated by the infinite escape of the absolute transcendence in the heart of affectivity.

Since Richir describes not the absolute transcendence behind phenomena but its traces in affectivity, this theory of the “moment” of the sublime and the infinite escape of the absolute transcendence is still phenomenological. The reflection of affectivity and its eternal movement to itself are such traces of the escape of the absolute transcendence (Richir 2015, 209). The archaic, divided self constitutes itself in two fundamental affections (implied in all particular affections) of “nostalgia” and

“infinite aspiration”: the infinite movement from the self to the self, the infinite aspiration (desire, *Sehnsucht*) of the self is rooted in the nostalgia for the “moment” of absolute pleasure (*jouissance absolue*), genetically preceding the division of the self (Richir 2010, 58-61).

4. *Is subjectivity conceived as “infinite aspiration” (desire, Sehnsucht) still a subject? A brief sketch of one current debate*

The archaic subjectivity, i.e. affectivity in relation to itself, which is the phenomenological base for the constitution of the intentional I, is nothing identical or completely constituted. The archaic self only discovers itself by spanning the abyss of the infinite escape of absolute transcendence; it reflects itself not as a mirror image but only through various multiple affections as modulations of affectivity by the transcendence of the world (Richir 2010, 75). The subjectivity’s mode of being is hence existence in the sense of ek-stasis as a movement from the self (stasis) to the self (transcending and appearing in the world) whereby the self as “stasis” is being constantly animated (Richir 2010, 90),

In order to indicate how such a conception contributes to current phenomenological discussions in France, we must return for a while to the conception of the phenomenon as event, and to the consequences some authors draw from it for the issue of selfhood. The unceasing animation of the self by events of sense, i.e. the fact that selfhood is incessantly at play, has led two other contemporary French phenomenologists, Henri Maldiney and Claude Romano, to define selfhood as the existent’s capacity to be implicated in what happens to her. The existent is implied in unexpected events of sense, happening only once, that enter into existence and open up *new* worlds, bring *new* existential possibilities from which the existent is to understand herself differently (cf. Maldiney 1991, 322-323, 351-352, 422-423; Romano 1998, 125-127).¹¹ It was exactly this conception of selfhood that provoked the question I formulate in the title of this study: Is this “happening subjectivity” still a subject? Does the fact that the existent changes – according to the way she

endures the events happening to her – mean that selfhood is reducible to this happening?

Richir – who does not consider “happening” or “ek-stasis” of the existent without its “stasis” – is not the only author to respond negatively. In his debate with Maldiney, Barbaras, for his part, reminds that phenomenology must escape from all forms of empiricism, including the “evential empiricism” (according to which one is what one experiences in events), by maintaining a minimal difference between receptivity (openness to events) and that which is received (events), a difference without which there is no openness or receptivity because receptivity coincides with what is received (Barbaras 2019a, 255). This is surely true but it is not completely fair to ascribe such an empiricism to Maldiney. Nor can it be ascribed to Romano. For what one may call (with Barbaras) the subjective difference is implied even in the conception of “happening subjectivity” (Maldiney’s existent open to events or Romano’s *advenant*): what is constitutive of the happening subjectivity is that it is *transformed* by events, so it cannot be reducible to them. As Maldiney puts it, an event is a transformation of the existent “permanently anchored” in the world.¹² Similarly, according to Romano, an event transforms the way one is in the world, that is, it transforms one’s personal history made up of all the past events one has experienced in one’s life. Consequently, these events have to be somehow deposited in what Romano calls “transcendental memory”, which is a capacity of being-in-the-world whereby past events do not cease to influence its present existential projects (cf. Romano 2012, 204-210). The important implication for us is that this idea of memory or personal history indicates a feature pertaining to subjective identity or persistence. The questions are then the following: what is this “under-throw” (*sub-jacere*) or “underlying thing” (*ὑποκείμενον*), i.e. the proper subjective dimension of existence, which somehow resists its continual modification in events of sense? How is it possible that events sediment and form one’s personal history? If Maldiney and Romano can be blamed for anything, it is not that this problem of a new reformulation of the classical problem of subjective persistence is completely absent in their work but that it is left largely unexplained, not to say ignored by the authors of

