

**TRANSITIONS  
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PREHĀJANJA**

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# PHAINOMENA

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## PHAINOMENA

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# THE MOMENT OF SURPRISE AND DIALOGICAL PLAY

## A HERMENEUTICAL INQUIRY INTO THE INTERHUMAN

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### *Abstract*

The contribution investigates the relationship between dialogue, time, and surprise. My proposal is that, in the case of dialogical face-to-face encounters, one ought to speak about a creative temporality. Such creative temporality is achieved by virtue of the moment of surprise, as it was thematized in the works of Martin Buber and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Although the two authors did not concern themselves necessarily with the issue of the temporality of dialogue, Henri Bergson's scattered

david-augustin mândruț



remarks on time and creativity might provide sufficient ground to delve into the question of the temporality of dialogue. In the present paper, I start with Claude Romano's contemporary framework of "evential hermeneutics," in which the author tackles the relation between temporality and surprise. The main aim of this article is to prove how dialogue, thanks to its playful character (Gadamer), renders possible the moment of surprise, and thereby, enables a deeper understanding to occur between I and Thou (Buber).

*Keywords:* dialogue, temporality, hermeneutics, surprise, play.

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### **Trenutek presenečenja in dialoška igra. Hermenevtična raziskava o medčloveškem**

*Povzetek*

60 Prisperpek obravnava razmere med dialogom, časom in presenečenjem. Pokazati želim, da je v primeru medosebnega dialoškega srečanja potrebno govoriti o ustvarjalni časovnosti. Takšno ustvarjalno časovnost je mogoče doseči s posredništvom trenutka presenečenja, kakor sta ga v svojih delih tematizirala Martin Buber in Hans-Georg Gadamer. Čeprav se avtorja nista posebej ukvarjala s problemom časovnosti dialoga, nam razpršene opazke Henrija Bergsona o času in ustvarjalnosti lahko priskrbijo zadostno oporo za razmislek o vprašanju časovnosti dialoga. V pričujočem besedilu pričnem s sodobnim okvirjem »dogodkovne hermenevtike«, znotraj katere se Claude Romano spoprime z odnosom med časovnostjo in presenečenjem. Poglavitni cilj članka je pokazati, kako dialog zaradi svojega igrivega značaja (Gadamer) omogoča trenutek presenečenja in s tem pogloblja razumevanje med Jazom in Tujem (Buber).

*Ključne besede:* dialog, časovnost, hermenevtika, presenečenje, igra.

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## Introduction

Although recent philosophical literature concerning the phenomenological and hermeneutical thematizations of surprise is very rich in content and can be applied to contemporary topics in the humanities (Maldiney 1991; Dastur 2000; Nancy 2000; Romano 2009; Romano 2014; Depraz and Steinbock 2018; Depraz and Celle 2019), the issue of the moment of surprise in the case of dialogical face-to-face encounters seems to be left untouched. Therefore, this paper gathers resources from both the philosophy of dialogue (Buber) and from hermeneutics (Gadamer), in order to prove how the moment of surprise functions in the case of the encounter between I and Thou. Buber's remarks on the issue of temporality seem to be rather scattered,<sup>1</sup> while Gadamer focuses more on the notion of dialogical play, leaving aside a possible reflection onto its temporal features.<sup>2</sup> Henri Bergson is the philosopher who paradoxically came closest to the thematization of the temporality of surprise, when he discussed time and creativity, employing the notion of absolute newness, i.e., the unforeseeable novelty. Thus, one main activity of this paper will consist in interpreting surprise under the heading of unforeseeable novelty via the contemporary thematizations of the notion of *kairos*, i.e., the opportune moment. The contemporary French phenomenological author Claude Romano also discusses the connection between temporality and surprise in an original attempt to define the temporality of that which he calls "event." Romano will be my starting point, because he is one of the phenomenological authors who explicitly connect the issue of temporality with surprise, while also alluding to Bergson's absolute newness.

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The present paper is divided into several sections, each investigating the theory of one of the abovementioned authors. Therefore, the first chapter sets up the framework of the discussion by analyzing the relation between time

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1 Nonetheless, Buber's remarks about the relation between the presence of the other and the present moment seem to point towards our direction of inquiry (cf. Buber 2013, 9–10).

2 Gadamer's theory of dialogue is, however, built on the idea of a historically embedded consciousness (cf. Gadamer 2013, 311).

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and surprise in the case of “evential hermeneutics.”<sup>3</sup> From there onwards, I present the perspectives of both Buber and Gadamer concerning the notion of dialogue. If the former was in his later work interested in “the ontological presupposition” of dialogue, namely in the moment of surprise, for the latter surprise arises in the case of the dialogical play between I and Thou as a sort of buoyancy and excess of meaning. Buber also spoke about musical or even floating relationships in the case of the psychotherapeutic encounter (cf. Agassi 1999, 236–237). By comparing the accounts of Buber and Gadamer, I aim to show their similarities and their differences, which leads me to Bergson’s analysis of time and creativity from his lectures, in which he discussed the issues of change, possibility, and reality. Finally, after investigating the core concepts of the four abovementioned authors, I attempt to draw an original conclusion regarding the relation between dialogue, time, and surprise. Thus, we find out that surprise is a manifestation of what has in the philosophical tradition been called *kairos*, i.e., the opportune and decisive moment of choice and change.

