
Being Startled: Phenomenology at the Edge of Meaning

KEVIN LOVE

*At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them ... The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 20)*

I. Introduction

A version of this paper was first presented to the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, June 2008. I have attempted to retain something of the performative character of that verbal presentation, a fact which accounts for certain grammatical peculiarities within the text. One hopes these do not detract unduly from the written form. I would also like to note with gratitude the perceptive and collegial contributions of all those present at the *Back to the Things Themselves!* panel, and in particular the hard work and enthusiasm of the event organisers, who have further given considerable time to a lengthy and attentive editorial process. One issue in particular has provoked editorial discussion: the seemingly innocent matter of whether or not to include a concrete example of the phenomenon in question. The editors have understandably pressed for such an inclusion, for illustrative purposes and to assist the reader in situating and interpreting the phenomenon more precisely. The author, however, has remained reticent. *Prima facie* this matter appears worthy of little more than a footnote, and the author's refusal mere

academic obstinacy. Indeed truthfully, in its own terms, the dispute now seems almost incidental. As befits all good conversations, however, the question has surpassed its initial parameters and prompted (perhaps before time) a more explicit consideration of methodology, included here by way of an introduction. Reticence is not affected here in an attempt to remain purposefully obfuscatory or indeed overly clever—things being complicated enough as they are! Far from attempting to evade or obscure proper intellectual responsibility, this hesitancy in fact springs from a desire to live up (within the restrictions imposed by our limited abilities) to the rigour and creative force of a series of still quite astounding texts, borne of a truly exceptional century of philosophical endeavour. Despite the awkwardness of the opening, therefore, and whilst fearful that these deliberations are not yet sufficiently detailed or well formed to commit to writing, I nonetheless attempt a few further remarks out of respect for the editorial team and in gratitude for their hospitable reception of this work.

Book I of Jean-Luc Marion's recent text *Being Given* resumes a consideration of the fundamental coherence and possibility of the phenomenological project, in particular, how one might establish a guiding principle by means of which—and *sine qua non*—phenomenology might proceed to the given without fear of presupposition. Discussing the problematic status of Husserl's earliest formulations, including the eponymous "To the things themselves," Marion soon arrives at the Husserlian "principle of principles:" "*every originally giving intuition is a source of right for cognition—that everything that offers itself originally to us in intuition (in its fleshy actuality, so to speak) must simply be received for what it gives itself, but without passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself*" (Husserl, *Ideen I* in Marion 12). A number of ancillary justifications can be offered to support the absence of a concrete example in this paper, but it is to this pre-eminent principle of phenomenology that one must finally return.

By “concrete” we commonly understand ourselves to be referring to lived experience, which in turn signifies a meaningful, worlded existence woven in and around an entity we still typically refer to as a subject. Perhaps “concrete” misleads a little here, since the call for an example is invariably a call for a naturalised example, whereas by right only that which has undergone the reduction could truly be said to be concrete. This aside, the example as *ex-emplum* is intended to pull out of this existential whole, as though caught on a hook of association, a thread or series of identifiable empirical experiences, so facilitating a preparatory identification with the phenomenon under examination and allowing the reader to (more or less implicitly) situate its class, type and relationality within the whole. On this basis alone one might conceivably argue for a more cautionary use of the strategy: given the clouded and imprecise situation of natural reflection such an argument would maintain, one might wish to limit the degree of association that occurs pre-reduction. In truth, though, the natural attitude is always with us in some measure, and it is the character and limits of this economy that require further elaboration.

It is, however, virtually inconceivable that the existential associations of natural life would not continue post-reduction; that, for instance, angst and fear would not maintain some form of phenomenological accord following the suspension of the natural attitude. The associations of natural, lived existence, that is to say, do not succumb to the reduction as do metaphysical abstractions and sedimented interpretations. Indeed they are clearly useful and important guides to phenomenological clarification. More fundamental still, the *associative quality* of existence presents itself not as one possible mode of experience amongst many, but as an essential feature of all experience (primordial or natural) and a fundamental premise of phenomenology itself. The unity of experience is by no means an ancillary or accompanying fact

for experience, nor arguably an equiprimordial structure, it being necessary for the unity of equiprimordiality. More fundamental still, and whether indeed effectuated by the phenomenological subject or the unconscious trace, unity is the ground or precondition of experience. It is the very medium of the Husserlian absolute, the milieu of givenness. The essential unity of experience, a condition of possibility for all empiricist notions of association, provides for the very *concrescence* of the concrete. But what if there were a phenomenon that, post-reduction, could not be described associatively? What if there were an intuition that gave itself, originarily and in its fleshly actuality, dissociatively? What if the limits of this given intuition disallowed, in fact and by right, any participation within that unity we variously call experience, existence or world? What would be the proper starting point for an analysis of such a phenomenon and what would the use of an example hope to accomplish in this context? If the concrete phenomenon disrupts lived experience, by what right would one seek to tie one's descriptions *to* experience?

The paper implicitly argues for just such an understanding of the phenomenon of the startle, and for this reason remains suspicious of the *exemplum*. For all its obvious inadequacies, therefore, we would prefer the reader to experience the essay performatively, or methodologically, in some measure (as well as the ever-wanting prose will allow), situating the phenomenon for themselves as best they can. While alive to the various paradoxes that emerge here, one could doubtless find some measure of support for this appeal to the reader from within the tradition: "We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this phenomenology for ourselves ... " (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* viii). In truth, though, our hesitancy concerns less the nature,

status and timing of the reader's affirmatory moment (a necessary if tacit requirement for any phenomenology), than it does the limits of the phenomenological method itself. Certain ancillary gestures in the paper accordingly venture the term *phenomenology* [sic] to reflect the broader philosophical context within which the present work unfolds. Similarly premature, this paragraphia is intended as a rhetorical shorthand for an emerging project that would pursue appearing beyond phenomenology. Beyond the play of light and dark, meaning and unmeaning, speech and writing, the trajectory of this project, we maintain, is initiated with the phenomenology of the startle.

Marion's contemporary deliberations around phenomenological method nicely fit the particularities of the present discussion in a number of places:

In contrast to the Cartesian or Kantian method, the phenomenological method, even when it constitutes phenomena, is limited to letting them manifest *themselves*. Constituting does not equal constructing or synthesizing, but rather giving-a-meaning, or more exactly, recognizing the meaning that the phenomenon itself gives from itself and to itself. The method does not run ahead of the phenomenon, by *fore*-seeing it, *pre*-dicting it, and *pro*-ducing it, in order to await it from the outset at the end of the path (*meta-hodos*) onto which it has just barely set forth (9).