“evential empiricism”.¹³ The main reason of this – rather deliberate – omission is that the problem of selfhood is associated not only with the subjective or enduring features, but also, and perhaps first and foremost, with the opposite pole of the phenomenological correlation: with the transcendent world and events. And it seems legitimate to limit one’s phenomenological project and focus on this dynamic aspect of human existence. However, if we want to shed some light on the issue of subjective persistence and on the relation between it and subjectivity’s happening, we should address the work of other authors, and especially that of Richir.¹⁴

As said above, events of sense are conditioned by the very mode of being of subjectivity which is ek-stasis or “eternal becoming” (Richir 2010, 133) as the movement from the self to the self. Hence, Richir might have explicitly claimed that Maldiney’s existent liable (*transpassible*) to events or Romano’s *advenant* understanding himself from events are phenomenologically conditioned by the division of the self in the “moment” of the sublime. He claims it rather implicitly: “*The event ... may occur in every moment of experience ... which is, every time, the echo of the sublime ‘in service’ (en fonction).* For the sublime is a ‘moment’, and not an event.”¹⁵ Consequently, if the “happening subjectivity” is “born” in the “moment” of the sublime and is understood as “ek-stasis”, and if we attempt to answer the question of its identity or persistence, we should focus in detail on its dimension referred to as “stasis”. For the purposes of this study, it does not matter that Richir does not employ the terminology of the “evential empiricism” and does not speak of “personal history” of sedimentation of events one encounters in one’s life but – with reference to the concepts of the “internal history of life” (Binswanger) and “transcendental history” (Husserl) – of “internal history” in the sense of sedimentation of the process of phenomenalization (cf. Richir 2004, 229). For the question we face is the following: What is that which underpins either personal (evential) or internal history, which enables the above-mentioned sedimentation of sense and hence helps to create this or that concrete subjectivity (a person)? In what does the properly subjective dimension of the “happening subjectivity”, its identity, consist?

5. Richir's conception of subjective identity

As has been shown above, in the “moment” of the sublime, the animal mass of the baby's affective body, the chaos of bodily sensations (Richir 2010, 94-95) without phenomenological sense, passes through the filter of transcendent *Wesen sauvages* of the world (Richir 2010, 97) and becomes the human affectivity related to itself through the plurality of *phantasíai*-affectations. To put it another way, it is as if the archaic community of the affective love between the mother and her baby, i.e. the *Leiblichkeit* of *chôra*, rolled up into itself and created what Richir calls the “primordial *Leib*” of the baby, a seat of *chôra* (*un siège de chôra*) (Richir 2006, 276). It is clear that the mass of the affective body becomes *Leiblich* in a more profound sense than Husserl's *Leib* (Richir 2010, 198): the fact that Richir delineates the archaic state of the affective community between the mother and her baby, and the subsequent genesis of the archaic self, i.e. the fact that Richir delineates the “corporeality” of the self on the pre-conscious level, enables to grasp the difference and mutual genesis of Husserl's *Leib* and *Leibkörper* (cf. Forestier 2015, 163). It is this genesis I will focus on in the remainder of this study.

The mass of affective body becomes *Leiblich* in the sense of the most archaic, non-spatial *Leib* (Richir 2010, 56, 108, 206), but not yet *Leib* in the sense of one's own body (*Leibkörper*). Even though this primordial *Leib* is designated by Richir as a “place” (*lieu, topos*), it is not the place of one's physical body situated in the world – the baby's living body is not “a bag delimited by her skin” (Richir 2006, 270) – but rather the place of the world that feels itself (Richir 2010, 68; Richir 2006, 285), or the place of a being-in-the-world. Let's return to what has been said: the baby's primordial *Leib* is a seat of *chôra* (*un siège de chôra*) whose *Leiblichkeit* is that of *chôra* (Richir 2006, 333); the flows of affectivity between the baby's body and that of the mother are seen only by the external observer but in fact their “seats” slip indefinitely into each other (Richir 2006, 273; Richir 2004, 249). The reason for this is that it is the same “gap” (*écart*) thanks to which the baby is in relation both to herself and also to others (Richir 2006, 302-303, 332): the primordial *Leib* is “an inside”