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### **Romano on the relation between event and surprise**

Before providing an analysis of the dialogical theories, which concern the issue of surprise, we ought to tackle the concept of surprise in the hermeneutical and phenomenological framework, in order to establish a certain ground, upon which we can build our argumentation. Thus, starting with Claude Romano’s thematization of surprise, as it can be found in *Event and Time*, it can be circumscribed how evential hermeneutics can be the starting point of an analysis concerning the relation between time and creativity.<sup>4</sup> Although Natalie Depraz provided an account of the temporality of surprise throughout her work (Depraz and Steinbock 2018; Depraz and Celle 2019), in my analysis I investigate the hermeneutical function of surprise, as it is described by

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3 Evential hermeneutics is the framework, within which Romano’s thinking unfolds. It represents the specific type of hermeneutics, where understanding is achieved by appropriating the events that occur to us (Romano 2009).

4 For Romano, the event is inextricably linked with time, especially the future vista, but also with surprise in the guise of unforeseeable novelty (Romano 2014).

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Romano, because I consider that it is pivotal for interhuman understanding,<sup>5</sup> as can be described by referring to the works of Buber and Gadamer. We soon notice that surprise is not only a temporal phenomenon *par excellence*, but it also plays a very important function in the economy of the event of encounter.

From the very beginning of the chapter concerning the phenomena of expectation and surprise, Romano holds firmly that the two should be treated in relation to the future vista,<sup>6</sup> as he calls it. Hence, we are informed that the vista of the future, within which an event happens, can give rise to the feeling of surprise (cf. Romano 2014, 172).

Romano identifies two meanings of the word surprise. First, it denotes an unmet expectation, and here surprise can be related to the notion of astonishment. The surprising manifests itself as the unexpected, and its temporality pertains to the notion of the sudden.<sup>7</sup> Surprise thus contradicts expectation. From a phenomenological standpoint, this contradiction to what is usually expected refers to the impossibility of fulfilling the intentional horizon, which pertains to protention. The real exceeds any forecast, because it appears to us, the adventants,<sup>8</sup> as a sort of shock. Akin to the thematization of Depraz (cf.: Depraz and Steinbock 2018, 27; Depraz and Celle 2019, 48), for Romano, surprise affects our body, so the surprise can also be related to the phenomenon of embodiment (cf. Romano 2014, 172). One can suppose that, for Martin Buber, the moment of surprise affects our entire being before the split between the body and mind phenomena, i.e., what he calls the unconscious.<sup>9</sup> We must always bear in mind that Buber confessed to his

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5 Romano's whole purpose of eventual hermeneutics is to determine and demonstrate the way, in which understanding happens, insofar as the advenant appropriates the events that befall him and responds to them (Romano 2009).

6 Contrary to Heidegger, Romano does not speak about temporal ecstases, but rather about vistas.

7 For Maldiney, on whom Romano draws, the sudden represents the very occurring of the event, and can thus give rise to a certain transformation of our being in the world, even to a metamorphosis (Maldiney 1991).

8 The advenant is the title that Romano ascribes to the human being, insofar as the human being is open to events and change (cf. Romano 2014, 57).

9 The unconscious is for Martin Buber exactly the moment, in which time and the body phenomena do not evolve separately, but conjointly (cf. Agassi 1999, 227). Buber thus came close to the notion of embodied subjectivity in an original attempt to

student, Maurice Friedman (cf. Friedman 2013, 108), that at the time when he was thinking about this notion, he did not have the adequate vocabulary to describe it, thus he proposed the notion of the unconscious in an attempt to “destroy” the metaphysical tradition of this concept, i.e., in an effort similar to that of Heidegger from *Being and Time* (cf. Heidegger 1996, 17).

Returning for the moment to Romano, the astonishing is thereby shocking, because it represents the *pathos* of the contradiction between what is expected and the actual. Hence, surprise is associated with novelty in a meaning close to Bergson’s thematization (cf. Romano 2014, 172). Therefore, we can already suppose that surprise designates the possibility of a creative dialogical exchange between I and Thou.

But Romano asks further whether surprise can be reduced merely to a contradicted expectation or not? He also asks whether the newness of the astonishing only closes the possibilities of imagination or not? His answer is that surprise is the phenomenon, which surpasses the resources of imagination. He thus somehow comes close to the Kantian thematization of the sublime.<sup>10</sup>

64 Henceforth, the second meaning of surprise refers to the wonder at the circumstance that things are, which comes close to the thematizations of Plato and Aristotle. Wonder becomes a sort of astonishment that does not cease, even when novelty fades away. Moreover, surprise is linked to the famous “there is,” of which Levinas speaks on several occasions.<sup>11</sup> An event elicits surprise, because in the first moment, when the advenant finds himself surprised, there is a certain suspension of every “grip”<sup>12</sup> by way of the sudden occurring of the event (cf. Romano 2014, 173). This suddenness is also present in Henri Maldiney’s theory of the event, on which Romano himself draws.

