

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Miklós Nyíró

TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF PHILOSOPHIES OF THE EVENT: EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION*

The concept of the ‘event’ did not play a significant role in the history of Western philosophy until the 20th century — with the Stoics perhaps being the only exception.¹ This philosophical tradition has mostly ascribed to ‘events’ a secondary, derivative status: They have generally been conceived as modifications of the attributes of substances or subjects.

Nietzsche, however, revealed that this traditional approach is based on an ‘inferential schema’ encoded in the very grammar — in this “folk metaphysics”² — of Indo-European languages: The constraint of the subject-predicate structure of sentence construction gives rise to the interpretative pattern according to which every predicate presupposes a subject, and every process or event is interpreted as the ‘action’ of some agent(s) that brings about a change in the predicate attributed to a subject.³ Nietzsche contrasts this with his own conception of ‘reality’, which is free from all kinds of linguistic (lexical-grammatical) as well as conceptual-logical-

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¹ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: Athlone Press, 1990), 4–9; Claude Romano, *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 5–10.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 214, no. 354.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Project Gutenberg, 2009), no. 17, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm#link2HCH0001>.

metaphysical schematization, namely, reality as a ‘swirling sea of forces’, pure ‘becoming’, an image that exerted a fruitful influence on later philosophies of the event.⁴

Subsequent thought focusing on ‘relations,’ ‘processes,’ and ‘becoming’ also emerged largely in opposition to the long tradition of Greek substance-ontology, of which the Cartesian concept of the ‘subject’ — which defined modernity for centuries — was also an heir. In fact, many philosophical endeavors of the 19th and 20th centuries can be seen as a struggle against the formalism, self-referentiality, and self-sufficiency inherent in Descartes’ idea of *cogito me cogitare* (the subject as a reflective, thinking substance), and, more broadly, against the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy as a fundamental ontological framework.⁵ Nevertheless, alongside Heidegger, it was especially the process philosophies of Bergson and Whitehead that challenged the traditional static, substantialist, and mechanistic ontologies in the most direct and comprehensive way, conceiving of reality as a system of a continuous creative unfolding, or that of processes (a complex network of ‘actual occasions’ in their mutual involvements in relational structures), respectively.

Over the course of the past century, however — in connection with the aforementioned endeavors, and more generally as part of efforts to overcome the so-called ‘metaphysical tradition’ that, while largely dominating the history of European philosophy, sought to uncover the necessary structures of reality and thus ignored contingencies — it is the concept of the event that has increasingly and explicitly

⁴ For an analysis of how Nietzsche’s anti-metaphysical endeavor is underpinned by his early theory of language — rooted in the so-called German ‘semasiological’ tradition — which rejects the traditionally assumed mimetic-representational relationship between ‘reality’ and its linguistic expression, thereby offering a critique of ‘impure reason’ as embodied in language, see Miklós Nyíró, “Nietzsche mint az eseményfenomenológia előfutára [Nietzsche as a Pioneer of a Phenomenology of Events],” *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis, Sectio Philosophica* 27, no. 3 (2023): 136–153. On the formulation of Nietzsche’s undertaking as “a critique of impure reason,” see Joseph Kopperschmidt, “Nietzsches Entdeckung der Rhetorik. Rhetorik im Dienste der Kritik der unreinen Vernunft,” in *Nietzsche oder „Die Sprache ist Rhetorik“*, ed. Josef Kopperschmidt and Helmut Schanze (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 39–62. It is noteworthy, furthermore, that Nietzsche understands even this revelatory breakthrough enacted by his own philosophy as an intrusion of ‘reality’ into the schematized human world, and he illuminates such an intrusion with the metaphor of ‘lightning’, through which the impersonal construction (e.g., ‘it’s lightning’, ‘it’ raining’, ‘es blitzt’, ‘es regnet’) and, in certain languages, the middle voice itself provide an adequate linguistic articulation of the ‘innocence of becoming.’

⁵ One can refer here, for example, to Hegel’s concept of the formation of consciousness in relation to material work, Marx’s emphasis on the sociality of praxis, the Kierkegaardian focus on the paradoxical nature of human existence, Nietzsche’s critique of Europe’s theoretical culture, Freud’s concepts of the sub- and unconscious, Dilthey’s concept of life, Husserl’s attempt to trace how the entire realm of pure consciousness is constructed through the constitutive acts of transcendental consciousness, and many other philosophical endeavors, including the postmodern *topos* of the ‘death of the subject’. American pragmatism, which emerged in the second half of the 19th century, also began with a comprehensive critique of Cartesianism, rejecting its sharp distinction between subject and object, the mind-body dualism, the pursuit of certainty, as well as the ‘spectatorial’ conceptions of knowledge in general.

come to the forefront of philosophical interest across many different areas of philosophy. A growing number of philosophers have argued that, in describing reality, events should be accorded an independent, even primary and originary — or at the very least, ‘positive-constitutive’ — status. For about seven decades, we have witnessed — and continue to witness — a remarkable flourishing of continental philosophies of the event, a development that can be traced largely to the works of Bergson, Nietzsche, and, above all, Heidegger. Beginning in the 1970s, the concept of the event also came to the fore in the analytic philosophical tradition, particularly in the context of its ‘metaphysical turn’.⁶ Thus, after Western philosophy had neglected the concept of the event for millennia, in recent times both the continental and the analytic philosophical traditions have been discussing it intensively and in diverse ways — theoretical reflection on the nature of events and their role in shaping reality has, so to speak, become one of the cornerstones of contemporary philosophy.⁷

