

THE ETHICS OF THE ENCOUNTER IN LEVINAS AND MALDINEY

David-Augustin Mândruț (Cluj-Napoca)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the relation between the works of Emmanuel Levinas and those of Henri Maldiney. Both phenomenologists engaged throughout their careers with the issue of the encounter, providing at the same time an ethical appraisal of it, which is centered around the notion of personal uniqueness. While Levinas breaks off with Martin Buber's so-called symmetrical account of interhuman relatedness, by advancing an asymmetrical theory of interpersonal relationships, Maldiney tackles mostly the question of phenomenological aesthetics, in an attempt to rigorously apply the core concepts of Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology onto the experience of the work of art. Even though Levinas's main concern was that of a phenomenologically inspired ethics, Maldiney's few and scattered remarks concerning the problem of alterity might help to shed light on the complex yet rarely explored relation between the two abovementioned authors. This paper sets forth the thesis that the encounter with otherness can be subsumed under the notion of event as it was described in the works of Maldiney. Moreover, if the Levinasian concept of encounter is seen through the prism of the notion of event, this brings along utterly important consequences vis-à-vis the ethical relation with the other. Therefore, I am going to argue, using mostly the phenomenological framework of these two authors, that the event of the encounter is that specific interhuman happening thanks to which the uniqueness of the other is revealed.

Keywords: Emmanuel Levinas; Henri Maldiney; ethics; phenomenology; event; encounter, surprise.

Introduction

Martin Buber was one of the first philosophers to actively engage in an attempt to describe the "narrow ridge" onto which encounters occurred. (Buber 2002, 243) The relation between Levinas's work and that of Martin Buber is well known, while Henri Maldiney also employs the notion of encounter to describe this sort of event-like happening between I and Thou, which produces a radical change in the being of both the

"same" and the "other". This paper argues that the uniqueness of the other can be revealed through these sorts of transformative experiences, provided by the phenomenon of encounter. While Levinas stresses on several occasions the responsibility held by the "same" vis-à-vis the other, Maldiney was rather more interested in the possibility of personal becoming through the experience of encounter, thus he even employed the notion of metamorphosis to describe this perpetual, yet innocent becoming (Nietzsche) of the same who encounters the other. This paper will be divided into several sections, each investigating a core notion of either Levinas or Maldiney, for example, those of event, encounter and uniqueness. These notions will be interpreted as forming a unitary whole, from which a full-fledged and broader notion of transformation or metamorphosis could be elaborated. The aim of the paper is twofold, in accordance with the twofold structure of the encounter. First, we have the ethical component, pertaining to the ethical dimension of this phenomenon, and then, we have the ontological quality of the encounter, which manifests most precisely in the possibility of mutual becoming. Therefore, transformation or metamorphosis will designate the possibility of mutual enrichment between I and Thou, where possibilities are always at stake, namely they are always in a process of becoming or actualization. This mutual enrichment between I and Thou represents more than what Gadamer has called the fusion of horizons (Gadamer 2013, 386), because our very being-in-the-world is thrown into play. Our thesis is mainly a relational and dialogical one, i.e., it sets forth the claim that the process of acknowledging the other's uniqueness is dependent on the relational event between I and Thou, which is precisely the interhuman encounter. Henceforth, and partly following the thematization of Claude Romano, it could be argued that in the case of the human being's existence, encounter is a peculiar form of the event, even a pivotal one. Even though Levinas was mainly preoccupied with ethics, and Maldiney with aesthetics, their notions of encounter seem to resonate precisely in the case of personal uniqueness. Levinas and Maldiney knew each other's work, as Prášek has shown, and nonetheless, this paper can be regarded as an attempt to strengthen once again the philosophical relation between the works of the two French phenomenologists. (Prášek 2023, 169) Finally, in the chapter concerning the possibility of transformation, key hermeneutical concepts will be employed to define the complex process through which the "same" passes in order that his or her possibilities come closer to actualization. Therefore, the notions of the opportune moment (*kairos*), the practical wisdom (phronesis) and interhuman confirmation will be addressed to notice precisely how the event of encounter becomes operative. Both Levinas and Maldiney have discussed the concept

of instant (a manifestation of *kairos*), in different thematizations, yet via certain hermeneutical remarks, we aim to bring their perspectives in conjunction, by advancing the thesis that the instant is ultimately a moment of change, thus demanding decision and responsibility.

