ask the following question: Can the phenomenological reduction itself be determined as a descriptive operation? Can one describe it that way?

According to Husserl—this is a different idea, but one that moves in the same direction—only the reduction allows us to discover what is a phenomenon. In this sense, Husserl admits that what is immediately given is not the phenomenon, without further ado, but that it transforms itself into the phenomenon (these are his own words) thanks to the operation of the phenomenological reduction. Therefore, in this sense—and Husserl asked himself about the same subject—the pure phenomenal givens that are the object of phenomenology are the fruit of an operation carried out by phenomenology and, Husserl adds, at a very late moment in the history of humanity, after the long developments of the work of the *Crisis*, with which you are all familiar. The Husserlian idea is that it is only thanks to a very special operation of the phenomenologist that the phenomena are discovered. This is similar to Heidegger’s notion of the phenomenon in *Sein und Zeit*, in which he says that the “phenomenon,” in the phenomenological sense, is at bottom that which does not manifest itself, does not show itself. Is this Husserlian idea compatible with an interpretation that would say that for Husserl being and appearing are identified without residue?

LEVINA: I do not think the reduction is the most powerful idea, nor the richest in influence. In France, surely not. Husserl always complained that no one starts with the reduction. This seems to be the great failing of Heidegger too. The reduction, through the motivations that make it necessary and that occupy such an ample place in the Master’s work, has always seemed to his most eminent disciples as an overly narrow methodism. But it has made possible the discovery of the intentional implications on the basis of which the abstract object regains a concrete meaning.

The Ruin of Representation

To meet a man is to be kept awake by an enigma. Upon meeting Husserl the enigma was always that of his work. Despite the relative simplicity of his welcome and the warmth found in his home, it was always Phenomenology one met in Husserl. These memories date back to my youth, when Husserl appeared already clothed in his myth; they contain only two semesters of personal contact. Discounting my respectful timidity, my excitement and the penchant of a twenty-year-old for mythology, I still believe that rarely has a man identified himself more with his work and separated this work more from himself. Referring no doubt to piles of his unpublished manuscripts slumbering in the bottom of some drawer and devoted to the phenomenology of retention, of the sensible or of the ego, he would say very simply: “Wir haben schon darüber ganze Wissenschaften” (“We already have whole sciences about that”). And he sounded as if he had acquired rather than created these still unknown sciences. Even in private Husserl spoke of his own work only in the very terms of that work. It was a phenomenology of phenomenology, and, when I knew him, almost always a monologue one dared not interrupt. And so, for me, the debt to the man is inseparable from the debt to his work.1

Of a rather serious but affable demeanor, faultless in his personal appearance though oblivious to externalities, distant but not haughty, a little uncertain in his certainties, the man reinforced the physiognomy of the work: full of rigor yet open, audacious and ceaselessly recommencing like a permanent revolution; embracing forms one would have liked, in those days, to be less classical and didactic, and a language one would have preferred to be even less monotonous. A work whose truly new accents will never reverberate to any but the sensitive or the practiced ear, but—obligatorily—alert.

By contrast, Heidegger’s philosophy presented itself brilliantly from the first. The confrontation of these two philosophies provided an important topic of meditation and discussion in Freiburg to a breed of students already dying out—those schooled by Husserl before knowing Heidegger.
Phenomenology, like all philosophy, teaches that immediate presence to things does not yet comprise the meaning of things, and consequently does not replace truth. But thanks to the way Husserl leads us to go beyond the immediate, we now possess new possibilities of philosophizing. Above all, Husserl contributes the idea of an analysis of intention capable of teaching us more about being (which these intentions were only supposed to grasp or reflect) than could a thinking that entering into these intentions. It is as if the fundamental ontological event, already lost in a grasped or reflected object, were more objective than objectivity—a transcendental movement. The renewal of the very concept of the transcendental that recours to the term “constitution” may obfuscate, appears to us to be an essential contribution of phenomenology. Whence, at the level of what may be called “philosophical reasoning,” a new way of moving from one idea to another. Whence a modification of the very concept of philosophy, which was identified with the absorption of every “Other” by the “Same,” or with the deduction of every “Other” from the “Same” (that is, in the radical sense of the term, with idealism). Henceforth, a relation between the Same and the Other does not come to invert the philosophical eros. Lastly, in a more general way: a new style in philosophy arises. It has not become a rigorous science as a body of universally compelling doctrines. But phenomenology has inaugurated an analysis of consciousness in which the greatest care is devoted to structure, the way one movement of the soul is integrated into another, and the way it rests and overlaps and is embedded in the whole of a phenomenon. One can no longer analyze by enumerating the ingredients of a state of soul. The points of reference of these “formulas of structure” certainly depend on the ultimate presuppositions of the doctrine. But a new spirit of rigor has been established; penetration is not a question of touching the subtle or the infinitely small in the soul, but in not leaving these elements or their developments without structure. These are the points that seem to me essential to all post-Husserlian thought, and they constitute the benefit that I, for my small part, have derived from a long acquaintance with Husserl’s works. They have influenced thought since the Logical Investigations, which defines phenomenology so badly, but proves it so well, for it does so as one proves movement—by walking.