Surprise designates a temporary suspension of every *com-prehension*<sup>13</sup> in a sense close to Maldiney’s terms. This means that surprise puts us in front

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overcome the body–soul dualism.

10 For Kant, the sublime consists of a sort of shock of our imagination, in the case of which its limits stretch endlessly, because, for him, the sublime is the absolutely great, i.e., that in comparison to which everything seems small (cf. Kant 2007, 78).

11 See, for example: Levinas 1978; Levinas 1987.

12 In the French language: *sur-prise*.

13 Also in the French language, but also according to Maldiney, *com-prehension* (cf. Maldiney 2012, 61).

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of the radical incomprehensibility of the event. Surprise functions in every experience that concerns feelings, because it attunes us with the world. Surprise thus becomes the root for virtually every feeling. This is why the surprise is the very opposite of despair,<sup>14</sup> a state, in which the advenant finds himself devoid of virtually any possibility. The key term that Romano borrows from Bergson, in order to describe this form of event, is the unforeseeable (cf. Romano 2014, 144).

The relation between the advenant, the vista of the future, and the event is characterized by availability towards surprise. Availability becomes thus an exposition to the impossibility of ourselves (cf. Romano 2014, 175).

On the basis of the presentation of the fundamental tenets of Romano's thematization of surprise, we can move towards the dialogical perspectives, which shall guide us to the creative temporality of face-to-face exchanges. As we are going to notice soon, this creative temporality is manifested precisely in the moment of surprise, when an excess of meaning, or even of affectivity, occurs between I and Thou.

### **Buber on dialogue and the moment of surprise**

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According to Martin Buber, dialogue takes place in the *in-between*, a sort of sphere, where both I and Thou engage in a mutual face-to-face exchange. From the very beginning, Buber stresses that the *in-between* is constantly reconstructed, according to what happens between the two interlocutors. This constant reconstruction and reorientation of the dialogical realm, or sphere, is called the unfolding; hence, we notice a sort of music-like metaphor in Buber. The father of dialogue is also very careful in describing this interhuman happening as a sort of mutual surprise, while the term event might seem too strong for Buber's overall thematization. Thus, we focus on the concept of happening, in order not to mistake it for the rather strong sense of the event,

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14 Romano somehow continues Kierkegaard's thematization of despair in an original attempt to prove how "sickness unto death" represents the impossibility of virtually every possibility. Thus, the advenant who finds himself in despair does not have any possibility to project unto the future or to choose, not even death, as Romano puts it (cf. Romano 2014, 101).

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as it is employed by Romano. Although the term “event” might not apply to Buber’s notion of happening, Waldenfels argues for a sort of intermediary event (cf. Waldenfels 2007, 56) or, simply put, an event, which occurs between myself and the other. Throughout his work, Waldenfels employs the issue of responsibility and responsivity, while Buber pays more attention to the possible transformation, which might be triggered between I and Thou in the case of the mutual surprise.<sup>15</sup> Waldenfels insists on the notion of happening, in order to describe how responsibility vis-à-vis the other becomes operative (cf. Junglos 2017, 734). While Waldenfels describes the relation of the interhuman happening with the concept of responsivity, in a letter written to Ludwig Binswanger, Buber directly associates dialogue with the unforeseen and with the possibility of mutual surprise (cf. Agassi 1999, 190). Although both Buber and Waldenfels discuss the notion of interhuman happening, in order to describe the relation with alterity, the latter is more interested in how the stranger can trigger our responsibility towards them (cf. Waldenfels 2011, 35), while the former pays more attention to the mutual sharing in knowledge that can happen between I and Thou (cf. Agassi 1999, 107). Moreover, Buber even asserts that change and transformation pertain to the realm of the interhuman, because only by the “ontological presupposition” of dialogue, i.e., the moment of surprise, can enable a genuine decision and thus responsibility to take place.

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In the text, where Buber proposes the moment of surprise as the “ontological presupposition” of dialogue, he alludes to the poet who, for example, receives his creative force from his partner in dialogue (cf. Buber 1965, 111). This statement points once again to the creativity implied in the dialogical exchange between I and Thou. The dialogical event or happening between I and Thou comprises both the I and the Thou, but nonetheless it

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15 It is debatable whether Buber’s happening might function as an event in Romano’s sense. For Romano, the event is utterly impersonal, while for Buber everything that happens in the in-between takes place between I and Thou, i.e., in the interhuman or interpersonal realm. Nonetheless, for both authors, whether we are talking about an event or a happening, these occurrences might produce a change or a transformation, in the case of the adenant’s selfhood or between I and Thou. Although the two positions might seem at first irreconcilable, Waldenfels’s notion of the intermediary event provides a space for a possible conjunction between the works of Buber and Romano.