It is not as though existence were already arrayed before the phenomenologist in an orderly system. Rather, the reduction must properly suspend any *a priori* orchestration of phenomenon, allowing the intuition to dictate everything, arguably up to and including the structure and style, but certainly the methodological principles, of the unfolding enquiry. For far from fitting neatly into an unexamined *a priori* classificatory empiricism, the *concrete* expression of the phenomenon in question (the startle) challenges predefined categories (existential or otherwise), remaining *unavoidably abstract* since the phenomenon itself is *essentially* abstract. More exactly, the phenomenon *abstracts*. This is not a question of the ambiguity of phenomena in general. In this regard at least—in the manner in which the startle abstracts one from the unity of

lived experience—the phenomenal charge of the startle is forcefully unambiguous. Neither is this a question of unmooring one particular experience from a pre-existing unity of lived experience. Rather, we would argue that the category of experience does not adequately capture the phenomenon in this case, and that the reduction must in fact *protect* the originary intuition from conceptualisation *as* experience. A phenomenology which is to remain true to the limits of originary intuition, and thus to the grounding principle of principles, cannot pass over this point—as uncomfortable or incredible as it may first appear—treating the startle as though it were but an unproblematic extension or limit case of other everyday phenomenon. Had one gone back to the full, primordial concretion of the startle, that is to say, one could never have hit upon the idea of interpreting experience as a unity.

All of which again sends phenomenology back to the reduction itself, which since Husserl has proven a fecund guide to phenomenological inquiry; an exhortation to thought matched only by an equal and opposite methodological provocation. The reduction, its possibility, necessity and consequence, sets the parameters of the foregoing discussion and structures entirely its outworking. Only through reduction does the intuition accede to its position of privilege; only the reduction grants intuition its originary right. Like the scientist's microscope, the reduction purports to allow the phenomenologist to see the very fact of the matter, illuminated and without distortion, all but disappearing itself in one's absorption with the phenomenon it alone reveals. Neutral, impartial, the reduction “does nothing” writes Marion, “it lets manifestation manifest itself” (10). Thus if one *were* inclined to seek examples, a concrete example of the reduction would indeed be worth collecting! For far from being any given experience, the reduction is that which necessarily shadows all possible experience. On the one hand the reduction establishes, in the particularity of its mode of engagement, the entire sphere

of primordial experience and for this reason might be considered to be primordially itself. The reduction guarantees the form of primordial experience, without itself being conceivable (by fact or by right) as a moment of primordial experience. On the other hand, therefore, the unnaturalness of the reduction must itself first be natural (arguably most natural, most proper to our nature, as Heidegger's contemplation of moods recognises). This edge of reason we call the reduction, in between natural and unnatural attitudes, negotiating between truth and naivety and policing what may pass and what must evaporate as mere presupposition, how would it fare under its own gaze? What would one intuit from the reduction, from the fleshy actuality of its being, held to the limits of its appearing? A brutal and abyssal question that pushes phenomenology to the irrational limit of an infinite regression, it is doubtful one could ever stop to formulate a response. But even when posited within the rational parameters of a formal phenomenology, the reduction is that which must *exceed* its limits to secure all other phenomena; it must overflow its fleshy actuality. Held to its limit the reduction, at best, becomes merely one mode of experience amongst many, an existential possibility unable to secure any privilege without further appeal to some form of metaphysical valorisation. The reduction itself, one might therefore argue, ought to first subject itself to reduction in order to validate everything that it secures, up to and including the possibility of phenomenology. In truth, Marion's project seeks to accomplish just this, stripping from the reduction every *a priori* principle or assumption that would limit, restrict or colour appearing. The issue toward which the phenomenology of the *stark* propels us (more maddening still) is whether or not givenness itself in fact limits appearing. This takes things further than one rightfully should go, even though our present context would seem to demand as a minimum a sustained reflection upon this limit more than any limit. Nonetheless, for the sake of conversation, if one *were* minded to seek concrete

examples, the startle might well pass for a concrete example of the reduction; the reduction, that is to say, under reduction. Stripped of its privileged gaze at the farthest extremity of the Copernican revolution, held within the limits of its fleshy actuality, the reduction would perhaps reduce itself to something resembling *mere* sight. Sight without seeing, experience without unity, an *ungivenness* that is not necessarily, or so quickly, “a givenness by denegation” (Marion 54), these are the motifs that enliven the enquiry precipitated by the startle.

Thus the question of the concrete example never really was the question our conversation supposed it to be. Fittingly enough, only after undergoing its own reduction does the question emerge in its primordially. Superficially of course the entire paper is little more than an exercise in exemplification, from the title words onwards. But if pressed further to distinguish the experience of the startle from other more or less surprising phenomenon, we would go on to say that the startle might best be exemplified or characterised by the occurrence of de-worldedness; it is that moment when all context deserts us, and this is the world and the context to which we refer the meaning of the word “startle.” Of course, like a negative phenomenology, this does not help the reader much, especially if one is expecting an orderly philosophical treatise on the nature of the startle. More than intellectual accord or logical approval, however, phenomenology has always distinguished itself by requiring, perhaps above all else, the aforementioned moment of affirmation. Put simply, here the affirmation concerns the possibility of an *occurrence* without worldly context; an “experience” (irreducible to human experience) where world is utterly, if momentarily, suspended. One cannot avoid certain immediate paradoxes, for instance the nature of the negotiation between the framing moments of world and non-world (something the doubled meaning of our title itself provokes). As with Cartesian doubt, however, paradox remains only a positive spur to the phenomenological élan, and not its undermining.¹

II. The Natural Attitude

So banal is the experience of the startle, and so temptingly straightforward the descriptions of the natural attitude, that one could almost be convinced of its inconsequentiality for a phenomenology properly concerned with the richer harmonics of lived experience. Closer examination of both the natural-scientific and common, everyday understandings nonetheless quickly uncovers that pervasive, philosophical precipitate that proved one of the earliest foils to the phenomenological impulse. A familiar opposition imposes itself: on the one hand an exterior physical world of anonymous matter-energy; on the other, a receptive interior, in some measure separate from the physical externality and typically considered “psychical” in character: physical cause, psychical effect.² Thus, for the natural attitude, an individual is startled when a particular psychic effect is caused by the presence of some simple physical object that (for reasons of Euclidean proximity, relative velocity or incident force, say) impacts upon a receptive psychical system ill-prepared or ill-equipped to deal with the raw immediacy *of* that object. With modern scientific realism, even those remaining psychical elements of the configuration are swallowed by a relentless physicalism. In a characteristic reification of consciousness, the startle is thus understood first and foremost as a linear physiological reaction to a causal physical stimulus: the psychical features themselves are now founded upon an *a priori*, preconscious, physiological system. And if not simply ancillary, the psychical is at best deemed the blind servant of a rudimentary, physiologico-evolutionary response (fight or flight). For the natural attitude, therefore, the startle unproblematically answers to, indeed seems to exemplify, what Heidegger (*Being and Time* 79) might call the Being-present-at-hand-along-with (*Mitvorhandensein*) of two entities.