⁶ The program for the ‘rehabilitation’ of metaphysics — in contrast to the anti-metaphysical stance of the logical positivists, and also Quine — was initiated, on the one hand, by Strawson’s work, primarily through his distinction between a ‘descriptive’ metaphysics, which analyzes the structure of the concepts in the common-sense worldview, and a ‘revisionist’ metaphysics, which aims to replace that conceptual structure with a more appropriate one. However, the real breakthrough in this field came particularly from Kripke’s metaphysics — which is based on modal intuitions and applies to all possible worlds — and from Putnam’s semantic externalism, which relies on Kripke’s causal theory of reference. Regarding the nature of events, three distinctly separate theories emerged within the analytic tradition. These are: 1) the conception that individuates events through a specific region of spacetime regarded as their metaphysical constituent; 2) the so-called causal theory, according to which an event is an entity that plays a specific role in the causal processes occurring in the world; and 3) the theory that regards events as the exemplification of properties or relations of objects (substances) at a given time. On analytic metaphysics and competing theories of events, see János Tözsér, *Metafizika [Metaphysics]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009), chap. 5.

⁷ In this study, I use expressions such as ‘philosophies of the event,’ ‘philosophies of events,’ and ‘event philosophy’ as broadly synonymous designations for philosophical approaches in which the event plays — whether directly or indirectly — a constitutive or otherwise significant role. For a selective list of contributions by thinkers who have anticipated, shaped, or explicitly developed contemporary continental philosophies of the event, see, among others: Giorgio Agamben’s transformation of the relation between potentiality and actuality; Alain Badiou’s seminal theory of events (*L’Être et l’Événement*); Renaud Barbaras’ radicalization of phenomenology toward an ontology of desire, movement, and subjectivity; Maurice Blanchot, who had a major influence on many post-structuralist thinkers (such as Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, Nancy, etc.); Jocelyn Benoist’s critical rethinking of phenomenality, givenness, and the limits of phenomenology; Henri Bergson’s emphasis on pure mobility, unforeseeable novelty, and creativity; John D. Caputo’s post-metaphysical theology of the event; Jean-Louis Chrétien’s philosophy of call, response, and responsibility; Françoise Dastur’s analyses of temporality, finitude, death, and the event; Gilles Deleuze theorizing about immanent events and rhizomes; Natalie Depraz’s investigations of surprise, affectivity, and intersubjectivity; Jacques Derrida, who explored the deconstructive potential of the *arrivant*; Éliane Escoubas’ phenomenological engagement with art, imagination, and appearing; Emmanuel Falque’s work on birth, death, suffering, incarnation, finitude, etc.; Didier Franck’s rethinking of embodiment, flesh, and alterity; Ole Fogh Kirkeby’s distinction between the

In the field of continental philosophies of the event, one of the most decisive breakthroughs was undoubtedly Heidegger's rethinking of Being in terms of temporality, historicity, and eventually *Ereignis*. Already in his early philosophical project entitled 'pre-theoretical science of origins', the young Heidegger characterized lived experience as a non-objectifiable *Ereignis* — anticipating, though not yet

three layers of the event; *Michel Foucault's* analyses of the evental emergence of discourses and historical formations; *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, who emphasized the event-like unfolding of understanding; *Martin Heidegger's* pioneering rethinking of Being in terms of *Ereignis*; *Michel Henry*, who conceived the event in relation to the immanent self-affection of life; *Pierre Klossowski's* exploration of the evental disruption of identity, subjectivity, and representation; *Jacques Lacan*, who situated the event in relation to the irruption of the Real and the transformative effects of the signifier; *François Laruelle's* reconceiving philosophical thought through the event of radical immanence; *Emmanuel Levinas's* notion of the encounter with the Other as an irreducible event of ethical alterity; *Jean-François Lyotard*, who explored the event as the occurrence of the unforeseen and the limits of representation; *Catherine Malabou*, who deals, among others, with traumatic events; *Henri Maldiney's* event-oriented phenomenology centered on the transformative encounter between existence and world; *Jean-Luc Marion*, who interprets the event as an excess of givenness and donation; *Quentin Meillassoux's* radicalization of the contingency of the event toward absolute contingency; *Jean-Luc Nancy*, who conceived the event in terms of exposure, and the coming-into-presence of existence; *Jan Patočka's* concept of the movements of existence and his phenomenology of appearing; *Marc Richir's* investigations of the evental and proto-temporal dimensions of phenomenological appearing; *Paul Ricoeur's* explorations of the evental character of interpretation, action, and the emergence of meaning; *Claude Romano's* eventual hermeneutics; *Gilbert Simondon's* theory of individuation; *Bernard Stiegler*, who linked the event to technics, individuation, and the transformation of temporal experience; *László Tengelyi*, who discussed 'fate-constituting events'; *Gianni Vattimo* developing the Heideggerian *Ereignis* in the direction of weak thought; *Paul Virilio's* philosophy of the accident produced by technological innovation; *Bernhard Waldenfels's* analyses of the disruptive experience of the 'foreign'; *Alfred North Whitehead's* process philosophy; and *Slavoj Žižek's* interpretation of the event as a rupture that transforms the symbolic coordinates of reality.

