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Apparitions

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sb. [a. Fr. *apparition* (15th c in Litt) ad. L. *appāritiōn –em*, n. of action f. *appārē-re* to APPEAR; Etymologically, exactly=appearance, and having a parallel development of senses. But now almost restricted in common use to sense 9, and when used in other senses, having generally from this association some ideas of *startling* or *unexpected* appearance. […]

9. *spec*. An immaterial appearance of a real being; a spectre, phantom, or ghost (the ordinary current sense) 1601 Shakeapeare *Jul C*. IV iii 275 "This monstrous apparition" […] (*OED*)

There are only apparitions. There have always only been apparitions.

Apparition names the complex and unstable coming to appear, the very arising or emergence of what appears and the thing's appearing. The *eidos* and the phantasm find their mutual source in the apparition of a *phantasma*.

The other [*l'autre*] never appears *as such*, it appears as an *apparition*: its appearance is in disappearing, it dis-appears in its appearance.

There will have been haunting—before life and before death.

This appearing in disappearing is bound up with the fact that an apparition bears death and absence within itself (it harbors its own ghost). An apparition, this certain invisibility in the visible, never appears *as such*. Since it is never present as such, it cannot be a

phenomenon for me, as all phenomenality, all idealization (hence all idealism) is dependent on the visibility of a contour.

Apparition names the structural instability between appearing and ("mere") appearance. As Derrida uses this term in his writings, taking advantage of its double meaning in French, an *apparition* names the appearance, the coming to appear, of something and a phantomatic or ghostly form. This structural instability would mean that, as much as a good Platonic philosopher would wish, appearing and appearance cannot be rigorously distinguished. It has been the task of philosophy from its Platonic inception to separate that which *is* from that which *seems* or *appears* to be, the *eidos* from "the phantasm" (in the Platonic sense), the phenomenon from the *phantasma*. Philosophy must distinguish itself from all the pretenders to the throne, those who feign to achieve the role of the mother of sciences, the most essential of *epistamai*. Thus philosophy concerns itself with demarcation, making sharp distinctions, policing borders, drawing a dividing line, constructing limits that cannot be crossed. It gives itself the task of establishing reality, what *is*, in distinction to all other states of being or existence that seem to be real but are merely illusory, like dreams, visions, etc. Philosophy needs to *know*, to comprehend, it must have *knowledge*. It needs to be certain. For this knowing, philosophy relies on sight, on a certain seeing. It knows, it believes *it* alone can see what must be seen. It must know what lies on both sides of a division. It needs to separate and sharply distinguish the good from the bad, the genuine from the deceitful, the true from the false, the real from the illusory, the present from the absent, the living from the dead, by opposing them to each other. And these binary and hierarchical oppositions authorize every principle of

distinction. But there can be no autonomous concept by itself with clearly defined limits. What has been called a concept is always haunted by another concept, putting into question what has thus far been understood as a concept and calling for a new assessment of conceptuality.

The logic of haunting, a logic of contamination, leaves a trace without ever belonging to that which it haunts. Haunting speaks of the very construction of a concept, of every concept. What has been called a concept, any concept, cannot fully and rigorously demarcate itself from another concept, as the barrier of every concept is threatened from the "inside" and the "outside." "Concepts" haunt each other: every "concept" bears the phantom of another.

The distinction that separates the *eide* from the *eidōla*, or the later distinction between the phenomenon and the phantasm or semblance, owes its very conceptuality to the philosophical mode of thinking. This "patrimony" of philosophy, this father-son lineage, is a patrimony of the *eidos*, of the concept, "the concept of the concept" (*Spectres* 235; *Specters* 147). The *eidos* or the *idea*, the figure of intelligible visibility, that which *is,* the being-present, is that which can always be repeated as *the same*. For, it is most constant and not subject to any material decay. It is that thing or entity *itself*, *as it is*, *according to itself*. It is that which *truly* is. It is only this view of "the true" or "the real," as the actual, as that which *is*, as being-present, that subsequently calls for "re-presentation" or "reproduction." According to this view, the image or appearance would always come

after, it would double actual reality or what *is*, re-present it, thus stand in for it and merely replace it.