Why would the logic that establishes the laws of ideas governing the empty forms of “thought” require, as its foundation, a description of the
But perhaps all the interest of the announced investigation, instead of having to do with the subject-object correlation that would define intentionality, follows from another dynamism animating intentionality. Its true enigma would consist not in the presence to things, but in the new meaning that intentionality permits being given to this presence. If the analysis of consciousness is necessary for the elucidation of objects, it is because the intention directed to them does not grasp their meaning, but only an abstraction in an inevitable misunderstanding; it is because the intention in its “bursting forth toward the object” is also an ignorance and a failure to recognize the meaning of that object, since it is a forgetting of everything that intention only contains implicitly and that consciousness sees without seeing. Such is the answer to the difficulty I called to mind a moment ago. It is the answer Husserl gives in paragraph 20 of the Cartesian Meditations, in characterizing the originality of intentional analysis. “Its original operation” he says, “is to unveil the potentialities ‘implied’ in the actualities (actual states) of consciousness. And thus is realized, from the noematic point of view, the explication, the definition and the eventual elucidation of what is ‘meant’ by consciousness; that is, its subjective sense.”

Intentionality thus designates a relation with the object, but a relation essentially bearing within itself an implicit meaning. Presence to things implies another presence that is unaware of itself, other horizons correlative to these implicit intentions, which the most attentive and scrupulous consideration of the given object in the naïve attitude could not discover. “Every cogito as consciousness, is, in a very broad sense ‘the meaning’ of the thing it intends, but that ‘meaning’ exceeds, at each instant, that which at that very instant, is given as ‘explicitly intended.’ It exceeds it, that is, it is laden with a ‘more’ that stretches beyond. . . . This exceeding of the intention itself, which is inherent in all consciousness, must be considered as essential [Wesensmoment] to that consciousness.”6 “The fact that the structure of all intentionality implies a ‘horizon’ [die Horizontstruktur] prescribes an absolutely new method to phenomenological analysis and description.”7

The classical conception of the relationship between subject and object is a presence of the object and a presence near to the object. The relationship is understood in such a way that, in it, the present exhausts the being of the subject and of the object. The object is at every instant exactly what the subject currently thinks it to be. In other words, the subject-object relation is entirely conscious. Despite the time it may last, this relation eternally recommences the transparent and actual present and remains a re-presentation in the etymological sense of the word.
By contrast, intentionality bears within itself the innumerable horizons of its implications and thinks of infinitely more "things" than of the object upon which it is fixed. To affirm intentionality is to perceive thought as tied to the implicit, into which it does not accidentally fall, but in which it maintains itself by essence. Thus thought is no longer either a pure present or a pure representation. This discovery of the implicit, which is not a simple "deficiency" of or "fall" from the explicit, appears as a monstrously or a marvel in a history of ideas in which the concept of actuality coincided with the absolute waking state, with the lucidity of the intellect. That this thought finds itself tributary to an anonymous and obscure life, to forgotten landscapes that must be restored to the very object that consciousness believes it fully holds, is incontestably akin to the modern conceptions of the unconscious and the depths. But it results not just in a new psychology. A new ontology begins: being is posited not only as correlative to a thought, but as already founding the very thought that nonetheless constitutes it.

We will return to this. Let us note for the moment that the conditioning of conscious actuality in potentiality compromises the sovereignty of representation much more radically than does the discovery in the life of feeling of a specific intentionality, irreducible to theoretical intentionality, and more radically than the affirmation of an active engagement in the world prior to contemplation. Husserl puts into question the sovereignty of representation with respect to the structures of pure logic, the pure forms of the "something in general," in which no feeling plays a role and where nothing presents itself to the will; and yet these structures and forms reveal their truth only when set back into their horizon. It is not an irrationalism of feeling or will that upsets the concept of representation. A thought that forgets the implications of thought, which are invisible prior to reflection on this thought, operates on objects instead of thinking them. The phenomenological reduction stops the operation in order to get back to the truth, to show represented beings in their transcendental emergence.