Among the important predecessors in the continental tradition, one can name, e.g., *Louis Althusser*, who reconceived history as a process marked by aleatory encounters and contingent conjunctures; *Georges Bataille*, as a precursor of later French thinking on rupture, excess, impossibility, and transformation; *Martin Buber's* philosophy centered on the I–Thou encounter; *Edmund Husserl*, as the foundational figure of phenomenology and an influential precursor of later event-oriented phenomenology; *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, who explored the event in the context of sensory experience and corporeality; *Friedrich Nietzsche*, whose critique of substantialist ontology anticipated key themes of event phenomenology; *Jacques Rancière*, who theorized the evental disruption of established orders of perception, representation, and political subjectivity; *Franz Rosenzweig*, whose philosophy explored revelation as an event that interrupts totality; and *Jean-Paul Sartre*, whose existentialist concepts of freedom, situation, and rupture contributed to the event-oriented rethinking of subjectivity and existence.

The core analytic canon within the field of the metaphysics of events includes, e.g., *Donald Davidson*, who developed an influential causal theory of events; *Jaegwon Kim*, who analyzed events as property exemplifications; *David Lewis*, who developed a systematic metaphysics of events centered on spatiotemporal and causal criteria of event identity; and *Terence Parsons*, who developed a theory of event individuation based on the properties exemplified by events.

equivalent to, the later concept of *Ereignis*.⁸ In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger comes to characterize the peculiar mobility of human existence as the distinctive “historizing” (*Geschehen*) of Being-there (*Dasein*).⁹ By contrast, events (*Ereignisse*) appear in this work primarily as occurrences that happen to beings within the world and thus belong to the realm of actualities rather than possibilities. As a result, the concept of the event does not acquire a proper existential significance in *Being and Time*,¹⁰ still less the distinctive philosophical role that *Ereignis* will come to occupy in Heidegger’s later thinking. From the very beginning, then, Heidegger’s thinking was oriented toward a primacy of the temporal, historical, and eventual over the substantial and objective. This orientation subsequently led him, within the framework of his critique of the history of Western ontology, to characterize the traditional understanding of Being in terms of ‘presence-at-hand’ (*Vorhandenheit*) and, more broadly, to criticize the metaphysical privileging of presence. He contrasted this with his own increasingly temporalized conception of Being, in which the ‘event of appropriation’ (*Ereignis*) came to serve as “the guiding word of [Heidegger’s] thinking since 1936.”¹¹

Heidegger was undoubtedly one of the most pervasive and consequential sources for twentieth-century French thought. In his monumental work on Heidegger’s legacy in France from the late 1920s to the end of the 20th century, Dominique Janicaud demonstrates just how far Heidegger’s influence extended, beyond academic

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem* (Kriegsnotsemester, 1919 winter), in *Gesamtausgabe* 56/57, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, ed. Bernd Heimbüchel (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 75. Over the years, Heidegger would come to designate this realm of origin — traditionally regarded as ineffable — by the terms *Ur-etwas*, life-in-and-for-itself, the historical self, factual life experience, and, finally, Being-there (*Dasein*), cf. Theodor Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9, 17.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 427.

¹⁰ See Miklós Nyíró, “A ’történés’ ontológiájáról, Veress Károly Bevezetés a hermeneutikába című kötete kapcsán [On the Ontology of ‘Historizing,’ in Connection with Károly Veress’s Book *Introduction to Hermeneutics*],” *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis, Sectio Philosophica* 26, no. 1 (2022): 83–86.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241. The transition from the project of *Being and Time* to Heidegger’s later thinking of *Ereignis* becomes particularly evident in *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and D. Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). In her introductory volume to that work, Daniela Vallega-Neu reconstructs Heidegger’s transformative turn as that from propositional thought toward the poetic, performative mode of thinking and language, in which language itself participates in the coming-to-presence of what is thought, thereby allowing Being to speak — or eventuate — through language, with the consequence of the displacement of the subject, cf. Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

philosophy into literature, theology, psychoanalysis, politics, and the humanities and social sciences. As a matter of fact, Janicaud explicitly speaks of “the omnipresence in France of the influence, direct or indirect, of Heidegger’s thought and work”, and even puts forward a rather striking, conclusive historical thesis, namely that “[a]part from the mathematical sciences and life and earth sciences, there is hardly any sector of knowledge or intellectual activity that has not been positively or negatively affected by that thought.”¹²

Within French philosophy, however, Heidegger’s influence was by no means uniform, nor was it exclusive of other intellectual currents. As Janicaud’s reconstruction shows, instead of a single, continuous and homogeneous transmission of a fixed body of ideas, the French reception of Heidegger was heterogeneous, inventive, and complex, marked by ruptures, upheavals, reversals, and delays.¹³ Heidegger’s presence in France was mediated, across successive and partly overlapping phases, by the interventions of particular thinkers — notably, among others, Koyré (and, indirectly, Kojève’s Heideggerian reception of Hegel) in the 1930s; Levinas from the late 1920s through the 1930s; Sartre and Merleau-Ponty from the 1940s; Beaufret, Hyppolite, and Birault in the postwar period; and, later, Derrida’s deconstructive reconfiguration of Heidegger.¹⁴ Heidegger’s thought was shaped, moreover, by institutions, texts and translations, competing interpretations and controversies, and intellectual movements that appropriated different aspects of his work for different purposes. French philosophers often brought Heideggerian ideas into dialogue with a variety of other intellectual traditions, including Husserlian phenomenology, Hegelianism, Nietzscheanism, Marxism, existentialism, structuralism, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, theology, and French philosophy of science.¹⁵

¹² Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 301.