If we claim with Derrida that there is no reality as such but only "appearances" or *apparitions*, this is not to take leave of one's senses and deny the world around us, but to suggest that what has been called "reality," denoting a stable, solid, fixed realm of *being*, is philosophy's attempt—no matter how sophisticated the denials—to establish a linear temporality, temporality as linearity, a historical temporality made up of the successive linking of presents identical and contemporary to themselves, a chronology, perhaps an eschatology and a teleology, an order of anteriority, precedence, and appearance. Appearances have always been judged in relation to and in comparison with the static ontology of presence, the yardstick to which one refers back and which has served as the basis for all judgment. This process is what Derrida in "The Double Session" calls "the very process of appearing" in general (*Dissémination* 219; *Dissemination* 192). "This order of appearance [*ordre d'apparition*] is the order *of all appearance* [*l'ordre* de l'apparition], the process of appearing itself [*l'apparaître lui-même*] in general. It is the order of *truth*" (219; 192).

Philosophy, this patrimonial filiation, mistakes the spectral for, or dismisses it as, an ideologeme or a phantasm to be expelled. Philosophy's steadfast belief in the reality of the real, the actual, or the material necessitates its *opposition* to what is considered to be of lesser importance like the imaginary, the fantastic, the ethereal, and the immaterial.

A threat to philosophy, which is based on a logic of exclusion or foreclosure, the spectral must to be conjured away. The spectral not only names the dislocation of the living present, of self-presence, but also dislodges the static ontology of presence, displacing the prominence bestowed to the ontological. Neither present nor absent, the spectral, would be the condition of any appearing or phenomenality.

Apparition speaks of spectral survival or living on [*survivance*], before Being or essence, before the separation of life from death.

The spectral, Derrida tells us in *Specters of Marx,* requires a new discourse, what he calls "hauntology" (*Spectres* 89; *Specters* 51). But perhaps this new discourse, or this other writing, would not even be a *logos* of haunting.

What Derrida has called "the spectral" or "spectrality" has far-reaching implications for all philosophy, in particular for phenomenology. Disturbing the order of phenomenology, submitting it to a deconstruction, spectrality forces, if not a rethinking, then at least a re-articulation of the phenomenological project. Phenomenology, the *logos* of phenomena, concerns itself with emergence into the open and coming to light (*phos*) of what shows itself. It aims to bring to light the being of whatever is. Phenomenology is the study of appearing (*phainesthai*), the coming into appearance and disappearing of phenomena, whether viewed as being present under the gaze of consciousness (Husserl), or as the things themselves as they show themselves in themselves (Heidegger).

When Husserl writes of *Erscheinung*, the phenomenon or the appearing, phenomenality is understood on the basis of, or starting out from, consciousness. The givenness of the phenomenon is understood as an actual presence for consciousness. Phenomena give themselves, but it is consciousness that receives what appears, considering that it is intuition that determines their validity. For something to be experienced as lived-experience [*Erlebnis*], it must be seen. The Husserlian consciousness is a consciousness that 'sees.'

In *Being and Time* Heidegger defines the task of phenomenology as letting that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. Logos lets something be seen (*phainesthai*). As is well known, Heidegger traces the Greek expression *phainomenon* back to the verb *phainesthai*, "to show itself." Hence, "the phenomenon is that which shows itself, the manifest [*das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare*]" (*Sein* 28; *Being* 51).[1] Phenomena are the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light, what the Greeks sometimes referred to as *ta onta*, beings, entities.

An entity can show itself from itself in many ways, it can even show itself as something that in itself it is *not*. Heidegger calls the kind of showing when an entity shows itself as that which in itself it is not "seeming [*Scheinen*]." Thus, phenomenon also means that which looks like something, that which is "semblant," "semblance" [*das 'Scheinbare', der 'Schein'*]. These two significations are interconnected. There is a structural interrelation between "phenomenon" as that which shows itself in itself and "semblance

[*Schein*]." One is the positive and primordial signification, while the other is a privative modification of the phenomenon.

