By conceiving Dasein as Being-in-the-world, Heidegger introduces a fundamental shift to the concept of place. No longer is place something external to us, a location ‘in’ which we are positioned; rather, place (as world) is part of our very being. However, one of the critiques directed at Heidegger is that his account of the relationship between Dasein and world reduces world to a self-projection of Dasein, with Dasein resembling the Cartesian subject from which Heidegger tried to escape. In effect, ‘world’ is reduced to being the place for Dasein to take place by existing and projecting itself. Claude Romano is a contemporary French phenomenologist who makes precisely this point, arguing that Heidegger equates the event of being (Sein) with the event of Dasein’s existence (EM\textsuperscript{1} 183).

As well as critiquing Heidegger, Romano proposes an alternative account, in which events are the key to understanding our relationship to the world in which our possibilities are projected and realised. For Romano, the world in which we project our possibilities is opened – and periodically upended – by events, first of all by the event of birth. As one to whom events happen, we are neither simply active nor passive, but live out of a passibility that puts our very selves into play and is a capacity to appropriate our possibilities and thereby advene to ourselves. Rather than seeing the world as the place for Dasein to take place, Romano sees our existence as the place for events and world to take place (EM 95). In this paper, I begin by outlining Romano’s critique of Heidegger, then describe Romano’s alternative, which he calls ‘evential hermeneutics,’ and

\textsuperscript{1} Romano’s major work is published in two complementary volumes: L’événement et le monde (1998) and L’événement et le temps. Épiméthée: essais philosophiques (Paris: PUF, 1999). Some of the key features of these volumes are sketched in an earlier essay, in the context of an analysis of aspects of Heidegger’s thought: “Le possible et l’événement,” 2 parts, Philosophie 40 (Dec. 1993): 68-95 (part 1), and 41 (March 1994): 60-86 (part 2). I will refer to a revised version of this essay which appears in a collection of Romano’s essays: Il y a, Épiméthée: essais philosophiques (Paris: PUF, 2003), 55-111. The text of Romano’s that I will draw on most often is L’événement et le monde (EM).
conclude by making some initial comments on its significance, especially in relation to thinkers such as Heidegger and Jean-Luc Marion.

1 The Subjectivity of Dasein’s Self-Projection

Heidegger repeatedly describes Dasein as both projecting itself into its own possibility, and as finding itself in a disposedness into which it has been thrown. However, as Being and Time progresses, the tension between these two dimensions progressively collapses, and the more active dimension of projecting into possibility takes on an increasingly dominant position – perhaps unavoidable after Heidegger’s initial decision to consider the question of being by studying the being of Dasein. Heidegger situates Dasein’s projective understanding in the referential totality of inner-worldly entities and Being-in-the-world, and increasingly describes the world in terms of its relation to this understanding: “The wherein of self-referential understanding, as that for which one lets entities be encountered in the way of Being of involvement, is the phenomenon of the world” (BT §18, 119*/86). This tendency to understand world in reference to Dasein reaches its most dramatic point when Heidegger asserts that “ontologically, ‘world’ is … a characteristic of Dasein itself” (BT §14, 92/64), and that “the worldliness of the world … is an existential determination of Being-in-the-world, that is, of Dasein” (BT §18, 121*/88). In such passages, world is presented more as a feature of Dasein’s own self-projection than as the referential totality in which that projection is thrown. In discussing truth, Heidegger goes so far as to propose that even being depends on Dasein: “ ‘There is’ being – not beings – only in so far as truth is. And truth is only in so far as and as long as Dasein is” (BT §44, 272*/230).

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2 For instance: “Disposedness and understanding characterise as existentials the primordial disclosedness of Being-in-the-world. By way of being attuned, Dasein ‘sees’ possibilities, from out of which it is. In the projective disclosing of such possibilities, it is always already attuned. The projection of its ownmost capacity-to-be is delivered over to the fact of thrownness into the there.” Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (BT), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper-Collins, 1962); translation of Sein und Zeit, 18th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001) §31, 188*/148. (Where an English translation of a text exists, the English page reference is given first, followed immediately by the original page reference. An asterisk following a page reference indicates that the translation has been modified.)