only in relation to the absolute outside that makes communicate all the seats of *chôra*, that of the baby as well as that of the mother and other people participating in taking care of the child. How does this communication take place? This will be clear if we remember that the infinite escape of the absolute outside (transcendence) is coextensive both with the birth of the self and that of the appearing world: it is thanks to the liberation of transcendent shared *phantasiai* (savage essences of the world) from their bond to this or that mass of affectivity (Richir 2004, 276) that constitutes the basis for the most archaic *Einführung* (Richir 2010, 56); this communication is neither an intentional imagination of what is going on in the mother’s mind nor the perception of the expression of her physical body but the situation in which the mother is literally “lived” by her baby, and *vice versa*, through their interconnected affectivities schematized by the same transcendence of the world (Richir 2004, 517-518).

This amounts to saying that the most archaic self, the primordial *Leib*, is on the one hand – as a reflection of the world itself, as interconnected with other seats of *chôra* – anonymous, and yet, on the other hand – as fixed by its mass of affectivity in a seat of *chôra*, in an “absolute here” (*ici absolu*) – it is singular (Richir 2010, 108). And it is exactly the primordial *Leib* as anchored in an absolute here which constitutes the core of the subjective identity, a sort of constancy resisting to the events of sense, which is the basis for the subsequent (genetically speaking) continuity or identity of consciousness. The primordial *Leib* anchored in an absolute here is a sort of invisible and irrepresentable (or infigurable) unity of multiple “places of *Leib*” (*lieux du Leib*) in which it is localized: the baby plays with her own body, she puts, for example, her fist into the mouth (one of the “places of *Leib*” is constituted by the “internal feelings”, *Empfindnisse*, located in the mouth), or she tries to make various gestures and touches various objects (other “places” are then localized in her fingers), or “babbling”, i.e. imitates various sounds that resonate differently in her head than the sounds from the outside. By all these activities, the contact of the two divided selves intensifies and begins to constitute “the inside space” (*espace du dedans*) by which the baby’s *Leib* individualizes itself further within the proto-space of *chôra* (Richir 2006, 276-278).

Its unity or identity, which is not yet the identity of “me” but the most archaic genetic condition of “me”, consists in the fact that all its transformations or modulations, i.e. all the modulations of affectivity in the events of sense, preserve a sort of homeostatic equilibrium, designated by Richir as absolute “thrust” (*poussée*) or “élan” (Richir 2004, 273), whose consistency is felt – “appears” – through “*synaisthesis*”, a sort of unifying archaic kinesthesia, a sort of “global” feeling of movements of the primordial *Leib* (Richir 2010, 56). Despite their transformative power, no events of sense, constantly animating the primordial *Leib*, may threaten its “identity” because these events appear only in relation to the “places of *Leib*” (Richir 2006, 268), and are felt “from inside” through *synaisthesis*.

Thus, it turns out that the continuity of the “happening subjectivity” is based on the continuity of the primordial *Leib* which is nothing but *living* (or *evential*) unity of the self constantly moving towards the self. This is to say that the identity of the self has the only significant limit: as the “absolute here” does not exist without the gap (*écart*) coextensive with the infinite escape of the absolute transcendence, it cannot be the “underlying thing” (*ὑποκείμενον*) in the sense of absolute autonomy; for the self may be destroyed by some traumatic limit events such as death or trauma leading to psychosis, in which cases the self enters in contact with the absolute transcendence (and hence loses the contact with itself). The self is the (living) self only by constantly spanning the gap of the escaping transcendence (Richir 2010, 61-62, 65, 77-78).