1. Event and encounter

As Claude Romano strongly emphasized throughout his works, the encounter is an event *par excellence*. (Romano 2009, 114) Nevertheless, for him, birth is the event that configures all the other events which will take place in the adventure of the human being. Contrariwise, both Levinas and Maldiney asserted the pivotal role played by interhuman meetings in the economy of our being-in-the-world. Levinas's well-known notion of the face-to-face encounter proved to be an attempt to rethink the Buberian reciprocity between I and Thou. Whereas Buber argued for a sort of symmetry between the same and the other, Levinas insists rather of the asymmetric side of the encounter, which always designates the priority of the other vis-à-vis the same, and the responsibility held by the same to the other. (Levinas 1979, 215) Both Buber and Levinas agree that responsibility is first and foremost a gesture of responding to the other (Buber 2002, 18), but Levinas conceives the other as a sort of radical alterity, who cannot be thematized and synchronized. The possibility of thematization and synchronization with the other would result in the other being subsumed under the categories of the same. Therefore, Levinas employs the notion of diachrony to designate this sort of temporal and ethical relation to the other. (Levinas 1999, 13) By the same token, Maldiney explores the pathic dimension of Dasein, to reveal the profound affective structures which bind us to the other. This possibility of welcoming the other, also present in Levinas, is called by Maldiney *transpassibilité* (*transpassibilité*). Shortly put, *transpassibilité* represents the liability manifested towards what transcends our horizons of experience, i.e., the otherness. Maldiney associates *transpassibilité* with surprise when encountering the other, but also, he regards the interhuman encounter to pertain to this horizon of *transpassibilité*. (Maldiney 2001, 104) Let me explain in a few words what Maldiney wants to express through this relation. The encounter is always a sudden occurrence of the other in the presence of the same, and due to this fundamental spontaneity of the other manifested over the same, we have to resist the event of encounter, by responding with our whole being to alterity. Thus, the notion of *transpassibilité* will be coupled with the notion of *transpossibilité* (*transpossibilité*). (Maldiney 1991, 361) As Samuel Thoma

explains, this couple represents two sides of the same coin, namely the receptive side and the responsive one. (Thoma 2019, 284) The sum of the two would result in a genuine decision towards alterity. I will not inquire for the moment into the complex relation between transpassibility and *Urdoxa*, and into their possible ramifications towards a psychopathology of the encounter, but rather I will return to Levinas's stance towards the other.

In *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, Levinas introduces the notion of a passivity more passive than any other passivity (Levinas 1998a, 15), which designates precisely this exposure to otherness, resembling somehow the passibility described by Maldiney. Levinas even discusses the relation to the other as a sort of trauma, but he nonetheless does not provide an answer to how we can cope with this sort of traumatism. Once again, the point of juncture between Levinas and Maldiney becomes more evident when we try to envisage how the two of them described the possibility of a relational trauma. In a short text, entitled *Encounter and Psychosis*, Maldiney even describes the encounter with the other, and the psychosis that is a possibility which always menaces this encounter to be determined by the instant, in Plato's sense. (Maldiney 2003, 20) While for Levinas, the instant was a way of escaping the continuity of duration, for Maldiney, this particular moment becomes the genesis of psychosis itself, because it represents an overload of affectivity and even meaning, which does not have any intrinsic past and future within. This, of course, would be an unfortunate encounter with otherness, while in our paper we aim to describe the fortunate encounter with alterity, which unfolds one's possibilities, thus not stopping them from becoming a reality. Therefore, the transformation of which we are going to speak is mainly concerned with what Wittgenstein has called the world of the happy one. (Wittgenstein 2002, 87)