Despite employing a mode of description mortgaged to a rather unsophisticated reductive physicalism, the liminal nature of the startle nonetheless already announces itself along two separate axes. First, for the natural attitude the startle marks the limits of an unassisted consciousness; the faculties or capacities of consciousness are surpassed, overrun by the velocity, kinetic force or (let us say) kinetic proximity of the object in question. Second, the startle, perhaps more than any other affective psychical state, abandons us to mere physiological reaction; being becomes a simple physical process, caught up in a state of affairs that consists of a similarly physical compound of corporeal entities present-at-hand-along-with.

We assume it is not necessary to rehearse Husserl's objections to the natural-scientific attitude in any great detail,³ or to consider the many notable justifications for the phenomenological reduction.⁴ Clearly, though, despite the undeniable attractions of the natural description, it cannot simply be the case that with the phenomenon⁵ of the startle, intentionality somehow misses its object, as though consciousness⁶ were too slow for a pre-existing world. This is not to deny the phenomenological sense of loss that remains with the startle post-reduction, or to dismiss the liminality of the phenomenon already observed. It is important, however, to first reaffirm the *a priori* status of consciousness for Husserlian phenomenology and recall that, far from existing independently, Husserl comes to view the emergence of objects over-against a subject as the *achievement of* transcendental consciousness. Accordingly, the following section begins to develop a phenomenology of the startle upon the ground won by the Husserlian *epoché*, in part to move beyond such configurations. We thus begin, perhaps a little technically, with a consideration of the structural phenomenology of the startle, first considering how one might analyse this phenomenon utilizing a Husserlian schema, before suggesting a phenomenological description of the startle that seems to unsettle that schema. Although slightly

laborious, this technical detail is important, as it ensures that the subsequent descriptions of the phenomenon unfold at the correct level of significance. We wish to proceed as rigorously and conscientiously as possible, respecting both the letter and spirit of Husserl's phenomenology, but also wish to move purposefully. For this reason, analyses are occasionally reigned in and observations sometimes unsupported. Whatever its technical inadequacies, however, we trust that as momentum gathers the section also begins to capture something of the phenomenological content of the startle. To further the analysis of both its content and ontological significance, a subsequent section unfolds within an (early) Heideggerian frame, before finally preparing for a critical encounter with the Levinasian *il y a*.⁷

III. Intentionality and the Startle

It is perhaps useful to quickly set out some basic elements of Husserl's methodological schema, from which the analysis will draw its initial momentum. This is in some measure a provisional attachment, being in part a strategic move that hopes to demonstrate the peculiar difficulties posed by a phenomenology of the startle. Although obviously familiar ground, we first make recourse to the fifth of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, where he famously distinguishes two "mutually requisite moments" of the intentional act: matter and quality. The unity of these moments constitutes the essence of intentionality, being "thoroughly essential and thus indispensable components" (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 128ff.). Crudely, we maintain that the difficulties for the Husserlian schema originate in the fact that, in the case of the intentionality proper to the startle *there is no matter*, since arguably there is no objectifying act as such.

The (still problematic) relation between noesis and noema requires that we step a little cautiously here. With explicit reference now to the phenomenon in question, let us begin by distinguishing the intentional act from the intentional correlate, but only by surrendering the correlate to better preserve the phenomenological content of the act. Again, this is not to suggest that the noema is in some simple sense overlooked or awaited by consciousness. With the analysis of the startle the tendency to fall back into the natural attitude appears to be particularly pronounced. It is not the case, however, that intentionality, as though inadequate in its aim, has somehow slipped and missed its mark and now waits for the world to come around again. With the startle the noema is as *entirely* adequate, as *entirely* given, as in any other intentional act; it is just that it is given as not given. This is perhaps interesting enough, and provokes further reflection around the nature and consequence of this ungiven given,⁸ but clearly this in itself does not amount to a complete or sufficiently detailed analysis of the separate constituting elements of the phenomenon. The startle is not simply an exemplar or proof of Cartesian doubt, the experiential correlate, as it were, of that famous thought experiment; being does not straightforwardly disappear into nothingness as though swallowed by an overwhelming skepticism. Although the flight of the noema certainly raises issues around the status, character and veracity of the interconnections of consciousness, particularly the subject-object correlation, it does not *necessarily* unsettle consciousness itself, precisely because the givenness of the noesis is preserved in the *ungivenness* of the noema. Accordingly, putting other issues to one side in order to pursue that which *is* given with the startle, we leave the noema to its fate for the moment, noting only that the imbalance created here between noesis and noema (which, after all, are not lightly or readily separable)⁹ will prove troublesome for a phenomenologically adequate description.