Except for these limit events, the primordial *Leib* anchored in the “absolute here” preserves its unity which finally becomes – in the last phase of transcendental genesis of the intentional self I will briefly address in this study – the unity of Husserl’s *Leib* anchored in “zero point” (*Nullpunkt*) in the sense of the centre of bodily orientations. The primordial *Leib* does not initially appear as *Leibkörper*, as one’s physical living body (Richir 2006, 275); it is a “place” for what is about to be constituted as *Körper*, the physical body. This constitution is a very complex movement in which the decisive role is played by the absolute here of the primordial *Leib* as the place of transcendental history, sedimentations of sense, and kinesthetic

habits (Richir 2004, 275). Since the baby is simultaneously evolving physically and her organs are being differentiated, such as the sight beginning to distinguish forms, and above all the form of the mother’s physical body (Richir 2014, 153-156), the baby starts to consider herself – in a new intersubjective form of empathizing (*Einfühlung*), described in detail by Husserl – as an “absolute here” different from other “absolute heres” (*ici absolus*) situated in other places of the intersubjective space (Richir 2014, 154-155; cf. Husserl 1989, §§36, 46). It means that “absolute heres” – in transcendental interfactivity mutually interchangeable or intertwined – become different places in the space of the visible world in which are situated various *Leibkörper* so that the mother’s *Leibkörper* tends to be one among many. She becomes “the other” as her *Leib* only appears with appearances giving to it a “figure”, i.e. in the form of *Leibkörper* situated “there”, which at the same time individualizes further the baby’s *Leib* as belonging to *Leibkörper* situated “here” (Richir 2004, 277; Richir 2006, 286). Nevertheless, the baby does not yet have at her disposal an image or representation of her physical body situated in the space; her regard is the regard of her seeing absolute here aimed at the visible deployed “behind” her skin but the baby herself is invisible; her mere situation in the visible is her animated “here” – she is the inside of the visible outside (Richir 2014, 155-156; Richir 2006, 276, 290; Richir 2004, 278).

The “humanization” of the baby is then accomplished by the constitution of the register of intentionality in which the temporalization of the sense becomes the temporalization of Husserl’s living presents with their retentions and protentions within the framework of the absolute flow of internal temporal consciousness. It was mainly in the last ten years of his life that Richir shed new light on the relationship between the movement of the sense-formation and the given, symbolically instituted sense, and depicted in greater detail how intentional experience is generated, how phenomenological concreteness is transposed to *noemata* and *noeses* of intentional consciousness, and how spontaneous contact of affectivity with itself becomes the opposition between the positing I and the posited I. The pivotal role is played by the institution of imagination that fixes and

divides evasive phenomena into *Bildobjekt* and *Bildsujet*, *Bildobjekt* being merely an aspect or profile (*Abschattung*, figurative (re)presentation) of intentionally posited *Bildsujet*. The phenomenological concreteness of *phantasíai*-affects, transposed into the affects coming from the outside, hence constitutes nothing but material (*hylé*) for acts of consciousness, the material which is reconfigured (deformed) according to the significations of language. The transcendence is no longer absolute, it is reduced to the pre-given (*Vorgegeben*) which is animated by the intentional meaning (Richir 2010, 110-135).

This is how the movement of *sens se faisant* is interrupted, and the self reaches the self – and poses itself symbolically. And this is also how the primordial *Leib* as the proto-space that guarantees the continuity or identity of the self becomes the “absolute here” of one’s physical body (*Leibkörper*) or Husserl’s “zero point” in the sense of central point of all orientations of the physical body (cf. Husserl 1989, 166). The identity of the self now appears as the unity of the living body, as the place (*Leib*) or the unmoveable limit (*limite immobile*) of the physical body (*Körper*) (Richir 2006, 285, 288).