¹³ One particularly striking example of such delays is that *Being and Time* was not translated in its entirety into French until 1985–86: Emmanuel Martineau’s complete translation appeared in 1985, followed by François Vezin’s Gallimard edition in 1986. This helps explain why the French reception of Heidegger developed through a peculiar combination of partial translations, lectures, essays, personal mediation, and — crucially — Heidegger’s later writings.

¹⁴ François Raffoul reconstructs three paradigmatic forms of Heidegger’s reception in France, arguing that, from the 1930s onward, his influence was articulated, respectively, through Sartre’s early existentialism and its reinterpretation of the Cartesian inheritance; ethics, phenomenology, and alterity in Levinas; and deconstruction and the question of the end of metaphysics in Derrida, cf. François Raffoul, “Heidegger in Modern French Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 471–486. On the fundamental importance of Heidegger for the development of French philosophy in the twentieth century, see Gary Gutting, “Footnotes to Heidegger? The ‘Master Thinker’ in Recent French Philosophy,” in *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50–66.

¹⁵ For a systematic account of the diverse intellectual traditions shaping modern French philosophy, see Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*; this

Indeed, although a significant portion of later French philosophies of the event takes, in one way or another, Heidegger's constellation of *Sein* and *Zeit*, and later *Ereignis*, as a point of departure, their engagement with Heidegger extends far beyond the appropriation of *Ereignis* as a philosophical concept. What they inherit from Heidegger is, rather, a broader constellation of problems and concepts — including Being, *Dasein*, temporality, ontology, existence, alterity, ethics, humanism, and the critique of metaphysics, among others — which is reconfigured in different ways in

volume also offers accounts about the influence of major thinkers on French thought from abroad: pt. II, "Influences": Knox Peden, "Spinoza in Modern French Philosophy," 421–436; Andrea Bellantone, "Hegel in Modern French Philosophy," 437–454; Franck Fischbach, "Marx in Modern French Philosophy," 455–470; and François Raffoul, "Heidegger in Modern French Philosophy," 471–486. For a complementary account of the Hegelian, existentialist, Nietzschean, and phenomenological strands of postwar French philosophy, see Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960*, "The Hegelian Challenge," 24–49; "Whatever Happened to Existentialism?," 67–83; "How They All Are Nietzscheans," 84–116; "Phenomenology, Religion, and Incomprehensibility: Derrida and Marion," 149–164. For a broader intellectual and conceptual map that situates major twentieth-century French philosophical debates within wider networks of phenomenology, existentialism, Hegelianism, Nietzscheanism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and the French philosophy of science, while also tracing changing conceptions of subjectivity, history, language, ethics, and ontology, see Alan D. Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). For another comprehensive intellectual map of twentieth-century French philosophy, with particular attention to its Hegelian, Heideggerian, Nietzschean, phenomenological, existentialist, and post-structuralist strands, see Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a discussion of historical rupture, novelty, difference, and the breakdown of teleological time as recurring problems in postwar French philosophy, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For the structuralist and post-structuralist background of later philosophies of the event, particularly the reconfiguration of relations among structure, history, discontinuity, and the subject, see François Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, vol. 1, *The Rising Sign, 1945–1966*, and vol. 2, *The Sign Sets, 1967–Present*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). For the role of psychoanalysis, particularly Freud and Lacan, in relation to Marxism, phenomenology, structuralism, and other major intellectual currents shaping postwar French philosophy, see Étienne Balibar and John Rajchman, eds., *French Philosophy Since 1945: Problems, Concepts, Inventions* (New York: The New Press, 2011). For an extensive historical-systematic account of the 'new phenomenology' in France, focusing particularly on Richir, Henry, and Marion and addressing questions of meaning-formation, embodiment, passivity, givenness, alterity, and the event, see Hans-Dieter Gondek and László Tengelyi, *Neue Phänomenologie in Frankreich* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011); for a concise English-language overview of that volume, highlighting the emergence and main concerns of the 'new phenomenology' in France, and its engagement with subjectivity, alterity, and the event-like character of appearing, see László Tengelyi, "New Phenomenology in France," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50, no. 2 (2012): 295–303. For a comparative account of how post-Heideggerian thinkers rethink the possibility and limits of ontology, including sustained discussions of Badiou, Nancy, Agamben, Romano, Meillassoux, and Heidegger, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Ontology after Ontotheology: Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2014). For a systematic reconstruction of competing approaches to the event, with particular attention to Heidegger, Derrida, Nancy, and Marion and to the event's implications for phenomenology, ontology, subjectivity, ethics, and politics, see François Raffoul, *Thinking the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

their respective projects. At the same time, Heidegger constitutes only one strand within a plurality of overlapping genealogical lines of the ‘event’ in French philosophy, alongside Bergsonian duration, especially in Deleuze; phenomenological accounts of appearing and manifestation, from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to Richir and Tengelyi; conceptions of historical rupture and discontinuity, from Hegel and Marx to structuralism and Foucault; and the distinctive notions of the event articulated by Deleuze, Derrida, and Badiou.¹⁶