"Appearing," according to Heidegger, is an announcing or making itself known through something that shows itself. Phenomena are never appearances, but every appearance is dependent on phenomena. Neither of them, however, can be reduced to a *mere* appearance [*Erscheinung*]. For, appearance does not mean showing itself. Rather, for Heidegger, it is the announcing-itself by something which does *not* show itself, but which announces itself *through* something that does (show itself). Heidegger writes that appearing is a *not-showing-itself*. The phenomenon shows itself, whereas what appears does not show itself. Yet appearing is only possible *on the basis of a showing-itself of something*.

Appearance and semblance are thus both founded upon the phenomenon.

It is phenomenology that "lets us see" what does not show itself, that which remains hidden, that which gets covered up—the Being of entities. Phenomenology lays bare the Being of all entities. In fact, precisely because phenomena are not given, Heidegger surmises, phenomenology is required.

Being announces itself through the appearance of the phenomenon.

The disturbance that Levinas's writings cause alters phenomenology's emphasis from the appearing of phenomena to the epiphany, the appearance or manifestation, of the Other.

In *Totality and Infinity,* we learn that the face expresses itself or signifies itself. Levinas calls "the way in which the other [*l'Autre*] presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me,*" the face. The other's "*way*" of presenting himself does not consist of "figuring as a theme under my gaze" or of "forming an image" (*Totalité* 43; *Totality* 50). Rather, "the face of the Other [*Autrui*] at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me" (*Totalité* 43; *Totality* 50-1).

In contrast to the face, "things have no face" (*Totalité* 149; *Totality* 140). "Things have a form," and are "seen *in* the light—silhouettes or profiles," whereas "the face signifies *itself*" (149; 140). In comparison, the face manifests itself "beyond form" (*Totalité* 61; *Totality* 66). The "life of the face"—expression—"consists in undoing the form, in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated" (61; 66).

Throughout his work, Levinas draws a distinction between the face and the phenomenon. In "The Trace of the Other" he provides the following distinction, repeated almost exactly in "Meaning and Sense":

> Although the phenomenon is already an image, a captive manifestation of a
> plastic and mute form, the epiphany of the face is alive. […] The Other [*Autrui*]
> who manifests himself in the face, as it were, breaks through his own plastic
> essence […] His presence consists in *divesting* himself of the form [*se* dévêtir *de*

la forme] which, however, manifests him. His manifestation is a surplus over the inevitable paralysis of manifestation" (*En Decouvrant* 194; *Trace* 351-2).

Coming toward us, Levinas notes, its mode of coming is that of making an entry. The epiphany (fr. *Epiphainein,* to manifest, fr. *epi+phainein* to show) of the face is visitation.

In a section entitled "Proximity" in *Otherwise than Being,* Levinas writes that the face of a fellow human being or neighbor [*prochain*] "escapes, evades [*échappe*] representation; it is the very collapse [*la défection même*] of phenomenality" (*Autrement* 141; *Otherwise* 88). (The word "défection" interestingly not only has a sense of "failure to show up where one is awaited for" but also "abandonment, desertion, giving up, withdrawal from, and relinquishing"). The face is *défection,* withdrawal, from phenomenality, a giving up of phenomenality, since it is, in a sense, "too weak, a non-phenomenon because 'less' than phenomenon" (141; 88)

In "Violence and Metaphysics," one of the first significant appreciations of Levinas's thought, Derrida points out that the other cannot be utterly other in the sense suggested by Levinas. *Autrui*, for Levinas, is underivable, irreducible, infinite alterity. Appealing to the writings of Husserl and Heidegger, Derrida shows that phenomenologically it is impossible to speak of the Other *in itself*. The Other must have *some relation* to*,* in Levinasian terms, "the Same." Even though the Other is never given *immediately* or "apprehended" directly, Derrida argues, it nevertheless 'presents' itself to me. It must appear to me, in two senses: (1) it must *appear* and (2) it must appear *to me*. Thus there

must be "a certain appearing of the other" (*Ecriture* 81; *Writing* 123). *Autrui* 'appears' but never *as such* and this appearance is the phenomenon—if it can be called a phenomenon any longer—of "a certain non-phenomenality," that of "an originary non-presence."