Conclusion

If we return to our initial problems why it still makes sense to speak – in the case of an extremely dynamic receiving instance of appearing which is subjectivity reconsidered on the basis of events – of a “subject” in the sense of a sameness that resists all events, and how should we describe this subjective persistence or identity, we may conclude that the “happening subjectivity” is still a subject because it is nothing other than the living body anchored in the “absolute here”. The proper subjective dimension of the self – its *identity* – is constituted by the living body feeling itself from inside through “*synaisthesis*”, a sort of unifying archaic kinesthesia. It is only thanks to this identity that the process of phenomenalization (events of sense) can sediment and form a personal or internal history – his or her *ipseity* in the sense of personal uniqueness. The concrete subjectivity, a person, is nothing but the result of this sedimentation finally modified through the symbolic institution into a “personal story” one can narrate. Since the movement of

phenomenalization and of the self is double, the internal or personal transcendental histories are after all overlapped by the history of the symbolically instituted I that can be narrated, by history made up of various *objectively perceived* events protruding from the infinite invisible process of phenomenalization (Richir 2004, 230).¹⁶ It is, therefore, the narrated history that definitively overcomes the anonymity of the archaic self without threatening its identity or continuity. The price for this *Stiftung* is however the “transposition” or deformation both of the phenomenon and of the savage self, in which phenomenological concreteness becomes imaginations and perceptions, i.e. noematic correlates of intentional acts of the subject who is an empirical I with her social and historical concreteness.

NOTES

¹ More precisely, even though in his phenomenological description Husserl mixed the reflection of the phenomenalization with its determination, Richir appreciates that he never completely subordinated the former to the latter (cf. Richir 2018, 29).

² In the last years of his life, Richir shed new light on the relationship between the movement of sense-formation and the given, symbolically instituted sense, and depicted in greater detail how intentional experience is generated. I sketch the most important phases of this genesis in the last section of this study.

³ Symbolic tautology was most famously formulated by Fichte in his *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge*. For Fichte, “I is I” or “I am” is the highest factum of empirical consciousness and the first, absolutely unconditional principle of the science of knowledge because to posit anything implies self-positing in which the I that posits is implied in the I posited. “A is A” as a judgment, the general form of human knowledge is effectuated by consciousness, which is an element of continuity unifying the subject and object of the judgment: “[W]ithin the self ... there is something that is permanently uniform, forever one and the same; and hence the X [necessary connection] that is absolutely posited can also be expressed as I = I; I am I.” (Fichte 1982, 95-96).

⁴ “The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality: so that the beautiful seems to be taken as the presentation of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, but the sublime as that of a similar concept of reason” (Kant 2000, 128).

⁵ For this reason, Richir puts “moment” into quotation marks: there is no moment in time in which one could experience the sublime.

⁶ The “phenomenological register” can be defined as a *particular* field of possibility, a system of coordinates or a manner of the phenomenon’s appearing, that is, a manner in which phenomenological plurality is connected within the framework of a certain temporal, spatial, etc., structure (cf. Forestier 2015, 34). In his genetic phenomenology, Richir distinguishes above all the register of the phenomenological basis (the phenomenological concreteness of *phantásiai*-affections) from every other register (e.g., the register of the imagination or perception) in which the basis is deformed by several types of *Stiftungen* (cf. Richir 2014, 24; Richir 2000, 457-466). As we will see, the “moment” of the sublime is the most archaic register that launches the movement proper to the phenomenological basis. Richir’s transcendental phenomenology describes pure movements of phenomena as well as their twists and interruptions as they pass into other registers (Richir 2014, 79).

⁷ Barbaras speaks of the “metaphysics of facticity”: “Ce qui se fait donc jour ici, à la faveur de la facticité originaire de l’ego, c’est bien un sens neuf de la métaphysique comme métaphysique de la facticité, métaphysique qui a pour objet propre les faits ultimes et, plus particulièrement, le premier d’entre eux, celui dont tous dépendent, à savoir le fait de l’ego” (Barbaras 2013, 285).

⁸ When Richir describes the archaic “space” of the affective community, he employs Plato’s term of *chôra*. According to *Timaeus*, *chôra* is the “receptacle (or nurse, if you like) of all creation”, i.e. the field in which the created world as the copy of its eternal model subsists. Cf. Plato 2008, 40 (*Timaeus*, 49a8-9).