We are now ready to describe the concept of event, and to link it with the notion of encounter. The event is this sudden excess of affectivity and meaning, which can also be disconcerting. It represents a radically new stance towards the world, which alongside Buber, could be called "understanding with the world". (Buber 1999, 175) For example, the encounter with the other, which disconcerts our everydayness (we can just think of some human endeavors, such as work), suddenly awakens the responsibility towards the other, thus reconfiguring all our possibilities towards the world. Here we could once again remember Buber's distinction between the I-Thou and the I-It relation. (Buber 2013, 3) As Buber points out, the horizon of the world becomes somehow illuminated by the presence of the other, shedding light even on the beings which were

previously conceived of belonging to the It-realm. What Buber was precisely attempting to emphasize is this radical distinction of attitude between the world conceived as an It and the world as conceived as a Thou. We might even call the event of the encounter one of responsibility, because the sudden appearance of the other's presence in our world horizon disconcerts us to the point when we feel responsibility towards the other. This is precisely what Levinas was discussing under the heading of a certain obsession with the other, which makes us somehow hostages. Moreover, Levinas also argued that the other signifies something even before or without the experience of the world. The last point should be emphasized further, because here arises a difference between the dialogical and ethical experience of the other, and the hermeneutical one. If in the case of the first, we suspend our judgements to let the other be and speak for himself or herself, without the same attaching any prejudices to it, the hermeneutical experience insists precisely on how prejudices intervene in the understanding of otherness, be they social, cultural or historical prejudices. Therefore, if in the case of the first experience the encounter is somehow floating above the world, for the latter, the world becomes the ground on which human encounters and interpersonal understanding might take place. Buber and Levinas were advocates of the possibility that holds the other to be significant for us before a certain experience of the world (Koo 2016, 100), while Gadamer always insisted that the world is a horizon of familiarity that allows interhuman encounters to take place. (Gadamer 1976, 15)

Now that we have presented the basic tenets of the relation between encounter and event, we are ready to dwell on the perspectives of Levinas and Maldiney, and to conclude by the possibility of bringing together their views in the case of the uniqueness of the other. We must always bear in mind that the encounter involves the sort of passivity, which was described by Levinas, implying this vulnerability towards the other. Here vulnerability can be treated in conjunction with Maldiney's passibility, because both notions denote this sort of liability that renders possible the fact of being transformed by the other. In other words, the genuine encounter with the other might bring along a sort of metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world, which we could call "understanding with the world", following Buber's letter to Hans Trüb. In this letter, Buber argues that encounters always involve resistance, adversity, contradiction and even absurdity. (Buber 1999, 175) Nonetheless, these types of genuine encounters, if responded properly to them, might trigger this understanding with the world, which might transform itself even into a friendship or into another type of interpersonal relation with otherness.

2. The epiphany of the other's face

As Prášek suggests, the face of the other is transcendence par excellence, because the visage cannot be included in one's sphere of ownness (the same). (Prášek 2023, 162) Moreover, as Levinas himself emphasized, the transcendence of the other's face points us towards the idea of infinity. There exists a certain epiphany of the face which renders possible the ethical relation with the other. The visage of the other resists objectification, because when encountering it, one does not pay attention to the color of the eyes, of the hair, or of the voice even, but rather the epiphany entails the uniqueness of the other. The uniqueness of the other implies the peculiar role played by what Levinas has called the metaphysical desire, the desire for the other qua other. (Levinas 1979, 33) One can also remember Martin Buber's inborn Thou (Buber 2013, 19), whose strength is reinforced in the case of the phenomenon of tenderness, whereas for Levinas also, the caress is pivotal for demarcating the metaphysical desire for any other desire or need. Nonetheless, the metaphysical desire whose encounter with the face of the other results in the ethical relationship of responsibility is not a desire that can be satisfied, but rather, a desire that grows stronger and stronger with every encounter of a visage, i.e., a uniqueness. Returning to the topic of epiphany, it also designates an "autophany" of the same, as Maldiney considered. (Maldiney 2003, 16) We can already notice how a certain process of mirroring, similar to that described by Patočka occurs in this scenario. (Patočka 1998, 36) The uniqueness of the other consequently reveals our own uniqueness, and from there on, the ethical relation might emerge. Contra Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, Levinas suggests that the other and the same might be regarded as the teacher and the apprentice. This epiphany also represents a sort of wonder before the presence of the other, which causes a disproportion and even a non-coincidence between the *cogitatio* and *cogitatum*. (Levinas 1999, 3) The interrelation between epiphany and autophany, as described by Maldiney resembles Levinas's notion of awakening to the other, i.e., the awakening of a responsibility pertaining to the immemorial past of existence. (Levinas 1998b, 77) Nevertheless, this sort of interhuman mirroring is first and foremost related to the notion of responsibility of one for the other, whereas both I and Thou come to acknowledge the uniqueness of the other. The relation between epiphany and autophany comes close even to what Maldiney called the surprise of being, a sort of overwhelming surplus of affectivity and meaning, which produces a metamorphosis of one's being-in-the-world.