The idea of a necessary implication that is absolutely imperceptible to the subject directed on the object, only discovered after the fact upon reflection, thus not produced in the present, that is, produced unbeknownst to me, puts an end to the idea of representation and the subject's sovereignty, as well as to the idealism according to which nothing could enter into me surreptitiously. A deep-seated passion is thus revealed in thought. A passion which no longer has anything in common with the passivity of sensation, of the given—which was the starting point for empiricism and realism. Husserlian phenomenology has taught us neither to project states of consciousness into being, nor still less to reduce objective structures to states of consciousness, but to have recourse to a "subjective" field "more objective than all objectivity." It discovered this new field. The pure ego is a "transcendence in immanence," itself somehow constituted in terms of this domain where the essential game is played.

III

To exceed the intention in the intention itself, to think more than one thinks, would be an absurdity if this exceeding of thought by thought were a movement of the same nature as that of representation, if the "potential" were only a diminished or slack form of the "actual" (or it would be the banality of degrees of consciousness). What Husserl illustrates through his concrete analyses is that the thought that goes toward its object envelops thoughts that open onto noematic horizons, which already support the subject in its movement toward the object. Consequently, they bolster it in its work as a subject; they play a transcendental role. Sensibility and sensible qualities are not the stuff of which the categorical form or ideal essence is made, but the situation in which the subject already places itself in order to accomplish a categorical intention. My body is not only a perceived object, but a perceiving subject; the earth is not the base on which things appear, but the condition that the subject requires for their perception. The horizon implied in intentionality is thus not the still vaguely thought context of the object, but the situation of the subject. A subject in situation or, as Heidegger will say, in the world, is announced by this essential potentiality of an intention. The presence to things that intentionality expresses is a transcendence already having something like a history in the world it is only just entering. If Husserl claims full light on these implications he does so only in reflection. For Husserl, being does not reveal its truth in History rather than in consciousness, but it is no longer the sovereign consciousness of representation that grasps this truth.

The way is open for the philosophies of existence, which can leave the field of the pathetic and the religious, to which they hitherto confined themselves. The way is open for all Husserl's analyses of the sensible and the prepredictive that he so obstinately preferred, going back to the Unimpression, which is at once primary subject and primary object, giver and given. The way is open for the philosophy of the lived body, in which intentionality reveals its true nature, for its movement toward the represented is rooted there in all the implicit—nonrepresented—horizons of incarnate existence. Incarnate existence draws its being from
those horizons, which, nonetheless, in a certain sense, it constitutes (since it becomes conscious of them)—as if here constituted being conditioned its own constitution. This is a paradoxical structure, which Heidegger will make evident and put to work everywhere. He will show that subjectivity, the very dimension of the subjective, is as it were brought about by being, in order that what is inscribed in the revelation of being, in the splendor of the “physia” in which being is in truth, may be accomplished.

The presence near to things referring to initially and most frequently unsuspected horizons—horizons that nonetheless guide that very presence—indeed also announces the philosophy of being in Heidegger’s sense. All thought that directs itself to a being already stands within the being of that being (which Heidegger shows to be irreducible to a being), as within the horizon and site that commands all position-taking, the light of a landscape, already guiding the initiative of the subject who wills, works, or judges. All Heidegger’s work consists in opening and exploring this dimension, unknown in the history of ideas, to which he nonetheless gives the most well-known name of Sein [Being]. In relation to the most traditional model of objectivity, it is a subjective field—but subjectivism “more objective than all objectivity.”

Transcendental activity is neither the fact of reflecting a content, nor the production of a conceived being. The constitution of the object is already sheltered by a prepredicative “world” that the subject nonetheless constitutes. Conversely, the sojourn in a world is only conceivable as the spontaneity of a constituting subject, failing which this sojourn would have been the simple belonging of a part to a whole, and the subject a simple product of a ground. The wavering between the disengagement of transcendental idealism and the engagement in a world, for which Husserl was reproached, is not his weakness but his strength. This simultaneity of freedom and belonging—without either of these terms being sacrificed—is perhaps Sinngebung itself, the act of bestowing a meaning that runs through and sustains the whole of being. In any case, transcendental activity receives this new orientation in phenomenology. The world is not only constituted but also constituting. The subject is no longer pure subject; the object no longer pure object. The phenomenon is at once what is revealed and what reveals, being and access to being. Without bringing to light what reveals—the phenomenon as access—what is revealed—being—remains an abstraction. The new accent and the brilliance of certain phenomenological analyses—this impression they give of deforming notions and things—derives from this double perspective within which entities are placed. Objects are uprooted from their dull fixity to sparkle in the play of rays that come and go between the giver and the given. In this coming and going man constitutes the world to which he already belongs. The analysis resembles a harping upon an eternal tautology: space presupposes space, that is, represented space presupposes a certain implantation in space, which in turn is only possible as the project of space. In this apparent tautology the essence—the being of the entity—shines forth. Space becomes the experience of space. It is no longer separated from its revelation, from its truth, in which it is no longer merely prolonged, but is rather fulfilled. Phenomenology itself is this reversal in which being creates the act that projects it; in which the present of the act—or its actuality—turns into the past, but in which the being of the object is at once perfected in the attitude that is taken with respect to it and in which the anteriority of being is again placed in a future. Phenomenology is itself this reversal in which human behavior is interpreted as original experience and not as the fruit of an experience. It leads us outside the subject-object categories and topples the sovereignty of representation. Subject and object are only the poles of this intentional life. The phenomenological reduction has never seemed to me to justify itself by the apodicticity of the imminent sphere, but by the opening of this play of intentionality, by the renouncing of the fixed object that is the simple result of and the dissimulation of this play. Intentionality means that all consciousness is consciousness of something, but above all that every object calls forth and as it were gives rise to the consciousness through which its being shines and, in doing so, appears.