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transcends the mere psychical or physical phenomena, which occur between the two interlocutors (cf. Buber 1965, 112). As Buber suggests, this happening has no clear-cut (temporal or spatial) landmarks (cf. Buber 2013, 23), because once we engage in a dialogue, we do not know anymore, where the soul ends and the world begins.<sup>16</sup> Buber's next remark is rather a bold one, because he holds that the human being's dialogue with himself or herself is possible only by virtue of the initial dialogue with others. Buber even introduces the notion of "internalization" to describe this process.<sup>17</sup> Buber also advances another complementary concept, which makes this "internalization" possible, namely the atmosphere of confidence (cf. Buber 2002, 127). In the next section, we demonstrate how Gadamer comes close to Buber's thematization, when he describes how the dialogue between I and Thou has a decisive consequence for the inner life of the human being, namely the possibility of building-up an infinite dialogue within oneself.

Concerning the moment of surprise, Buber states that the human being is not unpredictable to itself as he or she is to his or her partner.<sup>18</sup> This means that the human being always and already has some fore-knowledge and fore-understanding about himself or herself. Another rather puzzling remark is advanced forth by Buber, when he declares that language never existed before any address. In his book concerning the problem of the call and the response, Jean Louis Chrétien cites Heidegger's saying that the human being begins to speak only, insofar as he or she listens to the address of the other (cf. Chrétien 2004, 6). By the same token, and as Paul Mendes-Flohr suggested, the meeting between Buber and Heidegger, which was supposed to concretize in a

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16 This observation leaves some space for a possible comparison with Buber's thematization of dialogue and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh.

17 From the standpoint of cognitive psychology, Vygotsky was one of the first authors to suggest that higher-level mental functions represent the internalized early relationships with the others.

18 Here, a critique might prove itself to be useful, considering namely the question whether the infinite dialogue with ourselves is a unique chance for a sort of the moment of self-surprise, for example, when a novel idea (self-understanding) emerges during this kind of inner speech. Thus, there exists the possibility of a moment of self-surprise, in the case of which the inner dialogue awakens a novel idea, i.e., a new form of self-understanding. This infinite dialogue with ourselves proves once again to be creative.

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conference on language, suggests that the two philosophers were familiar with each other's ideas (cf. Mendes-Flohr 2014, 2).

Another key point in Buber's thematization of dialogue is the metaphor of the game. In his discussion with psychiatrist Carl Rogers, Buber compares the authentic dialogue between I and Thou with a chess game, in which both players are unaware of the other's next move (cf. Buber 1965, 178). The moment of surprise is once again addressed in the seminar on the unconscious, in which Buber suggests that the ideal therapist should be open and available to surprise, coming from the patient.<sup>19</sup> This does not involve any sort of passivity on the part of the therapist, but rather a sort of bracketing, in which the therapist suspends his beliefs and presuppositions, even his prejudgments or interpretations, in order to let the patient be, and manifest himself or herself as he or she appears to the therapist.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we might even notice a sort of conscious effort, coming from the therapist. This basic attitude is by Buber called "the conscious liberation," which is opposed to "the unconscious imposition" (of the theories of the psychiatric school, to which the therapist belongs; cf. Agassi 1999, 239–240).

68 Of course, Buber suggests from the very beginning that a therapist without a school or a method is a dilettante, nonetheless, there exists certain "moments of meeting,"<sup>21</sup> in which the two of them (the therapist and the patient) meet in their peculiar uniqueness. Moreover, this bracketing is the *sine qua non* of the real meeting between two unique human beings. This also involves a risk, namely that of change, transformation, or even metamorphosis.<sup>22</sup> Here, we could recall Maldiney's and Romano's notion of event, and the link they make to the issue of the genuine encounter.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, this bracketing, which

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19 Again, Buber's statement resonates with Romano's overall theory of the relation between surprise and availability.

20 This very useful therapeutic idea was developed further by Giovanni Stanghellini (cf. 2017, 11).

21 In the sense, which was employed by Daniel Stern (2004).

22 Buber is skeptical towards the notion of receptivity, as the *Unconscious* seminar testifies; nonetheless, he is in the search for a better notion, which could exactly be the concept of passibility. See, for example, Thoma 2019.

23 Maldiney explicitly analyzes the relation between the event and the encounter (1991), while Romano suggests that the encounter is a peculiar example of the event, in which a mutual metamorphosis might take place.