3 Italic used within quotations are always those of the original author. Emphasis that I have added is indicated by underlining.
Romano’s principal concern with Heidegger’s existential analysis is that, in insisting on everything that happens to Dasein being understood as one of its possibilities, Heidegger reduces phenomena to modes of Dasein’s being, thereby making Dasein a condition of possibility for events and failing to recognise the way in which events well up from themselves, happen to us and open a world for us. As Romano points out, Dasein is not only located at the centre of its world, but becomes the place for the appearance of that world and of being itself: “It is not merely ‘there’, alongside other beings, it is the fundamental There for the manifestation of Being, from which beings themselves become manifest and encounterable as such” (EM 21). Romano welcomes Heidegger’s insistence on existence as an event, a verb rather than a noun, but argues that because beings, truth, and even being itself only appear for Dasein’s projective understanding, there is no event other than Dasein’s existence:

It is because Heidegger restores its verbal sense to Being, as opposed to its substantive sense as copula, because, in other words, he conceives Being as event, that he thereby reduces the multiplicity of events to one alone: existing, in a transitive sense. No other event happens to Dasein than that event which it is itself, in so far as it understands Being – in so far as it is itself understanding of Being, transcendence. The event of Being and the event of being are, for it, one and the same. (EM 183)

In other words, all other events and beings are reduced to being the place for the single event of Dasein’s existing to take place. In Romano’s view, Heidegger thus accords a primacy to Dasein which conserves “the prerogatives conferred on the modern subject since Descartes – … Dasein remains the measure of all phenomenality” (EM 30). Romano judges that Dasein continues to be caught in the aporias of a metaphysical understanding of the ‘subject’ which Heidegger went to such pains to reject:

Heidegger, who breaks radically with this type of analysis, nevertheless renews certain of its aporias: no alterity, no original difference with the self comes to trouble the ‘autonomy’ of Dasein; … Being-in-the-world does not have, properly speaking, to become itself in the trial

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4 “The existential analytic is thus limited to declining, under its diverse modalities, the single event that is Dasein itself, the event of its Being.” (EM 27)

5 “How, then, could events be envisaged as themselves, and thus comprehended, when Dasein’s understanding of Being remains an ontological-formal condition of possibility for all that can present itself to it as event? For events are in principle what themselves open the playing field where they can occur, the unconditioned ‘condition’ of their own occurrence, that whose an-archic welling up abolishes all prior condition, or even that which occurs before being possible.” (EM 30)
suffered from the event, it is already entirely itself in the instant ‘held’ as supremely translucent, where it decides itself, and which seals its destiny forever.\(^6\)

According to Romano, there is no Other who is radically other from Dasein, and therefore nor is there any possibility for Dasein to become genuinely other, because everything that happens is a possibility of Dasein, which it always already is.\(^7\) Even death, which is the “possible impossibility of its [Dasein’s] existence” (BT 310/266), becomes one of Dasein’s possibilities – in fact, its “ownmost” possibility (BT 307/263):

A modality of authentic existence, and the uttermost possibility of that existence, death is just as much as existence is, it is the very possibility of existing. Finitude that Dasein already carries in itself solely by the fact of existing, finitude that does not happen to existence from outside, but is as inseparable from it as shadow from light. Death without adversity, without mystery, where nothing of ourselves is actually broken, where nothing alien awaits us, since by existing we have already been existing it from the outset. (EM 30)

At the same time as reducing death to one of Dasein’s possibilities, Heidegger almost completely ignores birth, a crucial event for Romano because it is an impersonal event that comes before Dasein and so can never be reduced to one of its possibilities: “That Being itself is given to us, handed over to us, conferred on us by the event of birth … introduces a fundamental heteronomy into existence, thus breaching Dasein’s existential ‘Self-subistence’ (BT §66, 381/332)” (EM 32).