Sensuous experience is privileged, because within it that ambiguity of constitution, whereby the noema conditions and shelters the noeis that constitutes it, is played out. There is the same predilection in phenomenology for the cultural attributes that thought constitutes, but from which it is already nourished in constitution. The cultural world, in appearance a latecomer but the very being of which consists in bestowing meaning, sustains, in phenomenological analyses, all that seems simply contained and given in things and notions.

The notions that up until this point remained on the level of the object from now on form a series whose terms are not connected to one another either analytically or synthetically. They do not mutually complete one another like the pieces of a puzzle, but condition one another transcendentally. The connection between the situation and the object that refers to that situation, as well as the link between the phenomena that constitute the unity of a situation (revealed in reflexive description), are as necessary as the connections of deduction. Phenomenology brings them together despite their strictly objective isolation. It produces apprehensions that until then only poets and prophets allowed themselves, through metaphor and “vision,” and accumulated by languages in their etymologies. Earth and sky, hand and tool, body and other, condition
knowledge and being in a priori way. Failure to recognize this conditioning leads to the production of abstractions, equivocations, and gaps in thought. It is perhaps through this caveat directed against clear thought, forgetful of its constituent horizons, that Husserl’s work was most immediately useful to all theoreticians, particularly to all those who imagine they spiritualize theological, moral, or political thought by their failure to recognize the concrete and in a sense carnal conditions from which the ostensibly purer notions derive their true meaning.

IV

But the fact that thought is essentially implicit, that the ideal of a total actuality can only come from an abstract view, abstracted from thought itself, marks, perhaps, the end of an entire philosophical orientation. Philosophy arose in opposition to opinion, and led to wisdom as the moment of full self-possession in which nothing foreign or other any longer comes to limit the glorious identification of the Same in thought. Advancing toward the truth consisted in discovering a totality in which the diverse found itself identical again, that is, deducible on the same level, or on the level of the Same. This explains the importance of deduction that derived the totality from partial experience (whether this deduction were analytical, mechanical, or dialectical). The thought that made explicit what was implicit in the represented was in principle this power of total actualization, the pure act itself.

And so it is that thought directed upon the object in all the sincerity of its intention does not touch being in its naive sincerity; it thinks more than it thinks and otherwise than it thinks at the moment and, in this sense, is itself not immanent, even if by its look it holds the object it intends “in flesh and blood”? We are beyond idealism and realism, since being is neither inside nor outside thought, but thought itself is outside itself. A second act and second thoughts are necessary in order to consider hidden horizons that are no longer the context of this object, but the transcendental givers of its meaning. More than the instant or the eternity of self-evidence is necessary to hold the world and truth.

That Husserl himself conceived these second thoughts in the form of objectifying and completely actual acts of reflection (in virtue of what privilege?) may not have been decisive for the influence his work has had. This life that bestows meaning may reveal itself otherwise, and presuppose for its revelation relations between the Same and the Other that are no longer objectification, but society. The condition of truth may be sought in ethics. Is it only by chance that Husserl had the idea of philosophy as teamwork?

To put an end to the conception that thought and the subject-object relation are coextensive, is to offer a glimpse of a relationship with the other that is neither an intolerable limitation of the thinker, nor a simple absorption of this other into an ego, in the form of a content. Where all Sinngebung was the work of a sovereign ego, the other could in fact only be absorbed in a representation. But in a phenomenology where the activity of totalizing and totalitarian representation is already exceeded in its own intention, where representation already finds itself placed within horizons that it somehow had not willed, but with which it cannot dispense, an ethical Sinngebung becomes possible, that is, a Sinngebung essentially respectful of the Other. In Husserl himself, in the constitution of intersubjectivity, undertaken on the basis of objectifying acts, social relations, irreducible to the objectifying constitution that meant to cradle them in its rhythm, are abruptly awakened.