Having thus preserved the full phenomenal content of the intentional act from dissemination into an uncertain noema, the analysis is able to return to examine the material moment of the noesis. If we can agree for the moment that the startle does not simply *accompany* a perceptive intentionality but that rather, when assayed from within its own horizon, can only be considered an intentional act in its own right (albeit one bearing its own particular sensuous, phenomenal content),¹⁰ then despite the Husserlian schema creaking a little it is still possible to maintain the present course. Since it is difficult to describe this moment as any sort of objectifying act, however, one must necessarily allow that material moments may not in fact be *essentially* objectifying. Notwithstanding, there is undoubtedly some phenomenal weight to the startle. It is not nothing. Something is given, or imposes itself, with the noesis at least. There are obviously many serious methodological concerns surrounding the reflective analysis of an unreflective phenomenon; concerns that are again perhaps more keenly felt in this case, where lack of reflection is something of a *sine qua non*. By objectifying this intentional act, however, phenomenological analysis is able to continue, albeit less confidently. For only by unquestioningly assuming the validity of this objectification, one might argue, is phenomenology able to commence at all, certainly as an eidetic science. Is it not the case that reflection upon an intentional act could only proceed eidetically in the case of an *essentially reflective* intentionality? The startle, in contrast, being essentially unreflective, does not perhaps give itself at all to phenomenology. There is a tension here, previously noted, between the startle and the founding moment of phenomenology: the verb *phainesthai*.¹¹ Perhaps uniquely, however, it would be necessary to describe the material moment of this noesis as *essentially non-objectifying*: in as much as the noesis is given at all, it is given as a *non-objectifying intention*.¹² Reiterating an earlier argument, it would be insufficient to simply determine this non-

objectifying essence as material in a deficient mode, if by this one implies any measure of inadequacy on the part of the constituting moment of materiality. In a way reminiscent of the reifications of the natural attitude, such a move would threaten the transcendental character of consciousness for Husserl. Just as it was for the noema, so the phenomenological reduction proscribes any inadequacy in the core givenness of the intentional act. Any hint of such deficiency in the heart of the noesis would again immediately presume a pre-conscious, *a priori* realm, on the surface of which consciousness floats.¹³

The non-objectifying character of the noesis is not, though, the only difficulty faced by a Husserlian reading. There is, in addition, a realignment and redistribution of activity and passivity that a standard depiction of intentionality-intuition would find difficult to accommodate. The typically virile activity of the *Sinngebung* has already been compromised, in some measure, by the ungivenness of the noema. But this is not to suggest that the startle utterly strips consciousness of all traces of activity, instituting a “bottomless passivity” (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 164) “more passive still than any passivity” (50). In fact, the phenomenon emphatically delimits the activity-passivity relationship, reveals by delimiting, and so articulates activity and passivity¹⁴ within these parameters in a pronounced and peculiar way. It is the phenomenal peculiarity of this delimiting-revealing-inarticulation, combined with the phenomenal charge of an essentially non-objectifying noesis, that provides the framework for our analysis of the startle.

First, it is not simply the case that intentionality, cool and composed, is merely and equanimously unable to com-prehend the noema. The startle accentuates the passivity of the subject in a unique appropriation of subjectivity: the subject is possessed, gripped and obsessed without room for self-regard.¹⁵ Subjectivity has no choice, is no longer itself, is *subjected to* the

affective force of a phenomenon that suffuses every space and corner of consciousness. The various, randomly dispersed moments that constitute a subject are suddenly and brutally swept into a single alignment, like iron filings in a magnetic field. Far from grasping, consciousness is now grasped, as though the world were fixing *us* in *its* gaze. Snatched out of the everyday busyness of existence, apprehended and blindfolded, this dislocated consciousness, unable to orient itself, is nonetheless utterly positioned—nailed to the spot. Yet phenomenally this moment does not resemble the dead, “black night of insomnia” (Smith 64). Not so much rendered sightless by the “total exclusion of light” (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 58), could one begin to speak of a “blinding bedazzlement of the gaze by an excess of light” (Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* 4; Marion 198), or the brash hostility of “a sun which leaves no shadows” (Camus, *The Outsider* 119), in which relief wells of thought might form? On the one hand it is certainly as though consciousness were being-interrogated, held to account for the nonchalant decadence of its objectifying intentionalities, but with the other hand ambidextrous consciousness is still found grasping, if only at air. With this familiar theme of accusation and passivity, therefore, one risks determining things too quickly; illeity too readily realised from within the persecution of the *il y a*. There is no switching here between light and dark, nor indeed a deconstructive play of light-dark. In the economy of (*a*)*letheia* (that arguably yet entangles both Levinas [Love, “Emmanuel Levinas and the Question of Theophany”] and Marion) an excess of light nonetheless perceived as a lack might, we imagine, indicate not an accusation but an *exhortation*, as though *phainesthai* surpassed itself.¹⁶

Less a startled subject, more a case of subjectivity startled, it remains to develop a more apposite description of the material moment of this peculiar intentionality. For notwithstanding its phenomenological unity, the startle seems to possess a dualistic tendency, the articulation of

which provides an improved schematic description of the material of the phenomenon. First, in contrast to the traditional conceptualisation of intentionality, there is a definite moment of retreat. A warding off,¹⁷ or covering of one's head, recoil could be said to represent one trajectory of the startle. It is as though intentionality were turned inside-out. Not simply directed internally in some psyche-analysis (in the startle there is no inside that is not turned outside, just as surely as the outside overruns the inside), but almost as one might imagine a sock turned inside-out, intentionality is inverted, its sensitive skin retracted from the world. An attempt at standing away prior to any possibility of standing away in speech (Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl* 106), the co-priority of this structural movement would extend as far as the phenomenological *vouloir dire*, which is, after all, *founded upon* the characteristic bearing of intentionality. In fact, this withdrawal fails to win distance of any sort, by means of which a subject might mediate the immediacy of the phenomenon. For whatever tensions and torsions emerge within the startle, utter immediacy continues to be a defining character. Second, one observes the more familiar apostolic movement of an intentionality that goes out into the world: consciousness sent forth, desperate to embrace that which it also recoils from. Despite their contradictory comportments, these two moments coincide acutely and further share a distinctive sense of movement *thwarted*. Not movement within a world, of course, not movement from here to there—the startle, we suggest below, eludes the facticity of the *Da*. Perhaps one could conceive of this movement as some sort of stretching, as though one could stretch consciousness in its own dimension (in the same sense, perhaps, as it is said that one “strains one's ears,” hoping to catch the faintest glimmer of orientation amidst phenomena). Far from already Being-in-the-world it is as though consciousness, still active despite everything, is attempting to force-itself-into-a-world. Pressing up against world, as one might press one's ear to the wall in an

attempt to understand the sense anticipated in the indistinct murmurings of muffled voices, consciousness, simultaneously passive, also contradicts this extroversion, retreating to the farthest corner of the room.