Heidegger’s failure to acknowledge this radical alterity leads Romano to speak of a “certain ‘idealism of understanding’” in Being and Time. In this ‘idealism’, “a meaning can only come to Dasein from Dasein itself,” thus leaving Dasein closed in on itself and excluding any possibility of

\(^6\) Romano, Il y a, 98. This element of Romano’s critique closely parallels Jean-Luc Marion’s view of Heidegger’s thought. Marion justifies his own rethinking of the subject by a critique of the conditions imposed on phenomena by both Husserl’s ego and Heidegger’s Dasein: “Metaphysical (in fact, Cartesian) egoology is a paradigm that always haunts the I, even reduced, even phenomenological” (Being Given 187/262; cf. Reduction and Givenness chap. 1, chaps. 3-4; BG §§1-3, §19, §25). In Reduction and Givenness, Marion makes an extensive critique of Heidegger’s thought, focussing especially on Being and Time and carefully considering the relation between Dasein and the Cartesian ego (RG chaps. 3-4). He concludes that, while Dasein is in many respects a “destruction” of the ego, the “I think” of Descartes’ ego is paralleled by an implicit “I am” on the part of Dasein, so that Dasein is a “confirmation”, and even a “repetition” of the ego (RG 106/160). Marion repeats this assessment in Being Given: “The aporias of the ‘subject’ forever haunt Dasein. It could be that Dasein does not designate what succeeds the ‘subject’ so much as its last heir” (BG 261/360).

\(^7\) Emmanuel Levinas makes a similar point in the opening chapter of Totality and Infinity: “The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralising the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same. Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I.” Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 45f.
events genuinely happening to it (EM 189). In this respect, Dasein resembles a Leibnizian monad or the self-affection that is the “original essence of receptivity” for Michel Henry.8

2 Romano’s Evential Hermeneutics

Romano retains much of the structure of Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein: he too describes the human being as self-projecting, self-understanding and self-determining in a world, acting, making decisions, and exercising freedom. However, his crucial shift is to begin from events rather than from Dasein, and to describe our existential projection in relation to them. He sees events as providing the fundamental phenomenological structure of our encounter with phenomena, and of both the world and the ‘subject’ which are opened in it. Thus, instead of an ontological hermeneutics, Romano offers what he calls an “evential hermeneutics”, in which we are understood in terms of openness to events, advening to ourselves in their advent, and therefore, not Dasein, but an “advenant”.

Romano’s central insight is to distinguish between two types of event. Events, understood in the ordinary “evental [événementiel]” sense, happen as an actualising or factualising of a possibility which is already present in the world, and are described by Romano as “innerworldly facts.” Essentially different from these are “events in a properly evential [événemential] sense,” whose happening is a radical arriving (advenir) which upends the pre-existing possibilities and thus reconfigures the world. There are parallels in this distinction to Heidegger’s ontological difference.9 Innerworldly facts are very much ontic actualities, while evential events not only reveal the fundamental significance of the happening of events, but are also the origin of the structures within which innerworldly facts can themselves arise.

8 “In so far as the original essence of receptivity is defined in its internal structure by immanence, it becomes apparent that it itself constitutes the pure content which it receives. What the original essence of receptivity receives is itself. ... Self-affection is the constitutive structure of the original essence of receptivity.” (Michel Henry, The Essence of Manifestation, trans. Girard Etzkorn [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973], 233*; translation of L’essence de la manifestation, Épiméthée: essais philosophiques [Paris: PUF, 1963], 287-88.)

9 Jean Greisch suggests that Romano’s evental-evential distinction should itself be regarded as “ontological”. (Jean Greisch, “« L’herméneutique événementielle » : De la mondification à la temporalisation du temps,” Critique 57, no. 648 [2001]: 404.)
Romano singles out four key phenomenological differences between innerworldly facts and evential events: innerworldly facts are impersonal, happen within a world, are subject to causal explanation, and are inscribed in a datable present. By contrast, evential events are addressed to particular entities, reconfigure the world, cannot be explained by causes, and occur with a “structural delay” that opens a future. I discuss these four features in turn here, as well as Romano’s notion of the advenant.