These genealogical lines, however, do not all engage the concept of the event in the same way or to the same degree. Not all of the thinkers included in this field developed an explicit ‘philosophy of the event’, and inclusion in the genealogy does not presuppose that they endorse the event as a privileged philosophical category. The genealogical reconstruction proposed here is therefore partly retrospective: It identifies event-oriented structures in philosophies that did not necessarily understand themselves as philosophies of the event. Accordingly, it is useful to distinguish among these approaches by means of three categories: First, those who develop an explicit philosophy of the event in a strict sense; second, those whose philosophies are strongly event-oriented, even without making the ‘event’ an explicit central category; and third, those for whom ‘event’ can serve as a productive reconstructive category for illuminating an important aspect of their thought. It seems justified to place Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, Badiou, Romano, and Tengelyi firmly in the first category, while Maldiney, Waldenfels, and Marion occupy a somewhat intermediate position. Among those whose philosophies are strongly event-oriented, we can include, for example, Bergson, Blanchot, Foucault, Levinas, Lyotard, Nancy, Simondon, Meillassoux, and Richir. Finally, among those whose philosophies are not explicitly organized around the concept of the event, but in whose work the concept nevertheless helps to bring certain important aspects of their thought into view, we may include Gadamer, Henry, Lacan, Laruelle, Malabou, Merleau-Ponty, Nietzsche, Ricoeur, Stiegler, and Žižek.

A further complication is that, even among philosophers who explicitly thematize the event, the terms they employ do not necessarily refer to the same phenomenon or philosophical structure. Yet the comparative scope of the inquiry requires a broad use of the term ‘event’. Accordingly, ‘event’ is used here deliberately as an umbrella term for a conceptual field encompassing different and often non-equivalent modalities of eventhood, including *Ereignis*, *Geschehen*, *événement*, *avènement*, *arrivant*, *event*, *happening*, *occurrence*, *actual occasion*, and related notions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Janicaud’s reconstruction is particularly useful for distinguishing two genealogical constellations: The Heidegger–Levinas–Derrida–Marion–Nancy–Richir trajectory, on the one hand, and the Heidegger–Deleuze–Badiou trajectory, on the other.

¹⁷ The use of ‘event’ as an umbrella term is well established in relevant literature; see Étienne Balibar and John Rajchman, eds., *French Philosophy Since 1945: Problems, Concepts, Inventions*. This anthology organizes postwar French philosophy around seven principal clusters of discussion, or areas of inquiry — “In Search of a New Critique”, “Histories of Truth”, “Questions of Difference”,

The concept of ‘process’, however, is more closely associated with the relatively neutral notions of ‘occurrence’ and ‘happening’ than with the more specific philosophical sense of ‘event’; the two should not therefore be treated as synonymous without further qualification. Several continental philosophies of the event do in fact distinguish the event from a mere process, change, or occurrence.¹⁸ In Heideggerian terms, such a distinction can sometimes be drawn between *Ereignis* and *Vorgang*: The former concerns a transformation in the disclosure of Being and meaning rather than merely the occurrence of a change. In turn, a contrasting conception — especially prominent in analytic metaphysics — treats the event primarily as an occurrence or entity: Something that happens and can be individuated, counted, and situated within an ontological framework. The event is thus understood less as a transformation of a horizon of sense, possibility, or subjectivity than as an ontologically identifiable item within the world, as in the event theories of Davidson, Lewis, and Kim. Underlying this contrast, however, are broader differences in philosophical presuppositions and methodological orientation.¹⁹

“Event”, “The Subject”, “Institution and Insurrection”, and “Thinking in Art” — and section “IV. Event” conceptualizes the event as a turning point that compels a new way of thinking, thereby bringing questions of time, history, political action, subjectivity, and the emergence of new meaning into a common conceptual field. Accordingly, this section brings together contributions by Goldschmidt, Sartre, Althusser and Balibar, Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, and Badiou.

¹⁸ This distinction is also suggested by the etymology of the word ‘event’: Its Latin verbal equivalent, *evenire*, means not only ‘to happen’ or ‘to occur’, but also ‘to befall someone’, for instance in the case of mourning or illness; cf. Alajos Györkösi, ed., *Latin–Magyar szótár [Latin–Hungarian Dictionary]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 202. In this latter sense, an event is not merely something that takes place, but something that befalls or happens to someone who is irreplaceable in its occurrence. One may describe this as a ‘*pro me*’ dimension: The constitutive correlation between the event and its irreplaceable addressee.

¹⁹ For example, analytic approaches have typically, though by no means uniformly, given greater weight to common-sense intuitions and to frameworks such as physicalism, causality, and extensional conceptions of time, whereas phenomenologically inspired approaches seek precisely to interrogate the apparent self-evidence of such presuppositions through a disciplined return to experience and to the conditions under which things come to appear.

These differences become especially significant when it comes to the conception of the ‘world’: Whereas, in much analytic metaphysics, events are treated primarily as entities or occurrences within an independently specified ontological framework, some phenomenologically oriented philosophies of the event conceive events in the strict sense as world-constituting — that is, as capable of opening or transforming the very horizon within which meaning, possibility, and experience are constituted. This, in turn, bears directly on the question of whether an event can be understood merely as a change occurring within an established order, or rather as the emergence of something genuinely new and potentially as a source of meaning-formation. However, for a contemporary effort to move beyond the analytic/continental divide in the philosophy of events, see James Bahoh, Marta Cassina, and Sergio Genovesi, eds., *21st-Century Philosophy of Events: Beyond the Analytic/Continental Divide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025).