When Llewelyn assays the vigilance of Levinasian insomnia, he describes it in the following manner: “It is a category that is closer to the passive of *kategguae* than to *katêgore* in that it is a category where the centrifugal intentionality of virile dominated assumption gives way to centripetal attentionality ... ” (Llewelyn 53). If posited in these terms, the material moments of the startle could be said somehow to reconcile both *kategguae* and *katêgore*, to reconcile and therefore transcend the trajectories of active, centrifugal intentionality and passive, centripetal attentionality. But such formulations are mere philosophical sophistry in the face of such a phenomenon, for the language of transcendence cannot handle the immanence of the startle and any notion of reconciliation will fail to do justice to the phenomenality of this relation. Not simply a blind transcendence, but the reverse of transcendence; not simply a fretful or irresolute reconciliation, but simply an unorchestrated occurrence (*ob-currere*) of activity-passivity. The phenomenal charge of the startle does not *give itself*, either to activity *or* passivity. Rather, denied any participation within the phenomenon, these existential participles thrash about within its horizons. Nor does the startle sit masterfully astride this opposition, orchestrating activity and passivity in itself. Since Hegel at least, but most potently with Derrida, every between seems unavoidably configured as *both* joining *and* separating; *différer* cleverly “*ancing*” between. But with the startle there is no calm, middle-voiced spreading (or *spreadance*) of possibility between activity and passivity, and in the immediacy of the startle there is nothing beyond consciousness that can orchestrate possibility across these poles. For everything comes too quickly, too quickly even for *différance* (see Love, “Différance and Paranoia”). This residual but insistent

phenomenality denies thought any part in a between that is still able to survey and negotiate the extremities of its engagement. On the contrary, the incident phenomenal charge of the startle establishes a phenomenal trajectory of its own, one that keeps itself between these two possibilities, between activity and passivity in a way that does not surrender itself *to the economy* of activity-passivity.

Consciousness is pinned out across the entire range of its potential participation in being. Bereft of any existential depth or richness, being-pulled-taut, unable to fold any content into itself, consciousness demarcates a simple *plane* of existence. A flat and soulless skin, devoid of *qualia* and textured only by a brute exposure that knows no love, grief, or joy. The vaulted expanse of being is reduced to mere surface. Apart from this plane nothing matters, and not even the nothing matters; a skin too thin to be troubled by angst. All that remains is this peculiar awareness—a wariness that sustains phenomenology on the far side of intentionality. For no matter how it twists and turns, consciousness cannot assuage the compulsions of the active and passive “tentionalities” that demarcate the field of existential possibility. But neither can the residual phenomenality of the startle articulate itself *within* the margins of these existential possibilities in the spreadliness of the middle-voice. Across the stark and rudimentary plane of sheer existence, therefore, consciousness writhes: utterly active but unable to be able, utterly passive but entirely unreceptive. Desperate to find a way back to fulsome being, but with nowhere to go. An opening of any sort would suffice—active or passive, an object or a subject—but no purchase is to be found against the grey marble façade of an existence closed off.

And so the phenomenal charge of the startle, suspended between the tentionalities that inhabit this drama, transudes a peculiar trajectory of its own. Distending, as it were, a dimension perpendicular to the plane of existence, the flow of this arc is thus unfettered by any existential

participles.¹⁸ Phenomenally, this trajectory is not something *other than* consciousness's writhing; it is simply the *occurrence* of this writhing in a direction other than that of existence. A non-participial occurrence suspends verballity, nominality and the *différance* between the two, as the gerundial tumbling of the startle carves a "between" *between* the middle-voiced between of the economy of activity-passivity. Neither one nor the other nor somewhere in the midst, an exponential paranoia one cannot think philosophically unless one can think it betweeningly, the phenomenal propulsion of the startle opens a trajectory elsewhere than existence as it exponentially undermines consciousness. Thought tripping over itself, finding itself losing itself, we tumble head-over-heels, caught up in a mode of thought (if thought it still be) that continually escapes the imposition of form; a mode of thought that erodes any stance (*ecstatic* or *substantive*) that would ground thought. Heraclitus driven mad. No longer thinking his thoughts but being thought by them, unable to find any firm ground in that river for even the first time, an unconstrained para-noia sweeps him off his feet. Like a child running down too steep a hill, the startle has us tumbling "who knows where," surpassing ourselves on the way. More "betweening" than between (perhaps the only between worth its name), a propulsive phenomenality exponentially snatches away the implicit but concrete orientation lent by the orchestrations of the economic between.¹⁹

IV. Temporality, Dwelling and the Question of Essence

Moving to consider the second constituting element of the intentional act, it is probably less controversial to suggest that the startle presents itself intentionally in a *questioning* mode.²⁰ Can one say anything further about the comportment of this particular question? Under the continuing influence of the natural attitude our first thoughts turn to the defining question of

essence: *tí esti*.²¹ Noticeably however, never being in time despite its historical diligence, the *What is ... ?* always arrives late to the startle. Although the question of essence immediately seeks to tie things up with its past tense (*What was that?*), inaugurating again its supine hermeneutic, there is nonetheless a delay, a dissonance that essence cannot recuperate: Being startled. Neither straightforward concealment nor unconcealment (*unverborgenheit*), in this final section we suggest that the entire economy of *letheia* and *aletheia* is surpassed in the phenomenality of the startle, and that there is announced a question of meaning before ever the question of the meaning of Being gets underway. For the startle suggests a question of a different sort, a question of meaning too fast for either ontology or ethics.²² The comportment of this question is suggested by the peculiar disposition of the startle, by its undissipated ambiguity that nonetheless permeates and saturates every corner of consciousness. This is not a question with the calm and measured gait of philosophical reflection, but an unruly and unstructured question, too desperate for philosophical niceties; a question seemingly able to surpass all reason and, in an instant, impetuously slough the entire weight of philosophical enquiry. To our mind the startle opens a question that no longer plays out within the marches of the question of essence: a *Why?* not immediately reducible to a *What?*

Most pressing and yet least pressing, this unruly urgency is not precipitated by anything that *is*. It is not that we urgently need an answer to the *Why?* because of this or that. There is no reason *why* we should ask this *Why?* By no means reducing us to “frivolous repetition,” however, “like an empty and unwarranted brooding over words” (Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 5), neither do we feel constrained to enquire, as if by default, of the *ground* of the *Why?* We suggest, alternatively, that the question *Why?* is never entirely captured by the ontological *What?*, never entirely reined in by the “for what reason?” by means of which the

What? secures its authority, ontological or otherwise. In its unreasonable haste, the *Why?* outstrips the *What?*. The *What?* can never give sufficient reason, can never satisfy the childlike persistency of this question. We are not inclined to quickly surrender this *Why?* to ontology and wonder instead whether the enquiry of the *Why?* engages a quiddity of a *rawer* nature. Such “quiddity,” however, would never cease to rip reason from the *What?* in the mature stateliness of its ontological procession. Taken so, could the *Why?* be considered a question at all? Does the *Why?* have any sight of its answer? Is it guided beforehand by what is sought? Or is it that the *Why?* is too quick—too quick even for *repetition*?²³ Hazarding the meagreness of this formulation and the fineness of the distinction, we simply suggest that one might yet find a way to open the *Why?* in its whyness.