First, innerworldly facts do not have a determinate ontic substrate which they modify in their happening, and to which they can be assigned. Thus, a bolt of lightning is a fundamentally impersonal event that does not affect any entity in particular. However, a phenomenon can only appear by affecting some entity, and so Romano describes the fact of the lightning as being assignable to “an open plurality of beings: the sky, the lake, the countryside, the walker and his dog, etc.” (EM 37). An evential event, on the other hand, is always “addressed” to a particular entity, such that “the one to whom it happens is himself implicated in what happens to him” (EM 44). Examples of this sort of implication include experiences of bereavement or making significant decisions; in events of this kind, “I am myself in play in the possibilities which it [the event] assigns to me” (EM 44).

Second, innerworldly facts always appear within the horizon of a pre-existing world. Romano understands this ‘world’ in a very Heideggerian sense, as “the totality of these pre-existing possibilities, from which all that happens happens, and is open, consequently, to explanation” (EM 47f). In Romano’s thought, the world is a hermeneutic network of possibilities within which human subjects interpret meaning, understand themselves and project their own possibilities in action:

‘World’ refers to the horizon of meaning for all understanding, the totality of possibilities articulated among themselves from which an interpretation is possible, the totality of interpretative possibilities that prescribe a horizon in advance for understanding, from which alone it can be put into action and brought about. It is itself a hermeneutic structure, and thus refers to the totality of possibilities from which a meaning can come to light as such.

... we find among these possibilities not only those prior possibilities from which all that happens happens (i.e., causes), but also those possibilities that depend solely on an advenant’s projections, and for the sake of which certain events occur: acts. (EM 51)
Evential events differ from innerworldly facts in that they do not happen within the already established horizon of a pre-existing world, but rather reconfigure the world by upending (bouleversant) its possibilities, and thus appearing on their own horizon. Far from being innerworldy, these events are “world-establishing for the adventant” (EM 56). When an evential event happens to me, my world is reshaped; none of my possibilities and projects remain unaffected: “This event has reconfigured my intrinsic possibilities articulated among themselves – my world – it has opened a new world in and by its bursting forth” (EM 55). In fact, “an event is this metamorphosis of the world in which the very meaning of the world is in play” (EM 95). Importantly, while the world opened by the event is genuinely new, it results from a reconfiguration of the existing world, rather than from a radically new creation.

Third, because an innerworldly fact is an actualisation of a pre-existing possibility in an already established horizon, it is foreseeable within this horizon, and subject to causal explanation (EM 64). The price of this comprehensibility is that innerworldly facts, along with their welling-up, are subordinated to “a universe of prior possibilities” (EM 54). Evential events, on the other hand, are subject to no such subordination. Because they do not appear within any pre-existing horizon, they are not explicable as the effects of causes within such a horizon. Romano therefore characterises their bursting forth as “an-archic” – a “pure beginning from nothing” (EM 58). However, this does not mean that events simply appear out of nothing. Romano is clear that the fact of an event’s happening is always explicable by causes which give it an “anchor point in a history”; but, he insists, “its causes do not explain it, or rather, if they ‘explain’ it, what they give a reason for is only ever the fact, and not the event in its evential sense” (EM 58). To illustrate this, he discusses the event of the first encounter between two people, the beginning of a relationship. As a fact, its actualisation is entirely explicable, in terms of how the two people came to cross paths, and even in terms of personality characteristics that might dispose them toward friendship. However, as the event in which a new relationship opens up in my life, an encounter “radically transcend[s] its own actualisation, reconfiguring my possibilities articulated in a world, and introducing into my
adventure a radically new meaning that shakes it, upends it from top to bottom, and thus modifies all my previous projections” (EM 59). From this perspective, an event is radically inexplicable, as Michel de Montaigne finds when he tries to account for his friendship with Étienne La Boétie: “If you press me to say why I loved him, I feel that it can only be expressed by replying: ‘Because it was him: because it was me’.”

Indeed, far from being explained as the effect of a cause, an event is its own origin, in the radical sense evident in the German ‘Ur-sprung’ (EM 61), of “pure bursting forth from and in itself, unforeseeable in its radical novelty, and retrospectively establishing a rupture with the entire past” (EM 60). This bursting forth establishes a new horizon of meaning, with a different range of possibilities on which I can project myself. The event “retransfigures my world to the point of introducing into it an excess of meaning that is inaccessible to any explanation” (EM 61), thus “obliging an advenant to understand both himself and his world differently” (EM 62). Because this shift in understanding takes place within the new horizon that an event opens, it only becomes possible after an event has already happened. Consequently, there is a “structural ‘delay’ ” associated with an evential event, such that “it is accessible only starting from its own posterity” (EM 64), and thereby opens me to the past (EM 69).