These distinctions provide the methodological basis for a comparative typology of philosophies of the event, offered here as a preliminary and tentative orientation. Rather than seeking a single definition of the event, the following discussion approaches these philosophies through four interconnected questions: What is an event? What does an event make possible? What is the event set against? And what happens to the subject in or through the event? These configurations should not be understood as rival definitions of a single phenomenon. Instead, they are intended to identify different dimensions along which philosophies of the event may be compared.

To address the first question — what an event is, or, more precisely, what kind of phenomenon or structure different philosophies identify as an event — it is useful to distinguish several partially overlapping families of meanings associated with the concept of the event. In some, notably Bergson, Simondon, and Deleuze, the event is intimately bound up with ‘becoming and generative processes’. A different line, extending from Heidegger’s *Ereignis* to Gadamer’s *Geschehen*, shifts the question toward the ‘happening of intelligibility’ itself: What occurs in an event is the opening or transformation of a horizon in which Being, meaning, or understanding can appear at all. A third, distinctly phenomenological and ethical configuration, developed in different ways by Levinas, Derrida, Blanchot, Marion, and Waldenfels, conceives the event as an ‘arrival of alterity’. Closely related to this, but more explicitly phenomenological, are the accounts developed by Maldiney, Romano, Tengelyi, and Richir, who can be grouped, for the purposes of the present genealogy, around the idea of a ‘transformation in experience’: For them, the event names the a reconfiguration of experience and its sense.²⁰ A further family understands the event primarily in terms of ‘historical or ontological rupture’. In Foucault, for example, it marks the contingency and discontinuity of what appears historically necessary; in Badiou, it names a rupture within a situation; and in Žižek, the event assumes the form of a dialectical rupture that alters the coordinates within which a situation is understood. Meillassoux radicalizes the question in another direction by relocating it from historical or phenomenological experience to the level of speculative ontology, where the event becomes an expression of the ‘contingency of reality’ itself. These overlapping configurations should not be regarded as rival definitions of a single phenomenon; rather, they identify different ways in which ‘event’ can function as a philosophical operator.

The second question concerns the transformative efficacy of the event: What does an event make possible, and more specifically in what sense does it introduce something new? Here, too, different philosophies of the event diverge. In Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Simondon, novelty emerges as a form of creative production — whether understood in terms of duration, creative advance, actualization of the

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that, within this phenomenological line, Richir develops an important internal critique of the concept of the event, insofar as he resists reducing the archaic instability of appearing to a punctual ‘event’.

virtual, or individuation — rather than as a rupture interrupting an otherwise stable order. In Levinas, Derrida, Marion, Waldenfels, and Romano, by contrast, novelty takes the form of an encounter with what comes from beyond the subject's horizon. In Foucault, Badiou, Žižek, and, in a different register, Meillassoux, novelty assumes the more radical form of rupture: It transforms, suspends, or reconfigures the very regime within which possibilities are constituted.

A further comparative question concerns what each philosophy takes the event to be set against. What the event displaces, resists, or interrupts varies significantly across these philosophies: Mechanical repetition in Bergson; substance and substantialism in Whitehead; the metaphysical privileging of presence and beings in Heidegger; totalization in Levinas; fixed identity in Deleuze; calculability in Derrida; historical necessity in Foucault; established knowledge within the situation in Badiou; and the supposed necessity of the laws of nature in Meillassoux.

What ultimately differentiates these philosophies of the event, then, is not merely how they define the event, but what they mobilize it against and what they seek to make possible by granting it philosophical primacy. The event thus functions both as a critical operator directed against different forms of philosophical closure — through which thought fixes Being, identity, possibility, or meaning — and as a principle of transformation that opens what such closure excludes.

The final question concerns what happens to the subject in and through an event. One important line of thought conceives the event as transformative: An event befalls an already constituted subject, yet changes it in such a way that the subject is no longer quite the same. This is the position found, in different forms, in Badiou, Romano, Maldiney, and Tengelyi. A second line radicalizes this claim by treating the event not merely as something that transforms a subject, but as something constitutive of subjectivity itself. On this view — represented in markedly different ways by Deleuze, Foucault, and Žižek, and with a fundamentally ethical inflection by Levinas — there is no fully constituted subject standing prior to the transformative encounter; subjectivity emerges through what happens to the subject and through the transformations that this entails. A third configuration places greater emphasis on the subject's receptivity to what arrives from beyond its powers of anticipation and appropriation. In Derrida, Marion, Waldenfels, and Blanchot, the subject is thus understood primarily in terms of passivity, exposure, and responsiveness: Rather than mastering the event, it receives or undergoes something that exceeds its capacity to constitute it. Finally, in more radical processual approaches, the very distinction between subject and event is destabilized, since subjectivity is itself understood as an effect, mode, or temporary configuration of a more primordial process of becoming. This is especially evident in Bergson and Simondon, and in a different register in Deleuze. Henry represents an important qualification to this position: Rather than dissolving subjectivity into a process of becoming in the Deleuzian manner, he

relocates subjectivity in the sphere of immanent affective self-experience. Taken together, these configurations reveal markedly different ways of relating eventhood to subjectivity, ranging from transformation and constitution to receptivity and the destabilization of the subject–event distinction.