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makes room for the moment of surprise, might bring along insight and, most importantly, a deepening of the interhuman field, in which both the therapist and the patient learn something very important about the cure itself, i.e., about perpetual mutuality and openness. More exactly, this moment of meeting has an essential role in change and understanding, and the term “insight” might once again prove itself to be decisive. As Buber explains, if the therapist takes the patient’s *psyche* as an isolated entity and analyzes it accordingly by means of objectification, healing might take place or even an improvement of the patient’s state. Nevertheless, if existential healing is to take place, then we cannot speak solely of the patient’s *psyche*, but rather about such a unique meeting between two unities. This is the reason why Buber employs the notion of “the unconscious” to describe the state of the human being, in which soul and body phenomena do not evolve separately, but are rather merged into a unitary whole, which is exactly the uniqueness of the patient.<sup>24</sup> Hence, Buber states that the interhuman might have a more striking effect in the case of therapy than the psychical realm alone. This could be the equation of what Buber calls healing through meeting (cf. Agassi 1999, 17). Already in *I and Thou* (Buber 2013, 8), Buber emphasizes the risk, which the I assumes by entering into relation with a Thou, but he also uses the term “sacrifice.”<sup>25</sup> This sacrifice might once again point towards bracketing, namely to the therapist’s capacity of withholding his or her prior interpretations, in order to meet the patient as he or she appears. Heidegger called this peculiar mode of approaching the world, and the other, “letting-be” (cf. Heidegger 2001, 223–224).

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Now that we delineated the basic tenets of Buber’s theory of the relation between dialogue and surprise, we are ready to move towards Gadamer’s thematization of the dialogical play. We have already given hints and clues towards a certain similarity between Buber’s conceptualization and that of Gadamer, thus we are ready to analyze the latter’s standpoint, and compare it to Buber’s.

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24 As Buber explicitly states in the afterword to *I and Thou* (2013), the therapist must help the patient to regenerate the atrophied core of his being, which Buber calls the microcosm.

25 Very interestingly, both Buber and Gadamer compare the I–Thou relation with the encounter with the work of art.

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## Surprise in Gadamer's dialogical play

Gadamer's main claim departs from the subjective considerations of play, as they are found in the works of Kant and Schiller.<sup>26</sup> There exists a certain level of seriousness of play,<sup>27</sup> as Gadamer points out; play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself or herself in the play itself. Gadamer already alludes to his notion of ecstatic self-forgetting, which he describes later on in *Truth and Method*. Moreover, play has its own essence, independently of the ones who are engaged in it. Play reaches its presentation through the players. Peculiar to play is the to-and-fro movement, which characterizes it (cf. Gadamer 2013, 107–108).

Therefore, Gadamer acknowledges the primacy of play over the consciousness of the players who are engaged in it. The structure of play absorbs the players into itself and thus frees them from the burden of initiating the play. A striking similarity between the theories of Buber and those of Gadamer can be found, when the latter asserts that the game itself is a risk for the player. One  
70 can only play with serious possibilities.<sup>28</sup> Playing necessarily entails the fact of being-played. In other words, the fascination of the game absorbs and even masters the players. Human play requires a so-called field, which is exactly the *in-between*.<sup>29</sup> Play is self-presentation. Nonetheless, every self-presentation can be a representation for someone (cf. Gadamer 2013, 109–110).

In another of his works concerning the problem of self-understanding, Gadamer endeavors to prove once again the existing relation between understanding, dialogue, and play. The conclusions he draws are of great importance for the concept of dialogical play, because in this text, Gadamer touches upon the element of surprise involved in this sort of interaction. Therefore, and alongside Buber, we can consider surprise to be once again

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26 These two theories of play considered it to be a sort of play of our faculties See, for example, Kant 2007.

27 Gadamer departs also from the theories that are found in child psychology, which state that play is the work of childhood only.

28 As we are going to see soon, the moment of surprise in the case of dialogical play points exactly towards the possibility of unfolding our possibilities.

29 When focusing on the the fusion of horizons between the familiar and the strange, Gadamer calls the *in-between* the object of study for hermeneutics.

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the “ontological presupposition” of dialogue. Gadamer himself did not use the phrase “dialogical play,” but certain scholars, such as Monica Vilhauer provided clues towards this concept (Vilhauer 2010), inspired by Gadamer’s overall thematization of understanding. Before inquiring into Gadamer’s rather short, but insightful text, we ought to mention another occurrence of the term surprise in Gadamer’s work. In his paper on “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics,” Gadamer analyzes the relation between the work of art and surprise. Thus, he writes that when the excess of meaning, which the works of art provide, overwhelms us, everything that is familiar is shattered.<sup>30</sup> This is the proper meaning of what Gadamer’s has in mind, when he thinks of disclosure, namely the discovery of something, which was previously concealed (cf. Gadamer 1976, 101).

Returning to his paper on self-understanding, Gadamer reiterates his main thesis from *Truth and Method*, in which he stressed that the back-and-forth movement of play does not derive from human game, but that the case is rather the opposite. Furthermore, Gadamer introduces one of the main notions of his text, namely ecstatic self-forgetting. This concept denotes the absorption in the game, which is experienced not as a loss of self-possession, but as free buoyancy and elevation (cf. Gadamer 1976, 55).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, another key point, which is advanced by the author, consists in the way, in which dialogue is treated in conjunction with understanding and playing. Hence, we are informed that dialogue between men presents a lot of similarities with the two abovementioned phenomena. For example, Gadamer mentions the risk, which is also present in Buber’s account, of putting forth a word or keeping it to yourself, or provoking a word from the other person and receiving an answer from them, or giving an answer oneself. Therefore, every word comes into play naturally, by anticipating the next one and by keeping in mind the

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30 This statement points once again to the *in-between* as the playfield, in which the to-and-fro movement between what is familiar and what is strange takes place.