Levinas emphasized several times that the other also resists the act of transcendental synthesis of transcendental apperception, as in Kant's sense, but also, he or she resists synchronization, in a sort of Schutzian manner. Not only did Levinas point towards the impossibility of grasping the other as such, but he also alluded to the thesis stating the primacy of the ethical relationship with the face over the experience of the other's resistance. The main concern of Levinas was how he could describe the encounter with the other, without the alterity being lost as such. He thus introduces the notion of the face as transcendence, to prove how the ethical relation with the other is established. Moreover, his notion of diachrony plays the pivotal role in outlining the impossibility of synchronization between the same and the other, and also the impossibility of thematizing the other, without he or she losing his or her otherness, i.e., the radical alterity. What Levinas wanted to highlight is that the other has primordially over the self, in a temporal manner, similar to Nietzsche's statement that the Thou is always older than the I. (Nietzsche 2006, 44) This puzzling statement renders the immemorial responsibility of the "same" to the other, which is manifested precisely in the first gesture of the encounter. Levinas discusses the salute expressed to the other, which initiates the relation and only after the other's response can we thematize reciprocity, as in Buber's sense. As we are going to see very soon the ethical imperative of Levinas stating that one shall not kill the neighbor is precisely inscribed on the other's face.

A very interesting point wherein the philosophies of both Levinas and Maldiney seem to resonate is that of our primary anchorage into the world, i.e., the earth understood as nonmoving. Levinas argues that the encounter with the other shakes somehow the solid ground beneath us, introducing a fundamental question vis-à-vis the other, translatable in the language of responsibility. (Levinas 1999, 28) On the other hand, Maldiney thematizes the event, which could also be an interhuman encounter, as a sort of disconcertment of our *Urdoxa*, the primal faith in the world, our symbolic anchorage onto the earth. (Maldiney 1991, 270-271) *Urdoxa* plays the pivotal role of being a sort of feeling of symbolic security, whereas as Fazakas and Gozé have shown, losing the basic trust in the world represents precisely the impossibility of virtually every encounter. (Fazakas & Gozé 2020, 171) Not only are we anguished when encountering others, but also, the possibility that the other affects us, in a sort of transformation of our state becomes impossible. This statement resembles Maldiney's wording that the psychotic is unable to welcome events. Therefore, we could consider the earth that does not move as peculiar for interhuman encounters, because when this earth shakes, i.e., faith in the world, then encounters become an impossibility.

Levinas introduces the metaphor of the solid ground beneath our feet, when he discusses the death of the other. (Levinas 2000, 129) Contra Heidegger, Levinas suggests that anxiety is not paramount for the feeling of nothingness, but rather, the death of the other plays this particular role for the one who survives, i.e., the same. As Levinas expresses this thought in a poetic manner, when the other dies, the face becomes a mask. (Levinas 2000, 9) The thesis held by Levinas can strengthen our argumentation once again, because the Heideggerian anxiety is not an event per se, but rather the possibility of resoluteness towards death. (Heidegger 1962, 312) Moreover, on the other hand, the death of the other represents for the survivor a sort of event, which can be designated, alongside the thematization of Romano, as bereavement. (Romano 2009, 114) The death of the other is not only a tragic event, but also a reminder of the uniqueness of the other person. Romano introduces the notion of shared possibilities to describe how, when the other dies, the possibilities we used to share with him or her are annulled. This once again reveals the uniqueness of the other and his or her irreplaceability, because one could of course share those possibilities with other people, but the outcome would not be the same, because there has existed a certain bonding between the I and Thou, wherein the historicity of the I and that of the Thou intertwined and even overlapped. Thus, concludes Romano, the metaphor asserting that the death of the other is also somehow my death is not that metaphoric anymore, because alongside the death of the other, the possibilities which used to be share with the other are now gone. (Romano 2014, 163) Levinas also describes the ethical imperative of not killing the other, because without implying any sort of ontological necessity, the visage of the other designates the other's nudity and vulnerability, i.e., his or her defenselessness. Therefore, when encountering the other's face, the immemorial responsibility is awakened by this specific event, which results in the ethical imperative of solicitude, and not of violence, for example. (Levinas 2000, 106)