What ultimately distinguishes the philosophies of the event is not only what they take an event to be, but what they set it against, what kind of novelty they attribute to it, how that novelty opens or reconfigures the field of possibility, and what happens to subjectivity in and through the event.

These comparative distinctions finally point toward a set of fundamental philosophical problems that cut across the different genealogies of the event. The question of the event is not merely a question of definition or conceptual classification; it bears more broadly on fundamental problems in ontology, ethics, politics, and technics.²¹

One important fault line in continental event philosophy concerns the status of the event in relation to ontology. Some approaches, beginning with Heidegger and continuing in different forms in Deleuze and others, seek to rethink ontology through the event;²² others, including Levinas, Derrida, Badiou, and Romano, emphasize, in different ways, the event’s irreducibility to an established ontological order or other

²¹ See, e.g., François Raffoul, *Thinking the Event*, “The Event of Being,” 186–232; “Event, World, Democracy,” 233–286; and “The Ethics of the Event,” 309–322.

²² Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, closely connected to both Heidegger’s early and later philosophical projects, though less directly to *Being and Time* itself, offers a related but less explicitly event-ontological trajectory, in which understanding itself takes on an event-like, participatory, and medial character. In articulating the central aims of his magnum opus, Gadamer repeatedly invoked Emil Staiger’s formulation: “To grasp [conceptually] what grips us” (*Begreifen, was uns ergreift*), quoted in Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Eine Biographie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1999), 320. Gadamer was thus concerned with what might be called the ‘event-like unfolding of understanding’ in this work — namely, with those instances in which self-transcending, ecstatic participation occurs in an event of meaning-formation — a concern that he explored in relation to the experience of art, history, and the linguistically mediated world. According to the work, however, these modes of experience are characterized at their core as an engagement in the ‘medial’ movement of play, or as a dialogical encounter akin to play, in the course of which the participants are grasped by, and thereby lose themselves in, an autonomous, self-contained, play-like, ‘medial’ movement, cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London / New York: Continuum, 1989), 91–98. Here, the player’s dissolution in the movement amounts to a paradigmatic realization of the idea of a ‘medial agent’ being led by the movement of a ‘medial event’ — with ‘medial’ referring to the ‘*pro me*’ dimension inherent in the constitutive correlation between the event and its irreplaceable addressee, as discussed in footnote 18. Gadamer’s approach may accordingly be characterized as ‘event-medial’, insofar as it is structured around this relation between a medial agent and a medial event. This structure finds a grammatical analogue in the linguistic phenomenon known as the ‘middle voice’; for a discussion of this parallel, see Miklós Nyírő, “Hermeneutics, Practice, Event. An Attempt at Re-Conceptualizing Human Agency,” *Phainomena: Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics* 32, nos. 124–125 (2023), 38–42.

prior conditions of determination.²³ Yet, the ontological status of the event is only one of these broader, transversal problematics.

A second cluster of problems concerns the ethical implications of the event for alterity, exposure, and response, as articulated in different ways by Levinas, Derrida, and Waldenfels. In Levinas, the event can be understood, in this ethical register, through the encounter with alterity, in which the subject is constituted as responsible rather than as an autonomous origin of meaning. Derrida radicalizes this structure by linking the event to incalculability and to what he calls the ‘absolute future’, while Waldenfels reformulates it in terms of responsivity: What happens to us precedes our response, and the subject emerges as one who is called upon to respond.²⁴ In these different approaches, the event therefore marks not only

²³ Badiou provides one of the most radical versions of this latter position. In his influential mathematical ontology, grounded in set theory — which conceives any situation in terms of the relation between the ‘void’ and the ‘infinite’, as unfolding according to the laws governing the presentation and representation of the multiplicity it contains — the event cannot be presented as an element of a situation and therefore cannot be identified ontologically from within the situation. From the standpoint of being-qua-being, the event does not exist; consequently, “ontology has nothing to say about the event”; cf. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 184–190, quote: 190.

In contrast, Romano offers a phenomenological critique of Heidegger’s attempt to think the event ‘ontologically’. He argues that the various ‘existentials’ of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology ultimately function as ‘timeless’ structural elements, rendering human existence insufficiently open to genuine events. As opposed to that, Romano’s phenomenological analysis presents events in the strict sense as anarchic origins in themselves: They generate the horizon of their own intelligibility and thereby transform and re-found the world of their addressees; cf. Claude Romano, *Event and World*, 10–22, esp. §3, “Events from the Perspective of Heideggerian ‘Ontology’,” and 23–56, esp. §§4–9. Thus, for Romano, events constitute a radically a-subjective and non-ontological starting point for understanding the world, the self, and historicity; cf. Miklós Nyíró, “Claude Romano az események ‘fenomenálisáról’ [Claude Romano on the ‘Phenomenality’ of Events],” *Erdélyi Múzeum* 85, no. 4 (2023): 25–37.