Inquiring after meaning like the infant hearing thunder, pleading for some sense to offer itself to this still damp mind, the startle enfigures a captivation antecedent to any retrospective of existential indifference. Thought stunned and reason bewildered, existence is stripped of the finery of language, and just when it was most desperate to gain some purchase on these “exterior noises” (Levinas, *Time and the Other* 48). The anonymity of the phenomenon induces an immersion anterior to any subjective interest. An awareness, that could not properly be said to be an existentiell absorption like an interest that one *has*, takes hold. The one who possesses interests always arrives late, bringing his interests in his wake. The awareness that announces itself in the startle is not an interest that one has but *that has one*. There is no existential “in order to ...” accompanying the startle; it is for nothing, and not even “for-nothing” (which role *Angst* already plays in resolutely projecting toward the horizon of impossibility). The startle is without role, reason or project. Indeed, there is no ecstatic projection of any sort but sheer immediacy. This is not yet an immediacy *to* this-or-that, already a mediation in itself, but an elemental

immersion without the resources to “take as ...” this or that (c.f. Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* 112; Heidegger, *Being and Time* 188ff.), without the resources to differentiate between *or differantiate a between*. The immoderate immediacy of the startle sweeps us away in an *ob-current* that disturbs the very composure of being and time.

Weird time: a time of paranoia and of horrifying. This gerundial tumbling “who knows where?” does not simply describe an affective state, but a peculiar temporality. Lacking a future, craving a past, and so stripped of its present also, temporality as we understand it dissolves to leave an *Urimpression* deprived of retention, preceding every protention and that thus precedes even its own possibility (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 33). There is no foothold here (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 131), and nothing to-hand which one might grasp, not even a powerless poetic grasp of a future, not even a minimal temporal ecstasis. *Sans Vorhabe, sans Vorsicht, sans Vorgriff, Verstehen* is suspended. Unable to find itself (*sich Befinden*), *Stimmung* gives way to disharmony. One’s past bears no weight and we have no “been.” Our future (*Zukunft*) evaporates and we know not whether we are coming or going, even losing sight, if only for an instant, of that ownmost utmost possibility. Being, one might say, *is no longer the issue*. Deworldeed, neither here nor there, no longer *Da-sein*²⁴ but all-over-the-place, we are left speechless, inarticulate, unable to tell (*Rede*) what is going on. As though “*Verfallen*” had quite forgotten even from whence it had fallen, the startle is no longer a purposeful fleeing that testifies to Being quite as effectively as a resolute *Angst*, but a pointless tumbling, a pre-incomprehension outside or before the entire existential structure implied by Heideggerian *Sorge*. Riven by the peculiar intensity of the startle, we no longer care.

V. Conclusion

Of course, this too *will have passed*; meaning will have been given. Time and place re-emerge as the startle slips uneventfully into the assiduous order of being. But when consciousness returns, when the object presents itself and the question of essence meets (unsurprisingly) with essence, what has transpired? The startle has met its end. But as we have been taught, there are two senses one might ascribe to this sentence. If (for one last time) we are to avoid slipping into the natural attitude, one cannot suggest by this that consciousness has finally found the thing that startled it. Rather, the phenomenon has ceased. In this sense, the object comes too soon to the startle, the object never was the object of the startle. Always too late and always too soon, never in time, this strange hiccup in being eschews the temporal orchestrations of existence. The startle does not participate in the verbliness of being, not even via a middle-voiced participle: there is no time.²⁵ Neither, in its anonymity, can the noun lend anything to the startle, and for these reasons we distinguish the startle from any beginning. Nonetheless, this non-phenomenon maintains a certain “disposition,” a certain bearing we have associated with a tumbling question, no longer a *Sinn von Sein*. Is it, though, a question of being in another sense? Can one hear in the horrified buzzing of the startle the rumbling of the *il y a*, the impersonal and irremissible character of existence of which our epigraph speaks? Might one find in the startle a moment of *truly* primordial experience, that would support Levinas’ persistent reflections on the horrific nature of pure being, from insomnia to suffering? Here for the moment we leave things, suspended and uncertain, gesturing awkwardly to an as yet unpublished work (Love, *Slang*). We note finally, however, that according to Levinas “[b]eing can never shock the mind, because it always has a meaning for the mind,” as “shock itself is a way of comprehending” (Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl* 68). If this is so, then we

wish to find a way to argue that the startle is not simply a shock, and the questioning quality of the startle not simply a question of being. In its utter immediacy the startle interrupts temporalised being by a way of an entirely different order, which is precisely *not* a way of comprehending, and which precisely does *not* have a meaning. No longer a way of Being, arguably yet a way of being (*il y a*), both the way and waywardness of this question remain, for us, in question.

Notes

¹ For obvious and related reasons, the enquiry also struggles with language, on occasion risking certain truistic formulations as the reviewers have pointed out (the startle being that moment when one sees most acutely without seeing and hears most acutely without hearing, for instance). But again, phenomenology does not occur in the logical rejection of the truism. On the contrary, phenomenology is the continued call to treat seriously and sensitively the slight dissonances seeming truisms generate—only on this basis is one able to appreciate the delicacy and importance of such famous formulations as “the nothing nothings.” As Marion elsewhere notes, the smallest possibility obliges phenomenology.

² Even when this cause is later determined to be another person (i.e. an object possessing an internal psyche of its own), within the parameters of the event itself the psychical component of the other plays no role, appearing (quite literally) after the fact. To point this up, one might compare the ancillary character of the other person in the startle with the immediate necessity of an alter ego in other famously examined phenomenological relations; for instance, love or shame.

³ “... one is finally led back to an absolute that is neither physical nor psychical being in the natural-scientific sense. Yet throughout the domain of phenomenological contemplation this absolute is the field of givenness. One must simply break with that supposedly so evident thought stemming from natural thinking, that all that is given is either physical or psychical” (Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and the Theory of Knowledge* 61).

⁴ Merleau-Ponty for instance, makes this point with characteristic eloquence: “I cannot conceive of myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the world of science” (ix).