There is no Other [*Autrui*] in itself, by itself (*kath' auto*), as Levinas contends.

What Derrida's reading of Levinas in *Adieu* makes clear is that in all the accounts of *Autrui* the face of the other displays a "spectral aura." Even though in these descriptions Levinas never fails to emphasize the concrete character of the face, Derrida detects something spectral in the characterizations Levinas gives: *Autrui* "divests itself," is stripped, deprived or dispossessed of form; it "escapes representation;" "overflowing" form, in its nudity, it is "the very withdrawal from phenomenality."[2] A quotation from "The Trace of the Other" can best illustrate this: "In the concreteness of the world the face is abstract or naked. It is denuded of its own image. [...] The nudity of the face is a destitution [*un dépouillement*] without any cultural ornament, an absolution—a detaching in the midst of its very production" (*En Découvrant* 194; *Discovering* 352).

Neither phenomenal nor non-phenomenal, neither visible nor invisible, the coming of what Derrida calls "the other [*l'autre*]" exceeds figuration. Its coming is an undoing or interruption of all form. Not entirely lacking in form, its "formless" form is that of a figure without figure, a face without face, a figure without face, a face without figure.

The coming of the other, that which arrives or happens beyond all form, then, cannot be figured. It is unprecedented in its coming—like a revolution.
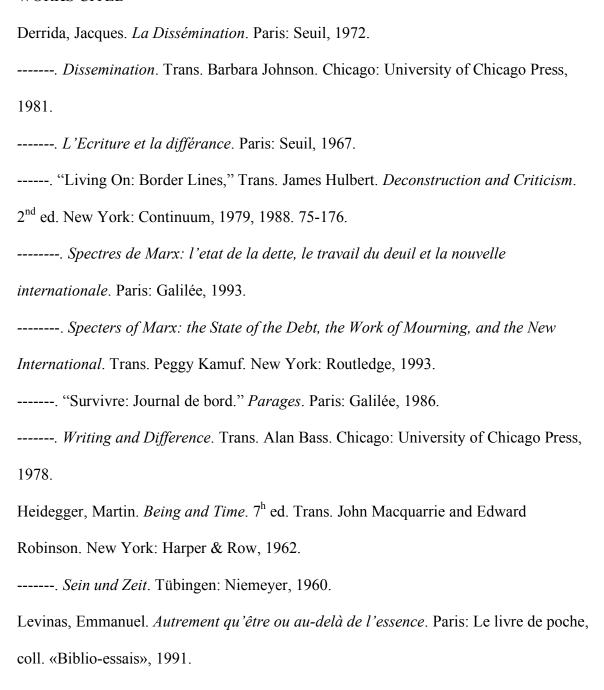
The other, whose appearance appears without appearing, effaces itself in its coming. Every appearance is haunted by disappearance, in appearing it dis-appears. Since it is irreducible to its appearing, a total and complete phenomenalization is never possible. For, flesh and phenomenality dis-appear immediately in the very coming of the apparition.

Apparition names the specter of the non-present, living-dead other.

A "ghost" is a spectral apparition, a magic appearance. Yet, it is a body--the most abstract of bodies. It is a becoming-body, a prosthetic body, an artifactual body, a body without body, a spectral body. This phantomatic body, an improper body without property or flesh, has the most intangible tangibility. Bearing traces of the departed or disappeared, every apparition is haunted by death or absence.

This is why we can claim that the coming of the other is always like the apparition of a ghost. Every time, in every relation—and every relation is a "spectral" relation—it is *as if* we were encountering a ghost.

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NOTES

[1] Heidegger further explains that *phainesthai* is a middle-voiced form which comes from *phaino*, to bring to the light of day, to place in brightness. *Phaino* itself stems from *pha*--like *phos*, the light, that which is bright—in other words, that in which something can become manifest, visible in itself.

[2] See for example: "It is doubtless necessary to insist on the *concrete figure* [*figure concrète*] in which the notion of alterity acquires its meaning. It should not be confused with that which has only a *formal signification*" (Levinas "Being-for-the-Other" 115; "Entretien" 10).