The fourth phenomenological difference between facts and events arises from this structural delay, and concerns temporality. An innerworldly fact is a “fait accompli” that “is brought about in a datable present, a definitive present in which everything is accomplished” (EM 64). It is simply a fact, with no unactualised potential, and is therefore located at a specific time. Events, on the other hand, are not datable for Romano: “They are not so much inscribed in time, as they are what opens time, or temporalises it” (EM 65). An evential event is never encountered in the present of its happening, but only retrospectively, from the future which it opens. It is not given as a present actuality, but precisely as “the movement of this futurition,” by which it opens a new horizon of

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possibilities, and “thus … introduces a fissure between the past and the future, from which time itself wells up in the diachrony of its radically burst open and non-synchronisable times” (EM 65).

Like Heidegger (and Marion), Romano gives the ‘subject’ a new name – “the advenant” – reflecting his understanding of how subjectivity arises and is reshaped in the happening of the event. Romano retains basic elements from Dasein in his concept of subjectivity, in that he understands selfhood as “capacity to appropriate eventual possibilities articulated in a world that surface from an event, and to understand oneself from them” (EM 118). However, in a crucial departure from Heidegger, there is no sense in which Romano’s ‘subject’ is itself the origin of its possibilities; rather, its possibilities are opened to it in the opening of a world which is the happening of an eventual event. In fact, the subject is itself the place in which its possibilities are opened to it; it is the taking-place in which it arrives at itself. For Romano, the subject is the one who comes to (ad-vient) himself in the happening (advenant) of an event in which he is implicated:

Advenant is the term for describing the event that is constantly underway of my own advent to myself from the events that happen to me [m’adviennent] and that, by addressing themselves to me, give me a destiny: adventure without return. … the very opening to events in general. (EM 72)

This perpetual coming to (a-venture) myself of the advenant precludes any possibility of claiming sovereignty, either over myself or over the world of possibilities in which I project myself. Romano insists that I always come to myself from an origin other than myself, and that this is true from the very beginning of my existence. This insistence is reflected in the central place which he gives to birth in his analysis: it is the event “that opens an advenant’s world for the first time” and that, “before any of his projections and before any understanding … makes possible all his possibilities and the world” (EM 96). As such, it is the “first event,” both in that it happens first (“en fait … le premier événement”), and in that it is the “original and inaugural event … the Urereignis” for all other events (“événement premier en droit”) (EM 96). Though my birth happens to a “to whom [à qui],” strictly speaking ‘I’ am not present until after I am born. I am never the origin of that which I am, and which I am from my very beginning (i.e., originally): “To be born is to be a self originally, but notoriginarily; it is to be free originally, but not originarily; it is to understand
the meaning of one’s adventure originally, but not originarily; it is to make possible the possible (by projecting it) originally, but not originarily, etc.” (EM 96). On this basis, Romano points to a structural delay in the origin of the advenant himself, reflecting the structural delay of the eventual event: “This original disparity [décalage] between originary and original ... introduces a deferral in the origin itself, such that the origin never declares itself until after the fact, non-originally, according to a constitutive delay and a non-empirical a posteriori that nevertheless belongs to its character as origin” (EM 96). Birth thus establishes a structural delay at my very origin; according to this delay, I can only ever project myself into future possibilities that have been opened by an event that itself always lies in the past. Romano’s account of this delay allows him to describe the advenant as being born into a dynamic which makes it essentially temporal, while precluding any suggestion that the advenant is itself the origin of this dynamic.