⁹ As the absolute transcendence is on its infinite run (*en fuite infinie*), the world – as well as the self – cannot identify with itself and, by this fact, must be described as the plurality of worlds or the phenomena-of-worlds (*phénomènes-de-mondes*). This triad the self/world/absolute transcendence corresponds to three Kantian metaphysical ideas of soul/world/god (cf. Richir 2015, 207-209).

¹⁰ “L’affectivité révèle l’absolu dans sa totalité parce qu’elle n’est rien d’autre que son adhérence parfaite à soi, que sa coïncidence avec soi, parce qu’elle est l’auto-affectation de l’être dans l’unité absolue de son immanence radicale. Dans l’unité absolue de son immanence radicale l’être s’affecte lui-même et s’éprouve de telle manière qu’il n’y a rien en lui qui ne l’affecte et ne soit éprouvé par lui, aucun contenu transcendant à l’expérience intérieure de soi qui le constitue” (Henry 2003, 858). Richir situates himself between M. Henry and E. Levinas: the former’s subjectivity is “inside” so that one cannot come out, while the latter’s subjectivity is “outside” so that one cannot come back inside (Richir 2015, 224). Richir’s affectivity, i.e. affectivity in relation to itself, affectivity as “an inside,” is nothing but movement constantly spanning the gap generated by “the outside” – the inside is fundamentally marked by the outside and, therefore, not perfectly adherent to itself.

¹¹ For a more detailed exposé of Maldiney’s and Romano’s “evential” conception of selfhood, especially in contrast to Heidegger’s conception in *Being and Time*, see my article “Personal Uniqueness and Events”, to be published in *Human Studies*.

¹² “En deçà de toute expérience ou attention centrale, nous sommes présents à un fond de monde où nous avons notre ancrage permanent. Ce que nous

attendons d’un ancrage sans pouvoir nous dérober à cette foi originaire, à cette *Urdoxa*, c’est sa stabilité [...] *Un événement bouleversant est celui qui déstabilise sans retour cet ancrage*. Celui qu’il atteint ne peut plus reprendre fond” (Maldiney 1991, 270-271). My emphasis.

¹³ I have to remark here that Romano’s position is still evolving and the relation between his early theory of selfhood—laid out in his books on the event—and the theory he holds today is not absolutely clear. With regard to his habilitation work (Romano 2010), one may say that while “evential selfhood” is still relevant for his current theory, Romano takes into account two other important aspects of human existence neglected in his books on event, namely its “natural” capabilities (corporeality) and culture. However, although he recently published a book on “being-oneself” (Romano 2019), he shed no light on the relation between what he designates as three different capabilities (*capacités*) of the existent, especially between the existent’s corporeality and her capability of being open to events.

¹⁴ Note that since he describes subjectivity as “infinite aspiration” (desire, *Sehnsucht*), Richir is obviously in agreement with Barbaras who determines the mode of being of subjectivity as “desire” (Barbaras 2008). Even though Barbaras often says that he does not share Richir’s transcendentalism, insofar as “transcendental” means “going under the given”, Barbaras’ phenomenological project of searching for an “*a priori* of the Husserlian *a priori*” (Barbaras 2013, 7) is very close to that of Richir. However, there are also some differences. For example, Barbaras thematizes the most archaic condition of the movement of desire under the term of “archi-event”, while Richir correctly remarks that the “moment” of the sublime is far from being an event. I have attempted to analyse the reasons behind this Richirian affirmation in my article “Archéologie du sujet phénoménologique d’après Marc Richir et Renaud Barbaras.” *Interpretationes. Studia Philosophica Europeanea* 2019 (1): 209-224.

¹⁵ “[L]’événement ... *peut surgir à tout moment de l’expérience, de manière apparemment arbitraire, par surprise, celle-ci étant l’écho, chaque fois, du sublime ‘en fonction’*. Car le sublime est un ‘moment’, et non pas un événement” (Richir 2010, 73). My emphasis.

¹⁶ The issue of *ipseity* in Richir is so complex and goes beyond the scope of this article that I may only refer to the recent excellent book by I. Fazakas (2020).

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[All translations in the text, from French to English, are mine].

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