31 The notion of ecstatic self-forgetting might bear certain therapeutical values in Buber’s sense, because, thanks to it, the human being who is absorbed in the dialogical play, loses themselves, only to find themselves changed after the interaction has taken place. As Paul Ricoeur writes, we find ourselves only by losing ourselves (cf. Ricoeur 1981, 106).

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last one (cf. Gadamer 1976, 56). We are already on the way to demarcating the thesis of the Husserlian time-consciousness as we proposed in connection with the instantaneous and opportune moment of surprise.<sup>32</sup>

72 For Gadamer, life of language consists in playing along or playing further the game, in which we are thrown from the very moment, when we first begin to speak. The dialogical play or game consists in giving and taking, in an almost rhythmical manner.<sup>33</sup> This perpetual interchange between I and Thou soon arrives at the moment of surprise, when both I and Thou are somehow puzzled to learn something radically new about each other, something which was not present before, i.e., the radically new, which is, nonetheless, something that shatters the overall familiarity of understanding, introducing us to the strangeness of alterity. This bursting forth of meaning is precisely the moment of surprise under the guise of the excess of sense, which gives rise to mutual understanding. Thus, the finality of dialogue consists in mutual enrichment, in the case of which we become more aware of ourselves. By the same token, and as Buber clearly emphasized, the limits of dialogue are the limits of becoming aware (cf. Buber 2002, 12). This is the peculiar function of ecstatic self-forgetting. Through every dialogue, something different, and, as it could be added, something new, comes into being, thus paraphrasing Gadamer's last observations from this text (cf. Gadamer 1976, 58). We must nonetheless remember that when Gadamer calls the *in-between* the true place of hermeneutics, he refers to the interplay between what is familiar and what is strange. Last but not least, Gadamer considers that after the dialogical event fades away, the dialogical trace is carried further by both partners in dialogue, in a sort of mutual enrichment, and, as we may add, as a desire to reengage into dialogue. This represents exactly how one can surprise himself or herself, namely by continuing the infinite inner dialogue with oneself.

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32 Husserl describes time-consciousness to consist of an original impression, which is linked to the retention of the lived experience and with the anticipation of the next one, which he calls protention (cf. Husserl 1991, 33). While Husserl's account is rather linear and involves continuity, the experience of the instant, as we shall soon notice, consists in an occurrence without any intrinsic past or future moment within it.

33 Drawing on empirical studies of his time, Gadamer emphasizes even the rhythmicity of our understanding with the others and with the world.

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## The temporality of surprise: The kairotic instant

The final section of our essay tackles the issue of the temporality of dialogue by recalling the perspectives of Romano, Buber, and Gadamer, which we treat in conjunction with Bergson's idea of the unforeseeable novelty. In his lecture on "The Possible and the Real," Bergson emphasizes how creative time functions and the way, in which it produces this unforeseeable novelty (cf. Bergson 2002, 232). Although he points towards the being of the universe and the evolution of species, we could also argue that this creative temporality applies to dialogue too. Claude Romano describes how surprise functions in the economy of the event, considering it the *sine qua non* of the temporality of the event, which is oriented towards the future. Romano alludes in certain passages to the work of Bergson, from whom he borrows the idea of the unforeseeable novelty. This is the peculiar function of surprise in the economy of eventual hermeneutics. Moreover, Romano dedicates the first three chapters of his book *Event and Time* to the analysis of the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine (Romano 2014), where the authors concern themselves with the notion of the instant. The instant, as it appears in the works of these authors, is related to the opportune moment, i.e., the moment of action and decision. Returning to Bergson, we can connect with his thoughts also Levinas's argument that the instant means an interruption of duration (cf. Levinas 1978, 86), in which something new might occur. Without naming it as such, i.e., the instant, Bergson has in mind the possibility of a radical change in the economy of the universe, as he puts it. But what if this change can occur at the level of one's being-in-the-world?