Romano’s insistence that the advenant is not the origin of itself, nor of the world in which it projects its possibilities, leads him to distinguish three types of possibility, two of which can be described in Heideggerian terms. As well as the ontic or “factual possibility” of what is simply not yet actual (EM 112f), and the ontological or “projectual possibility” proper to the advenant’s way of being as a self-projection in the possibilities of an already existing world (EM 115), Romano introduces an “eventual possibility” which is the “possibility of the [projectual and factual] possible” (EM 117). Eventual possibility is the opening of a world, with its horizon of projectual possibilities, in the happening of an eventual event. As such, it is that which makes these projectual possibilities possible, and in which a future is opened that is not limited to an ultimately sterile playing-out of the “dead possibilities” of my present:

Without such an eventual possibility every projection would be in vain, for it would have no hold on the future in its absolute difference from my present: a projection clutching at dead possibilities, dead even before they had been possible, since they would be incapable of taking hold of the future [avenir], and thereby making me happen [advenir] to myself by calling me to more than what I know of my capability. (EM 119)

Because it exceeds both my actual possibilities and my projectual possibilities, this eventual possibility opened by the event “is strictly impossible.” But this very impossibility is the excess by
which eventual possibility reconfigures my world, and opens me to a possibility for myself that I have not myself projected, and which is therefore genuinely other than what I already am (EM 121f).

3 Significance of Evential Hermeneutics

If one accepts that thought such as Husserl’s and Heidegger’s continues to be haunted – and weakened – by the traces of Cartesian subjectivism that persist in it, thus precluding thought of that which is genuinely other, the simplest remedy is a straightforward inversion of subject and object, same and other. I believe this is the result of Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, which insists on the primacy of phenomena, giving themselves in and of themselves alone. However, such an approach serves merely to perpetuate the structures of egoistic sovereignty, except with the subject as passive recipient of an object imposed on it, or determined and defined by its other, or perhaps a mere mode of God or Nature in a monism such as Spinoza’s.

One of Romano’s great strengths is to avoid this kind of simple inversion. He conceives of an interplay between subject and world in the happening of events, such that a place is opened for an adventure that is no longer defined by the dichotomies of subject-object and active-passive. Thus, Romano takes great pains to preclude any attribution of some kind of selfhood to events, by situating them firmly in the context of their happening to a human subject: “Events, in the evential sense, are precisely nothing other than this reconfiguration of my possibilities, in which I am given the capacity to understand myself differently” (EM 75). The “new world” that is installed by this reconfiguration remains “my world” (e.g., EM 61). For Romano, the new horizon of possibility opened by an event is always a horizon for the understanding and projection of the advenant to whom the event happens (EM 60-62). The event brings an excess of meaning and of possibility into my world, but these are clearly meaning for me and possibilities for me (EM 61).

Though Romano describes an event as opening “a new world” (EM 55), he is clear that this world is ‘new’ only in that “strictly speaking it is no longer the same world” (EM 55). More often,
he describes the event as that which “upends” (EM 45) and “reconfigures” my possibilities articulated in a world” (EM 59), and leads to a “metamorphosis” of the world and its meaning” (EM 93), a “mutation” of meaning” (EM 95), or even a “transition” from one meaning [evental] of ‘world’ to the other [evental]” (EM 94). Each of these descriptions makes clear that, while the event brings something genuinely new for the *advenant*, it is not a creation ex nihilo, which is received on a blank screen, and to which the particular *advenant* is irrelevant. Rather, the event happens in the context of an already existing totality of possibilities for meaning and projection, and its happening is the upending and reconfiguring of this very totality. The result of such an upending or reconfiguring depends fundamentally on the particularities of what is upended and reconfigured. In Romano’s account, the world opened by the event is genuinely new, but it is not a radical origin.