⁵ Within this paper constant reference is made to the *phenomenon* of the startle, as well as a number of associated descriptive terms. This is principally for reasons of clarity. One should note, however, that we are not entirely at ease with this designation. This unease is not based

upon a certain, perhaps fashionable, hesitancy in respect to positive phenomenological description but, quite the contrary, draws its impetus *from* the positive phenomenological description. Phrased differently, we are interested in the trajectory for thought opened beyond phenomenology by the nonetheless positive phenomenality of the startle.

⁶ Although the term *consciousness* now seems a little anachronistic for the contemporary phenomenologist, we retain it here for reasons of alignment (with both Husserl and Levinas). Despite its unfortunate and continuing affiliation with a particular philosophical history and project, the *a priori* standing Husserl attaches to the term not only initiates and distinguishes phenomenology, but also allows the term to resonate beyond the limits of this philosophical history into less metaphysical tropes such as *Dasein* or *embodied existence*. Since our concern is not to establish each or any of these tropes, but to carefully dislocate existence, we would ask that the term consciousness be read in this resonant form.

⁷ Many allusions and promised analyses impregnate this short essay and propel us toward a number of important interlocutors (all of which would doubtless name Husserl among their key influences). Central to this are Levinas, Derrida and perhaps Marion (albeit for sharply different reasons). Again, despite *bubbling-up* here and there, practicalities prevent us from staging these conversations with due diligence. Heidegger, naturally, would also appear high in this list of necessary engagements (not least since an entire section of *Being and Time* is dedicated to a discussion of fear as a state of mind). As a precursor, therefore, to a more detailed deliberation, and in preparation for the final section of this present essay, we provide the following observations: Heidegger (179ff) introduces fear as a mode of *Befindlichkeit*. At the end of this section he comments on the “variations in the constitutive items of the full phenomenon of fear” (181). One variety, described in terms of sudden dread and alarm, is named terror (*Entsetzen*), and another translated as “becoming startled” (181). We are later told, emphatically, that anxiety (*Angst*) “*is what first makes fear possible*” (230), and furthermore, “*That in the face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world-as such.*” Further work is underway to provide more detail in relation to these distinctions and their commensurate temporal organisations, but we note already that, for us, the startle is not to be understood as a derivative of a fear which, founded on some ontic property (acoustic intensity, or Euclidean propinquity), “comes from entities within-the-world” (230), where *Dasein* already understands these entities, authentically or inauthentically, in relation to Being-in-the-world-as-such. It is not as though the startle were the most vulgarly absorbed fear one might imagine, precisely because *Verfallen* is structurally unable to forget what is fundamentally at issue and continues to testify to *Angst* precisely *in* its *verfalling*. In short, even if such a thing as an authentically resolute *Dasein* were conceivable, we fancy we could startle him.

⁸ “A matter that was not matter for presentation, nor for judgement, nor for...etc. etc., would be held to be unthinkable” (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 122).

⁹ There are “not two things present in immanent experience; the object is not immanently experienced and then next to it the intentional immanent experience itself” (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 98).

¹⁰ Perhaps, though, we have misinterpreted the startle. Perhaps it is a mere sensation that accompanies a particularly powerful perception, and it is the perception itself that constitutes the objectifying act or matter. This is perhaps a fine distinction, but a central one that animates the subsequent phenomenological descriptions: in determining the startle as merely an accompanying sensation, we argue, one betrays the phenomenal content of the startle. Taking the analysis to the thing itself requires that we reexamine this distinction between ancillary sensation and material perception with greater rigour. For one might care to argue that the startle has no accompanying moment of perception or, more accurately, that the perceptive moment arrives late. When meaningful perception arrives the startle is already gone. Certainly nothing is *perceived* by the startle, since this would seem to require a certain mastery the startle lacks. Greater clarification of this important point of deviation may well be demanded, but with this temporary concession the analysis can continue.

¹¹ This said, we do not wish to quickly collapse into the deconstructive mode exemplified by previous prestigious commentators. The startle, after all, is still an experience of sorts, arguably an experience par excellence, given its obsessive Levinasian tenor. Moreover, as such, it still offers itself to an analysis of sorts. This may no longer be a phenomenology, however, and might be better termed a phenomenology [sic]. A manuscript, presently in press, attempts to do better justice to these allusions in a sustained consideration in and around Derrida and Levinas (Love, *Slang*).

¹² This is disturbing, and not simply because consciousness is always meant to be consciousness of Whatever accidents may have befallen the noema, the simple fact that an intentional act could be *essentially* non-objectifying serves to challenge the very notion of intentionality proposed by Husserl, at a fundamental level. Without the methodological sleight of hand that allows one to reflect on the form of intentionality characteristic of the startle, one could not say that the consciousness of the startle were a consciousness of anything at all, since the essentially unreflective nature of that intentionality could never allow the objectification of the intentional act without fundamentally altering its character. At the very best, with the wavering of the noema, the startle again presents itself as a limit case: consciousness of consciousness and nothing besides.

¹³ To suggest that the phenomenologically reduced intentional act is somehow inadequate to the phenomenon, or that the intentional ray has somehow lost its bearing, is to suggest that (in Husserlian terms) transcendental consciousness itself is inadequate. In doing so one implicitly posits a new noumenal realm, against which consciousness is measured, behind the phenomenal world of lived experience. We lack the space in this opening gambit to engage with notions of intuition and the saturated phenomena, where notions of passivity and activity become more pertinent to our discussion (see below). For now, suffice to say that at this level of phenomenological analysis (the level of *(a)létheia* rather than *adaequatio*) one could not suggest that a non-objectifying intention were a deficient mode of the material moment of an intentional act any more than one could suggest that doubt or questioning were a phenomenologically deficient mode of engaging with the world (i.e. knowledge in a deficient mode). Attempting to maintain our focus, we must once more postpone a complete analysis and simply add that this non-objectifying mode of intentionality could not easily be reduced to a form of unconscious

intentionality, if with this one has in mind either some inexhaustible psychic drive or something along the lines of an absorbed Heideggerian *besorgen*.

¹⁴ More properly, a non-articulation or inarticulation. Or better still, an articulation proceeding by means of the thwarting of articulation.

¹⁵ We lack sufficient space to relate the similarities between this obsession and the Levinasian obsession of *Otherwise than Being*, or indeed the insomnia of *Existence and Existents*. Elsewhere (Love, *Emmanuel Levinas and the Question of Theophany*) we open an engagement with the Levinasian oeuvre, one we hope to continue in a fuller form (Love, *Slang*).