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With Buber and Gadamer, the unforeseeable novelty of dialogue, namely its creative temporality, operates on another level. This is precisely the interhuman field. While Buber stresses the structure of dialogue as a sort of unfolding game (cf. Buber 1965, 82), Gadamer explicitly links understanding with playing and dialogue (cf. Gadamer 1976, 44). Therefore, we can insist that by virtue of the dialogical play, which encompasses both I and Thou, and thanks to the implicit buoyancy and elevation, surprise might emerge. As Buber asserts, I always have some sort of self-understanding (cf. Buber 1965, 113), while the spontaneity of the other might prove itself to be overwhelming,

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hence the risk and the sacrifice of dialogue. The question is whether we can anticipate ourselves, if the possibility of the creative temporality provided by the infinite dialogue with ourselves, in which something new appears, seems to lean towards the option, in which we actually can surprise ourselves. On the other hand, Gadamer employs the notion of play, in order to describe how a mutual enrichment between I and Thou occurs. Simply put, by playing along the dialogical game, the unforeseeable novelty seizes us in our entire being, bringing forth a new understanding with the world (cf. Agassi 1999, 175), of the other, and of ourselves. Once again, the dialogical play between I and Thou involves two free human beings, bearing alongside their uniqueness and specific spontaneity. The unforeseeable novelty might appear alongside a word uttered or even by a gesture, in which I and Thou both understand each other, by virtue of a moment of meeting. Furthermore, the consequence of the dialogue between I and Thou for the human being is that he or she can “internalize” this conversation and continue it on his or her own. But where does surprise appear in this context? Once again, if we consider the infinite  
74 dialogue with ourselves to be the “internalization” of the dialogue with others, then the surprise, which was experienced between I and Thou, might also take place in the case of the self that continues the conversation on its own. We have already indicated above that this surprise might consist in the unforeseen novel idea, which seems to appear from nowhere, i.e., as a new form or self-understanding, but which is nonetheless a result of this infinite dialogue with ourselves. Hence, not only dialogue, but also creativity seems to be a relational phenomenon, and we can remember Buber’s account of the poet who gathers his or her creative possibilities from the encounter with otherness (cf. Buber 1965, 118).

Before concluding our essay, we ought to present more of the internal economy of the moment of surprise and its relation to the instant. We dealt with the concept of surprise throughout our essay, and now we can focus on the notion of “moment.” As child psychologist Daniel Stern has demonstrated, there is a certain difference between time as succession and time as an instantaneous occurring (Stern 2004).<sup>34</sup> The moment of surprise involves precisely the instant,

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34 Daniel Stern alludes also to the theories of Husserl and Bergson.

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under the guise of a kairotic moment or, simply put, of *Kairos*.<sup>35</sup> *Kairos* differs completely from *chronos*, because while the latter represents the succession of time and its flow, the former represents the instantaneous occurring of a specific moment, which is called opportune, i.e., the instant. The opportunity proves itself to be decisive for the philosophy of dialogue and for hermeneutics, because not it not only provides a new form of understanding between I and Thou, but also has ethical consequences regarding choice, decision, and action.

As the French phenomenologist Henri Maldiney held, for example, the real is that, which we do not except, and, moreover, we are passible for the unforeseeable (Maldiner 1991). Thus, summing up our discussion concerning the kairotic moment of surprise, it involves two key components, which were already present in the work of Maldiney and which were borrowed from him by Romano too. Needless to say, Maldiney is himself a theoretician of surprise and of the event (cf. Maldiney 1991, 251). He nonetheless connects these two concepts of surprise and event with the instant that does not contain any intrinsic past and future within it. Maldiney also describes a certain psychopathology, which can be linked to the notion of instant, and with regard to which he insisted on the sudden change triggered by the moment (cf. Maldiney 2003, 20). This sudden change from one state to another might also be triggered by an interhuman encounter. Therefore, we can insist on a sort of “dialogical passibility,” in the case of which the I has to be receptive and available, in order to welcome and to appropriate the surprise, and integrate it in the overall economy of dialogue, keeping themselves open to change and insight. As Michel Bitbol emphasizes, transpassibility, the key notion of Maldiney’s phenomenological theory, represents exactly the possibility of welcoming surprise (cf. Depraz and Celle 2019, 16). On the other hand, the “dialogical possibility”<sup>36</sup> implies taking advantage of the kairotic moment of surprise, thus resolving the crisis (the decision) instantiated by the moment of meeting. This act of “passibilization” as “possibilization” might be accomplished

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35 Henri Maldiney (1991) and Giorgio Agamben (2005) are two contemporary philosophers who describe the relation between the instant and *kairos*, the former being a manifestation of the latter.