The one exception to this for Romano is, of course, the event of birth. It is here that his divergence from Heidegger is most dramatically evident.\footnote{Romano believes that Heidegger’s restriction of possibility to Dasein’s self-projection depends on his ignoring the significance of birth. In turn, this allows Heidegger to present death as one of my actual and appropriable possibilities, thus avoiding the need to grapple with death as something radically other which happens to me. (Romano, *Il y a*, 57-88.)} Heidegger introduces a form of conditionedness for Dasein in describing it as “thrown,” but without suggesting that this thrownness is any sort of origin. In Romano, on the other hand, it is already clear that, though events open *my* possibilities and *my* world, I am the origin of neither of these. However, the event of birth reveals the *advenant*’s origin, and the origin of the world, as being *radically* external, in that it is the only event in which, strictly speaking, there is not yet an ‘I’. Preceding ‘me’, it is both “impersonal” and “inappropriable [inassumable]” by me; it “radically transcends my thrownness, and therefore also my own potentiality-for-Being” (EM 101). All that an *advenant* originally is comes from an origin that he himself is not: “Before any of his projections and before any understanding, this event makes possible all his possibilities and the world” (EM 96). While Romano’s world retains many Heideggerian features, in that it is the horizon of possible projection and meaning for the *advenant*, unlike Heidegger, Romano systematically excludes any suggestion that the world is itself a
projection of the *advenant*. One who advenes to himself in being born can never be the origin of himself, nor of his possibilities, nor of his world. Romano thus concludes (implicitly contrasting himself with Heidegger): “What could appear as a condition (Being-in-the-world) is here conditioned in turn” (EM 99).

For Romano, from its very beginning, the ‘I’ who is born can only be understood in terms of an interrelatedness with my world, which is itself first opened for me in the event of my birth (EM 97f). This mutual interrelation between the *advenant* and the world in which he advenes to himself is critical for Romano: “The world opens only for an *advenant*, who advenes to himself only *through and from* the world, takes place only where an event wells up, is the ‘place’ for the taking-place of the world as such” (EM 95).

This fundamental interrelatedness of the *advenant*, the world and the event is central to Romano’s thought, and means that each of these concepts can only be understood in terms of the others. The *advenant* is the one who is always arriving in the events that open his world; the world opened by events is the totality of possibility for the *advenant*; and events themselves are the reconfiguring of the *advenant*’s world. On the basis of this interrelatedness, Romano succeeds in understanding the *advenant* as actively implicated in the way an event happens, without placing him in a constituting role, and while still ascribing the initiative for their happening to events themselves.

For Romano, while the event “brings its own horizon of intelligibility with it, obliging an *advenant* to understand both himself and his world differently” (EM 62), this new understanding remains understanding, and this new world remains the world of the *advenant*, and both of these are essential to the happening of the event. In fact, the event’s happening is precisely the transformation in the *advenant*’s self-understanding and self-projection in a world. Even though his world is opened for him by the happening of the event, the *advenant* still “shapes himself [se determine lui-même] in the course of his adventure” (EM 91) and still “has to understand himself” (EM 94). Romano is clear that the world transformed by the event remains a profoundly *human*
world, in which people have freedom and capacity to act. In fact, decision-making is itself a phenomenon which Romano returns to a number of times, opening up the complexity in which a significant decision about my life is both my act of self-determination and simultaneously eventual. Such a decision is eventual in that it appears to me as a decision only once it has already been made (EM 67f), and in that by “reconfiguring my intrinsic possibilities (my world), … [it] also opens to me ipso facto a possibility that I did not project” (EM 121; cf., 122).

Part of Romano’s success lies in his attentiveness to the subtle interplay of activity and passivity, capacity and impotence, which we find in ourselves, and which leads us to insist on ourselves as genuinely free and self-determining at the same time as we admit the fundamental ways in which this freedom is qualified. Romano describes this ambivalence as a “passibility [passibilité]” which arises from the origin of our self-projecting adventure lying outside ourselves (in birth), and therefore coming before any activity or passivity. It is a “being exposed beyond measure to events, in a way that cannot be expressed in terms of passivity, but precedes the distinction between active and passive” (EM 99). As such, it is a sort of “‘pre-subjective’ opening,” because “a passivity that would be mine … is given only in the after-shock and counter-blow of the event.”12 Romano’s account of birth provides a mediating origin for the tension we experience between activity and passivity, between capacity and impotence. Moreover, this mediation is not restricted to the radical origin which is my birth, but rather is part of the ongoing structure of my adventure, in which my possibilities for acting in the world are reconfigured by the events which happen to me.