Summing up Levinas's overall account of the face, it represents the uniqueness of the other but also the ethical imperative not to kill the other. The epiphany manifests itself in the encounter and it reveals also our uniqueness and the shared possibilities, which could refer also to such Buberian notions as participating and cooperation. (Buber 1957, 79-80) Nonetheless, the face also transcends all the sensible qualities of the physical visage, because it designates the awakening of responsibility, and the impossibility of including the other in the sphere of ownness. If the other would be included in the sphere of ownness, then we could not speak anymore of the other, because he or she would be a mere reduplication of the self, and so, responsibility would lose the

feature of solicitude. This is why Levinas contrasted his approach of radical alterity with such notions as thematization, comprehension, grasping or synchronization. He nonetheless considered the other to be fully other in the face-to-face encounter, i.e., when responsibility intervenes without the interruption of conceptualization, categorization, labelling or typification.

3. Maldiney on the event of encounter

Despite Maldiney's scattered remarks on the notion of event, a full-fledged account of it can be found in his text entitled *Event and Psychosis*. There, Maldiney explains how the event might be the source of mental illness, especially of trauma. However, there exists another version of the event, precisely in the case of the work of art. (Maldiney 2000, 34) Aesthetics and psychopathology were long time preoccupations of Maldiney, and he believed that the notion of event could explain the genesis of psychosis, as well as the work of art. Recalling the notion of passibility, it is intimately related to the event, because transcendence manifests for Maldiney as a sort of happening, which is radically new, and it exceeds the prehension of the human being. Therefore, transpassibility would again designate the capacity to resist this sudden excess of affectivity. Correlatively, transpassibility is tied to the notion of transpossibility, which denotes the possibility of a response towards the event. The receptive part and the responsive side are both of the same importance, because they articulate the moment of decision through which the subject escapes crisis. The event is characterized also by surprise, since surprise disconcerts our entire being, not only the body or the mind. This disconcerting feature of the event and the surprise correlated represent the moment of reality. As Maldiney has emphasized numerous times, surprise is the mark of reality. This sudden disconcertment demands a response, which is precisely the decision taken vis-à-vis the event. As Maldiney himself suggested, both transpassibility (receptivity towards the event), and transpossibility (responsivity towards the event), are two modes of living in transcendence. The event represents a novel situation, which brings along a constative transformation of Dasein's existence, i.e., his or her being-in-the-world is metamorphosed. (Maldiney 1991, 252)

Once again, likewise Levinas, Maldiney emphasized how faith in the world, *Urdoxa*, is shaken by the disconcerting event, which results in a sort of instability of the earth beneath us. Moreover, in another of his books, Maldiney alludes to the oppo-

sition between the firmness or the stability of the earth and the void of the world. (Maldiney 1975, 251) The firmness of the earth, phenomenologically understood, might be the antidote, so to say, to the void of the world. Fazakas and Gozé have described in a genetically fashion how the parental environment is internalized by the infant in the guise of the earth that does not move. (Fazakas & Gozé 2020, 185) This would be the genetic origin of our anchoring into the world, i.e., into the earth that does not move. The earth has a double function, a phenomenological and a symbolical one, to use Richir's phrasing. (Richir 1988, 91) Not only is the earth the ground onto which the encounter happens (the phenomenological side), but also, it represents our symbolic faith that it will not shake when encountering a radical change in the guise of the event. Therefore, the earth can be considered both as the grounding of corporeal experience (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 120), and also as a certainty in the world enabling the subject to welcome surprise. The event is ultimately and existential (Maldiney 1991, 294), in Heidegger's sense, but what about the event of encounter in Maldiney's?