¹⁶ At this juncture of light and dark, therefore, which continues perhaps the most abiding opposition in the history of philosophy, we take the opportunity to record also, but without any justification for the moment, that despite a number of important intersections the startle is not an example of a saturated phenomenon. The notion of the saturated phenomenon, so delicately and conscientiously extrapolated, still remains enmeshed in an economy (*re-ligare*) of (*for-*)giving and withholding, for which reason perhaps it fails to penetrate to the phenomenological. With the wider project in which this present phenomenology sits, we do not attempt to mark the course of a hyperbolic trajectory (one that seeks to exceed economic thinking and absolve itself by the sheer magnificence of its ascension beyond), but to slip through the crevices parabolically.

¹⁷ *Par-esse* one might suggest (see “indolence” in Levinas’ *Existence and Existents*).

¹⁸ Elsewhere (Love, *Différance and Paranoia*) we note and explore the intriguing confederacy of verb and noun in two of the most important philosophical contributions of the 20th Century: the verbal substantive *Sein* and the deverbial noun *différance*. It is in this context that we hope to develop more adequately the notion of the gerundial.

¹⁹ In *Différance and Paranoia* we explore with greater rigour the question of the economy and its effraction, as posed most diligently and frequently by Derrida, for whom, we argue, the motif of the ‘re-’ exceeds and initiates (initiates by exceeding) the circling economies of logic, law and time. It is not that we wish to *object* to the orchestration that establishes the economic between with its characteristic bearing and logic, any more than one would want to object to experience itself. Nor, as far as it goes and in the way that it goes, do we find cause to object to the *différential* (de)constitution of this circle, that now seems rightly to delimit a certain mode of enquiry. What we do hope to indicate is that there may yet be other compartments for thought, more perpendicular (one might say) in their trajectory than the quasi-ontological effraction we call *différance*. *Différance* (if this is not too provocative a formulation) is always and essentially between, but a between that both joins and separates, that joins in and through separation, that cleaves. The smooth spreadliness of the middle-voice of *différance* provides a clue to the character of this participial between. By contrast, the phenomenology of the startle represents one strand of a wider project that attempts to prise open an alternate dimensional trajectory for thinking the between. Gerundial rather than existential, we argue for an appreciation of the gerund that abstracts it from the participial order of the verb-noun (whether the verbal substantive *Sein* or the deverbial noun *différance*).

²⁰ A question suggests itself in the startle, this much is clear, but to begin to think of this question as *essential* to the startle presumes a *prioritisation* of questioning comportments we have, following Levinas' lead, already sought to problematise (Love, *Emmanuel Levinas and the Question of Theophany*). Certainly there is a questioning quality here, but it will be necessary to closely interrogate this question to disclose its peculiar structure before determining its "ontological" status. As we hope to briefly indicate below, the startle cannot straightforwardly be considered a "questioning mode of Being." Nonetheless, it is through a consideration of the Being of this question that one begins to question its being a question at all.

²¹ Derrida (*Politics of Friendship* 6), with, one suspects, a nod toward Levinas, touches on the historical emergence of this particular questioning comportment and the implicit eclipse of other possible questions. *Différance and Paranoia* offers a reading of *différance* as the consummation of this particular questioning comportment and points up possible openings for other questions.

²² Levinas is of course in and around so much of this discussion, not least with his notion of an *a priori* quinsity that escapes quiddity (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*; Love, *Emmanuel Levinas and the Question of Theophany*). Practical restrictions prevent us speaking of him directly with sufficient care, but as already promised, a full discussion will more adequately outline the interrelations between the remarkable Levinasian oeuvre and aspects of our more modest project. Already, though, we are inclined to add that neither is this question of sorts insistent of an interlocutor, and this is not simply due to the delay in articulation. Whilst the *startle* might well be considered "an appeal for help, for aid" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 24), it could not so quickly be said to be "*adressé à autrui*" (Levinas, *Autrement qu'être* 45). The startle seems as little suggestive of the structures of the *Who?* as it is of those of the *What?* Certainly the startle precedes the resolution of the subject *qua* one-for-the-other, disturbing any stability the "*me voici*" may allow. But more fundamentally, to call "Is anyone here?" also inaugurates a comportment of its own; this presupposes a someone (*quinsity*) as opposed to a something (*quiddity*). Like Narcissus, who, having already established the frame of his enquiry, and hearing only the hollow echo of his words, is destined either to the passivity of the "Here I am!" or the reflections of *jouissance*: "By chance the boy, separated from his faithful companions, had cried: 'Is anyone here?' [*ecquis adest?*]" and "Here!" [*adest*]" cried Echo back." (Ovid 150-1). Here, then an instance of moving too quickly from *Autre* to *autrui*; "being placed in question by the Other [*l'Autre*]," that is to say, does not *necessarily* assume a "prior dialogue", "the encounter with another [*d'autrui*]" (Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* 146).

²³ An interjection in essence-difference that seeks neither any goal nor any respite reason has within its power to grant. A leap, perhaps, but certainly not a leap that secures either space or ground on the far side, within or upon which the *What?* might yet dwell. If Heidegger and others have recently distended this *What?* (considering afresh the question of essence, *as such* or *différentially*), and if Levinas might be thought to have responsively broached the question of the *Who?* (neither genealogically nor ontologically but in its who-ness, its *quinsity* [Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 25], and surely such a way of questioning yet eludes us all), then we prefer to spend some time with the *Why?*, not as an *aporia* (that doubly binds the *Why?* into the *What?*),

nor even as an enigma (that tempts us to imagine a *Who?* speaking in riddles [*αἰνίσσομαι*] from behind the scenes), but in its “whyness,” if such a thing can be thought.

²⁴ “By its very nature, Dasein brings its ‘there’ along with it. If it lacks its ‘there’, it is not factually the entity which is essentially Dasein; indeed, it is not this entity at all” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 171). If “*Dasein is its disclosedness*” (171), then we are not concerned here with Dasein, not yet, since the startle is precisely *not* an experience of disclosedness. Whether it is yet describable as an experience at all, an experience par excellence, or simply some rudimentary awareness not yet caught up in being, we leave to a later work.

²⁵ Neither, one might hazard, does it participate in the middle-voice of *différer*—there is no space—but this is another story.

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