On the priority of the ethical relation over ontology, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 48–52. On the event’s opposition to what is already possible, predictable, and programmable, see Jacques Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (2007): 441–461, esp. 450–454. See also Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Ontology after Ontotheology: Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy*, esp. pt. II, chap. 4, “Advent or Birth: Two Models of the Event,” 138–184, and chap. 5, “Absolute Beginning or Absolute Contingency,” 185–224, which discuss Heidegger, Romano, and Meillassoux; see also the discussion of Badiou in chap. 1., 34–62.

²⁴ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 99–129, esp. 112–114, on substitution, responsibility, and the constitution of subjectivity; Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 228–298, esp. 252–257, on undecidability, incalculability, decision, and responsibility; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 28–30, on the “absolute future” and the coming of the

the advent of something new but also a transformation in the very structure of ethical subjectivity.

A further problematic concerns the political significance of the event. Here, the event can mark a rupture or reconfiguration of an established political order and thereby alter the field of political possibility, as articulated in different ways by Foucault, Badiou, Rancière, and Derrida. In Foucault, the event is linked to historical discontinuities that reveal the contingency of apparently necessary forms of knowledge and social order; in Badiou, the political event constitutes a radical rupture within a situation and, through the procedures of intervention and fidelity that follow from it, makes possible the emergence of a political subject; in Rancière, it is associated with moments of dissensus that disturb established distributions of places, identities, and visibility; and in Derrida, it is tied to the undecidability and risk inherent in responsible political decision.²⁵ Across these approaches, the political significance of the event lies in its capacity to disrupt established configurations of power and intelligibility and to reconfigure the field of political possibility.

event; Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 28–29, on the relations among the “perhaps,” the future, and the event; Bernhard Waldenfels, “Phenomenology between Pathos and Response,” *Coactivity: Philosophy, Communication / Santalka: Filosofija, Komunikacija* 17, no. 3 (2009): 92–102, esp. on the temporal precedence of pathos over response and the irreducible delay between them;

Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien: Basic Concepts*, trans. Tanja Stahler (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 21–42, esp. the sections “Patient and Respondent,” “Temporal Diastasis,” “Responsivity,” and “Call and Response.” See also Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960*, chap. 6, “The Turn to Ethics: Levinas and Deleuze,” 117–132; chap. 7, “The Turn to Ethics: Derrida, Levinas, and Foucault,” 133–148; and chap. 9, “Ontology, Ethics, and Incomprehensibility: Alain Badiou,” 165–183; and François Raffoul, *Thinking the Event*, “The Ethics of the Event,” 309–322.

²⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 4–12, on discontinuity as a positive category of historical analysis, and 21–31, esp. 27–28, on the description of discursive events and the specificity and conditions of their occurrence; Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–164, esp. 142–151, on the singularity of events, discontinuity, and genealogy’s rejection of teleological historical narratives; Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 178–190, on the event and its irreducibility to the situation; 201–211, on intervention; 232–239, on fidelity; and 411–430, esp. 412–419, on subjectivization, truth, and the emergence of the subject; Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. and intro. Jason Barker (London / New York: Verso, 2005), 58–67, “Subjectivity without a Subject,” and 141–152, “Politics as Truth Procedure”; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 21–60, esp. 43–52, on dissensus and the disruption of the police order; Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12–19, esp. 12–14, on the distribution of places and positions and the delimitation of the visible and invisible; and Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law,” 228–298, esp. 233–238, on law, justice, force, and the inaugural rupture of the founding act.

A final transversal problematic concerns the transformative role of technics in individuation and subject formation, as explored especially by Simondon, Stiegler, and Malabou. In Simondon, technical objects participate in processes of individuation and in the co-constitution of individuals and their milieu; Stiegler radicalizes this interrelation by treating technics as constitutive of human temporality, memory, and the formation of subjectivity; and in Malabou, the question can be approached through the plasticity and adaptive capacity of subjectivity.²⁶ From this perspective, the event may also be approached as a transformation mediated by technical, material, and situational conditions.

In conclusion, several broader implications emerge from the foregoing analysis. The genealogies and comparative distinctions traced here suggest that the contemporary turn to the event is less the emergence of a single philosophical doctrine than a broad reorientation of thought: From substance to becoming, from fixed structures to historical and experiential transformation, and from constituted subjects and established orders to the possibility of their disruption and reconfiguration. In this sense, the event — in its diverse and often non-equivalent forms — names not a single phenomenon or unified object of philosophical inquiry, but rather a family of strategies for engaging with what exceeds, disrupts, or transforms what is already given: A plurality of ways through which philosophy has sought to think the emergence of novelty and alterity, and the metamorphoses through which established horizons of meaning and possibility are reconfigured.

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²⁶ See Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 59–66, esp. 59–61 and 63–66; Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134–182, esp. on the constitution of the human through technicity; 183–184, on temporality and technicity; and 204–238, on epiphylogenesis and the ‘already there’; and Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), “Plasticity’s Fields of Action,” 15–31; “The Central Power in Crisis,” 32–54; and “You Are Your Synapses,” 55–77. On the technical yet simultaneously ontological transversal problems of possibility and actuality, continuity and rupture, symmetry and asymmetry, contingency and transformation, and their implications for the event and the technological reconfiguration of reality, see Gaetano Chiurazzi, *Dynamis: Ontology of the Incommensurable* (Zürich: Springer, 2021), and *Seconde nature. De Lascaux au numérique*, rev. trans. Matteo Manicacci (Milan / Paris: Éditions Mimésis, 2024).

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