The event par excellence is the encounter with the other. Maldiney recalls Levinas's wording that the other cannot be invented by the same. Maldiney insists not only that Levinas's statement is valid, but also, that the other is the one that I am not. (Maldiney 2001, 103) Encountering the other, the same finds himself or herself in a situation of passivity, and even of welcoming, likewise the overall situation with the event. As Maldiney asserts, we are liable *vis-à-vis* the uniqueness of the other. We cannot respond to the other by virtue of an *a priori* system, therefore, spontaneity is addressed. Henceforth, not only does the encounter with the other demand our spontaneity and decision, but also our welcoming and confirmation of otherness. (Maldiney 1991, 404) The encounter is the moment of the real, a specific moment which cannot be anticipated. The reality of the other so to speak is correlated with our faith in the world, in a similar fashion to Merleau-Ponty's perceptual faith. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 5) This means that we do not first doubt the real existence of the other, but rather, with this sort of interhuman trust, we are always and already ready to engage in dialogue. The horizon of the encounter pertains to transpassibility. (Maldiney 2001, 104) Transpassibility here designates the possibility of a radical change in our tissue of existence, namely of our being-in-the-world. But as Maldiney reminds us, in order to change, passibility is not enough. There needs to be a response, thus transpassibility is addressed alongside passibility. Once again, passibility designates here the possibility of resisting the event, and its intrinsic activity refers to the responsive component of this encounter. (Maldiney 1991, 364) Levinas insisted several times on how the "same" who

encounters the other is always and already a separated being, and thus, he or she finds himself or herself in a sort of crisis, which is caused by the excess of encounter. We will see exactly how this change occurs when we are going to employ some hermeneutical and anthropological aspects later in this essay, such as *kairos*, *phronesis* and confirmation.

Exemplifying the relation between the encounter and passibility, Maldiney refers to the infant who lances a cry towards the mother. The infant finds himself or herself in a sort of limit situation (in what Maldiney calls a crisis), wherein the response of the mother is pivotal and somehow vital. Because the world of the infant is involved, two outcomes are possible. Either the mother responds and then the infant finds himself or herself in the world of the happy one (Wittgenstein), or the mother does not respond in time, and the infant will dwell in the world of the unhappy one. Maldiney analyzes the contradictory aspects of the phenomenology of the call, because as he argues, whereas a response is awaited even before the cry, surprise is always at stake in this phenomenon. (Maldiney 1991, 402) Returning to the mother-infant relation, if she responds in time to the infant, then bonding takes place, and this is the situation also with friendship and love relations. Moreover, by welcoming the infant, for example, the mother also confirms his or her existence, thus introducing him or her to the world of the happy one. The significance of the world is at stake for the infant who lances a cry, thus what we have called, alongside Buber, understanding with the world is implied too. Depending on the mother's response, the infant will come to an understanding with the world (the world of the happy one), or he or she will collapse because of what Maldiney has called the abyss of rhythm. (Maldiney 1991, 425) If there exists a rhythmical attunement of mother and infant, that the presence of the mother and her response will help the infant remain in the world of the happy one, i.e., the world in which the relations of signification are operative. If the outcome is unfortunate, then the collapse will be represented by anxiety, as in Heidegger's example of the anxious *Dasein* who cannot relate himself or herself anymore to beings ready-at-hand. This is why Maldiney names the phenomenology of the call the moment of the conscience (as in Heidegger's sense).

We can now draw some concluding lines between the experience of the event and that of the encounter. Both are experiences wherein the suddenness inherent in them disconcerts us to the point at which there seems to be a risk within virtually every encounter, as Buber would state. This risk indicates precisely the possibility of a metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world. Likewise Buber, Gadamer discussed how a word

thrown into the dialogical game, a word, a gesture, a movement etc. might highly influence the course of the dialogical intercourse. (Gadamer 1976, 56) Nonetheless, Buber also insisted on the sacrifice involved in the encounter, this pointing to the bracketing of our prejudices vis-à-vis the other. (Buber 2013, 9) Thus, the encounter becomes an ethical event, because as Maldiney and Levinas have insisted, the other cannot be invented. Moreover, if the other were to be thematized, synthetized and synchronized, then we would talk about a totality and not of the infinity of transcendence. This moment of meeting between I and Thou can be thematized under the aegis of the Platonic instant. This instant has no intrinsic past and future within, but also, it represents the opportune moment for decision and change. We are soon approaching the final section of our paper, in which transformation and uniqueness will be addressed, but until then, we still have to describe the role played by the instant. Whereas Levinas saw the instant as a discontinuity in the flow of time, as conceived by Husserl or even by Bergson, Maldiney asserted that the instant is related to the event, because of their suddenness and possibility of change. Even though the encounter is a spontaneous event, it happens however between I and Thou, thus decision becomes crucial for how we are to approach the other with responsibility. This decision is led mostly by the practical wisdom (phronesis), as the Greeks conceived it, which might result in a sort of mutual bonding between I and Thou, and even of confirmation between them. It could be argued, alongside Claude Romano, that the event instantiates itself through the instant of opportunity and decision, so that transpassibility and transpossibility could be addressed as manners to cope with this usually overwhelming experience. Although, and contra Romano, we have considered in this paper the event to be not utterly impersonal, but rather, an inter-human happening between I and Thou.