Romano’s account of the advenant’s adventure is a thoroughly human story, built around my striving to realise possibilities by means of action, decision, projection and understanding in my world. One of the features of his account which assures this humanness is the central place he assigns to meaning. From the outset, he designates the horizon of the world as “a hermeneutic structure” – a horizon of possible meanings that can be understood and interpreted, and thus provide

12 Romano, Il y a, p. 101, n. 1.
a basis for meaning-filled projection and action (EM 51). For Romano, an original characteristic of the *advenant*, opened in birth, is the endeavour “to understand the meaning of one’s adventure” (EM 96). Indeed, the *advenant* arrives at himself only in such an act of understanding: “The *advenant* is the one who … has the possibility of understanding *himself* in his selfhood starting from the possibilities articulated in a world that the event has pushed forth, and, consequently, to advene himself precisely as *the one* to whom what happens happens” (EM 73). Consequently, the *advenant*’s adventure in a world is itself fundamentally hermeneutic, which is reflected in Romano’s choice of “evential hermeneutics” as the title for his “interpretation of the *advenant*” (EM 34). Romano’s account of the *advenant* is fundamentally (or even ontologically) hermeneutic. The very happening of the event reveals a fundamental and hermeneutic interrelatedness of event, world, and the one who comes to himself in that happening. Moreover, Romano is faithful to this very Heideggerian sense of hermeneutics, while consistently avoiding Heidegger’s tendency (in *Being and Time*) to establish Dasein as a self-originating self-projection.

The other Heideggerian element that Romano retains is the centrality of temporality. This happens in two aspects of his analysis. First, the structural delay in an evential event opens a fissure between the future and the past, “from which time itself wells up, gaping beyond measure” (EM 68). Because events have always already happened when I encounter them (and encounter myself in them), my experience of them is necessarily delayed, and is therefore an opening to the past: “The very meaning of an event is given only in terms of an essential *a posteriori* – a ‘transcendental’ *a posteriori*, one could even say” (EM 69). Second, the event’s happening is in itself an opening of the future. An event does not happen as a present actuality, but as “the movement of … futurition” that is the making possible of new possibilities: “It opens an entirely new future” that is genuinely other than the actualities of the past and the present (EM 65).

This genuine novelty of the future that an event opens is one of the great strengths of Romano’s account. By contrast with Heidegger’s conception, which defines world in terms of the place for Dasein’s possibilities to be projected and played out, Romano’s *advenant* is open to
radical alterity, and repeatedly upended by the welling-up of that which is other to it. While Romano does not himself describe this in terms of transcendence, his evential hermeneutics certainly lends itself to an account of the transcendent (and even Transcendent) breaking in on the immanence of experience. In seeking to open a conceptual space for that which exceeds the subject, Romano has much in common with other recent French thinkers such as Levinas, Marion and Jean-Louis Chrétien. Moreover, he does this without succumbing to the temptation of making the subject a purely passive recipient of an excessive and transcendent alterity.

However, Romano’s thought depends on a less than satisfactory tension at its heart: it could be characterised as an essentially Heideggerian account of self-projection that is occasionally interrupted by the self-imposition of evential events reconfiguring my world. These two dimensions cannot be entirely integrated with each other without compromising the opposing insights they carry with them: on the one hand, the *advenant* projects his possibilities on the horizon of a world; on the other hand, the *advenant* is upended by the advent of an evential event that transfigures his possibilities and his world. Such a disjunction is reminiscent of the inadequacy of conceptions of the supernatural in which it is presented as a radically transcendent order breaking into and overturning the natural order.

I don’t believe that there is a simple way of resolving this tension in Romano’s thought. Nor do I believe that it undermines the success of his account as a phenomenological description, given the extent to which it corresponds to our experience. It may be that events, and especially the event of our own existence, elude a comprehensive account in something like the way that light does. Just as we resort to two fundamentally incommensurable accounts of light – the wave and particle models – perhaps we must also content ourselves with describing contrasting dimensions of events in a way that simply sets out the tension between them. It may even be that this tension is a reflection of the ambivalence in our experience of advening to ourselves as the place for the variety of events that happen to us, both giving us a horizon on which to project our possibilities, and upending us to open new possibilities beyond any of our projections.