36 Of course, the notions employed mirror Maldiney’s transpassibility and transpossibility (Maldiney 1991, 361).

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by what Buber called confirmation. Thus, when surprise occurs in the case of the dialogical play and of the interhuman encounter, this might provide itself to be the opportune moment to confirm the other in his or her uniqueness, leading to the dynamic unfolding of his or her possibilities. Buber calls this phenomenon the dynamic confirmation of the other's potentialities, and its relation to surprise appears in the dialogue with Carl Rogers (cf. Buber 1965, 178). Therefore, by confirming the other according to the opportune moment, a sort of horizon of new possibilities paradoxically awakens in the person of the other. Nevertheless, this involves the other's passibility too. Moreover, by virtue of the other's passibility, "dialogical possibility" might emerge, which results in mutuality. In summary, the dialogical passibility refers to the possibility of appropriating the surprise and taking advantage of it by confirming the other (the possibilization). Furthermore, in this specific case, confirmation proves to be an adequate response to surprise. The moment of surprise does not only prove to be an opportunity for mutual understanding, but also for mutual bonding<sup>37</sup> and deepening of the interhuman field by virtue of confirmation. We must nonetheless remember that Buber insists on the value of confirmation in becoming self with the other (cf. Buber 1965, 71). Moreover, this becoming self with the other involves also mutual understanding, which becomes the *sine qua non* of the unfolding of possibilities. Maldiney in turn paradoxically describes the instant to be operative both in the genesis of psychosis, but also in the event of interhuman encounter, which was of utmost interest to us throughout this paper. He deliberates on how we can cope with this overwhelming event by being open, receptive, and responsive to alterity. However, whereas Maldiney describes the instant of sudden change as a sort of trauma, this being the case wherein the subject is not receptive and responsive, we discussed the, so to speak, fortunate situation of the interhuman encounter, namely the possibility of mutual understanding, enrichment, and confirmation.

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37 As it was described by Patočka in the case of the first movement of existence (cf. Patočka 2016, 166).

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## Conclusion

We began this essay by sketching out a possible appraisal of Claude Romano's hermeneutics of surprise, in order to establish a firm ground, upon which our argumentation could unfold. Secondly, a comparison between Buber's perspective on dialogue and the thematization of Gadamer proved to be necessary, because in both views surprise plays a major role, despite being virtually only a metaphor. Thus, we argued that dialogical play and mutual understanding can be achieved by virtue of its "ontological presupposition," namely the moment of surprise. Next, we ventured into the realm of temporality, seeking a clue that would fit the temporal features of surprise. We found Bergson's thematization of creative temporality or the unforeseeable novelty to be just the specific argument we were looking for, but we nonetheless complemented his view with the aid of the theory of *kairos*, namely the right moment for choice, decision, and action, i.e., the instant. We therefore linked *kairos* with the opportunity left open by surprise, which is precisely the interhuman confirmation. Henceforth, we argued that surprise might mark the right moment for the confirmation of otherness; thus, the unfolding of the other's possibilities and potentialities can become a certainty or something actual. We can just imagine a simple dialogical scenario, in which dialogue itself unfolds by virtue of the perpetual interplay of the two interlocutors, until the moment, when one of them or even both realize something decisive about the whole situation, in which they find themselves, i.e., mutual understanding. That is a surprise. Mutual confirmation proceeds naturally from this sort of relationship.

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The tasks we attempted to tackle throughout the paper were numerous, but nonetheless interrelated. Firstly, the general aim of the paper was to set up the thesis concerning the dialogical hermeneutics of surprise, which was followed by the affinity of the thinking of both Buber and Gadamer. The paper ended with an inquiry into the temporality of the moment of surprise, in the case of which we interpreted surprise as the Platonic instant of opportunity,<sup>38</sup> decision, and action. We have provided an appraisal or even an elaboration of

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38 For example, in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*.

78 Maldiney's notions of transpassibility and transpossibility (cf. Maldiney 1991, 361–362) in an endeavor to reveal their dialogical function in the economy of everyday face-to-face exchanges. Furthermore, we alluded to the twofold possibility of the encounter with the instant of surprise, which might result either in a trauma (as Maldiney has conceived of this instantaneous change) or in a fortunate change of our being-in-the-world that refers to mutual enrichment between I and Thou. The next possible step, which ought to be taken in future research, is that of applying our current results of the dialogical moment of surprise to the field of psychopathology, because whereas we have just alluded to this unfortunate possibility, further research might attempt to prove how the twofold possibility of encounter with the moment of surprise results in either trauma or enrichment, depending on our transpassibility and transpossibility. Anticipating, and following Maldiney's claim, the participation in the disclosure of the event, conceived as an interhuman happening, involves both transpassibility and transpossibility that are triggered by the moment of surprise (cf. Maldiney 2001, 103–104). Finally, we proposed the notions of dialogical passibility and dialogical possibility, in order to emphasize the way, in which bonding, change, and even understanding between I and Thou might occur, also alluding to the psychopathology, or, as we called it, the unfortunate outcome of the experience of the overwhelming event. While the event has often been interpreted as a sudden change of our being-in-the-world, resulting in trauma (cf. Romano 2014, 202), our purpose throughout this paper was that of establishing how mutual becoming, alongside the unfolding of our possibilities, can be rendered possible by the moment of surprise.

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### **Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism**

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## *Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024*

### **Marcations | Zaznačbe**

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan  
| Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić



## *Phainomena 32 | 126-127 | November 2023*

### **Demarcations | Razmejitve**

Damir Barbarić | Dragan Prole | Artur R. Boelderl | Johannes Vorlauffer | Cathrin Nielsen | Virgilio Cesarone | Mario Kopić | Petr Prášek | Žarko Paić | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Emanuele Severino | Jonel Kolić | Jordan Huston