4. Transformation and uniqueness

Let us summarize what has been argued throughout this paper in order to get a clearer picture of the relation between the event of the encounter and personal uniqueness. (Prášek 2021, 729) As Levinas has asserted, the other strikes me with some sort of suddenness, similar to how Maldiney has described the happening of the event. Contra Romano, and somehow following the path of an interhuman hermeneutics, the event is not something that strikes the "advenant", i.e., the happening subjectivity, as something impersonal, but rather, it is always co-created due to the dialogical intercourse between I and Thou. Therefore, the moment of surprise, as it was described in the works

of Martin Buber and Hans-Georg Gadamer is addressed. This moment of surprise can be designated as the *via regia* thanks to which metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world happens. (Buber 1965, 113) Surprise must be tied to the notion of the Platonic instant, the moment of opportunity, that arises between I and Thou. Needless to say, this is also a moment of responsibility, because the instant of surprise calls forth a decision taken from I to Thou and vice-versa. This decision is guided by *phronesis* (Wierciński 2019, 329), as we have attempted to argue, which leads to interhuman confirmation. (Buber 1965, 71) Therefore, a new understanding with the world occurs. This understanding with the world entails also the presence of the other, but not necessarily in a sort of mutual enrichment (Gadamer), which is still a possibility, but rather as a sort of inner change into the economy of our being-in-the-world. For example, Buber has argued many times about how mutual confirmation can lead to becoming self with the other, i.e., to a sort of interhuman bonding, which represents precisely the possibilities of friendship, and even love. Therefore, the event of encounter, which implies the epiphany of the other's face awakens not only our responsibility to the other, but also, it reveals the pivotal role played by the other in our understanding of the world, i.e., Levinas's metaphor of the other as teacher. The encounter with the other is of utmost importance, because it represents how transformation and change become possible. Therefore, we can deduce a threefold structure of the event of the encounter. First, it enables a new understanding with the world, in the broadest sense of the term, which can lead to a transformation of our being in the world, that happens thanks to the re-configuration of our intrinsic possibilities and of our projects towards the world. Second it renders possible responsibility towards the face of the other, and third, it reveals thereof the uniqueness of the other's presence. The moment of surprise seizes our being in its entirety, i.e., our being-in-the-world, thus receptivity (transpassibility), and responsivity (transpossibility), become the key feature that helps cope with this overwhelming event, wherein the presence of the other instantiates itself in our world horizon. Understanding with the world could designate distinct, yet related operations. First, due to its reconfiguration of our intrinsic possibilities, always projected onto the world, a new horizon of understanding might appear, i.e., also a self-understanding and other understanding as in empathy (or Buber's notion of imagining the real). (Buber 1965, 81) Second, understanding with the world can awaken a dormant so to say horizon, pertaining to the infinite responsibility, for example, to the other. Therefore, and to paraphrase Levinas, confirmation awakens an ancient horizon of responsibility, more ancient than any ancience. This is rendered possible by the epiphany of the face, this

sudden appearance of a non-replaceable uniqueness. Levinas insisted numerous times, though in his early works, on the impossibility of swapping one's "Da", as in *Da-sein*, with the other's "Da", a phenomenon responsible for our feeling of loneliness, as Levinas has argued. (Levinas 1987, 42)

5. Conclusions and perspectives

This paper attempted to argue that the event of the encounter has tremendous consequences for our becoming in the world. First, we have provided some conceptual clarifications concerning the notion of event and encounter which have been employed throughout our essay. Second, we have turned towards Levinas's account of the face, to strengthen our thesis concerning the uniqueness of the encounter with the other and the ethics tied thereof. The epiphany of the face corresponds to the autophany of the "same", in which a moment of meeting occurs. Thus, we soon arrived at Maldiney's scattered yet insightful remarks regarding the event of encounter, where he was primarily commenting on the relation of his own thought and that of Levinas. Next, the sub-chapter about transformation and uniqueness was primarily hermeneutically informed, by the works of Buber and Gadamer, which nonetheless touch upon the thematizations of Levinas and Maldiney. Using also some ideas of Claude Romano, we have insisted on the possibility of a metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world by virtue of the encounter with the other, and the relationship which emerges therein. Subsequently, even though the event of bereavement was only barely touched upon, further research in this direction might prove itself to be of utmost importance for our attempt at a hermeneutics of the interhuman. Setting up the ground for future inquiries, the idea of a hermeneutics of the interhuman takes the event of encounter to be paramount for the metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world and for the possibility of emergence of a new understanding with the world. A genuine encounter pertains to the realm of the interhuman, thus the hermeneutics of the interhuman attempts to provide an account of how understanding between I and Thou might take place. Some hints and clues were given by Martin Buber by his notion of inborn Thou, from the letter to Hans Trüb cited in this paper. Moreover, Gadamer's dialogical play is pivotal for the fusion of horizons resulting in mutual enrichment. Levinas and Maldiney have the merit of paving the way for some considerations pertaining to this interhuman hermeneutics, for example the event of encounter and the responsibility towards the other. Not only do the perspectives of the two abovementioned French phenomenologists strengthen the idea of the event of

encounter for a hermeneutics of the interhuman, but also, their overall thematizations of the interpersonal realm might prove themselves to be fundamental resources for our future research.

David-Augustin Mândruț, PhD Cand.,
Faculty of History and Philosophy,
Center for Applied Philosophy, University of Cluj-Napoca
davidmandrut[at]gmail.com

References

- Buber, Judith Agassi. 1999. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Buber, Martin. 1957. *Pointing the Way*. Translated by Maurice Friedman. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Buber, Martin. 1965. *The Knowledge of Man*. Translated by Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Buber, Martin. 2002. *Between Man and Man*. Translated by Ronald Gregor-Smit. London and New York: Routledge.
- Buber, Martin. 2013. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. London/ New Delhi/ New York/ Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Fazakas, István and Gozé, Tudi. 2020. "The Promise of the World: Towards a Transcendental History of Trust." *Human Studies* 36 (April): 169-189.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2013. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Koo, Jo-Jo. 2016. "Concrete Interpersonal Encounters or Sharing a Common World: Which is More Fundamental in Phenomenological Approaches to Sociality?": 93-106, in Szanto, Thomas and Moran, Dermot, eds. 2016. *Phenomenology of Sociality. Discovering the "We"*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1979. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague/ Boston/ London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Time and the Other*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh. Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998a. *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998b. *Entre nous. On Thinking-of-the-Other*. Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1999. *Alterity and Transcendence*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 2000. *God, Death, and Time*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Maldiney, Henri. 1975. *Aîtres de la langue et demeures de la pensée*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme.
- Maldiney, Henri. 1991. *Penser l'homme et la folie*. Grenoble: Millon.
- Maldiney, Henri. 2000. *Ouvrir le rien l'art nu*. La Versanne-Fougères: Encre Marine.
- Maldiney, Henri. 2001. *Existence: crise et création*. La Versanne-Fougères: Encre Marine.
- Maldiney, Henri. 2003. "Rencontre et psychose." *Cahiers de psychologie clinique* 2, no. 21: 9-21.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2006. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Patočka, Jan. 1998. *Body, Community, Language, World*. Translated by Erazim Kohak. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Prášek, Petr. 2021. "Personal Uniqueness and Events." *Human Studies* 44 (July): 721-740.
- Prášek, Petr. 2023. "Levinas vs. Maldiney. On the Face of Sensible Nature." *Phainomena* 32 (November): 157-184.
- Richir, Marc. 1988. *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique*. Grenoble: Millon.
- Romano, Claude. 2009. *Event and World*. Translated by Shane Mackinlay. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Romano, Claude. 2014. *Event and Time*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Thoma, Samuel. 2019. "Into the Open: On Henri Maldiney's Philosophy of Psychosis." *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* 26, no. 4 (December): 281-293.
- Wierciński, Andrzej. 2019. *Existencia Hermeneutica*. Zurich: Lit Verlag.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2002. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London and New York: Routledge.