Event and Method

DANIIL KOLOSKOV, Department of Philosophy and Social Science, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

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This article will pursue two goals. First, it compares Romano's notion of the event with Merleau-Ponty's notion of expression. They can be seen as fulfilling similar functions emphasizing the possibility of unexpected happenings. Both thematize the ability of the transformation that lies at the foundation of the very possibility of experience. Second, the article stresses the difference between these notions, which illustrates a certain methodological difference in Romano's and Merleau-Ponty's approaches. The former approach can be loosely described as transcendental, as it seeks to emphasize that events operate as a condition of possibility of experience and, as such, are not explainable by everyday experience. The latter approach relies on emphasizing the *circular connection* between our everyday experience and an unexpected possibility of reorganizing this experience: according to this strategy, unexpectedness should be seen as a reserve of everydayness, which always carries with itself a tacit possibility of transformation.

Keywords: Romano – Merleau-Ponty – event – expression – transcendental – empirical

Introduction

The notion of event is situated at the forefront of the phenomenological tradition. To give but a couple of examples, Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis*, Merleau-Ponty's notion of expression, Maldiney's accounts of event and psychosis, Marion's analysis of gift and given, Romano's evential hermeneutics – all can be seen as contributions to the analysis of events.[1] Because of the diversity of the contributions, it becomes complicated to offer

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[1] On comparing phenomenological and non-phenomenological approaches to event, see also Zarader (2005).

a general definition of this concept without losing everything that is interesting about it. In a preliminary way, we could borrow Dastur's formulation saying that we can "only define it as what was not expected, what arrives unexpectedly and comes to us by surprise, what descends upon us, the accident in the literal meaning of the Latin verb *accido* from which the word accident derives" (Dastur 2000, 182; see also Filiz 2023, 1 – 15 for a more syncretic overview).

In this article, I will first outline two methodological strategies in the phenomenological tradition that explicate this intuition. One approach, which we can find in Romano's work (we could add to this list such authors as Heidegger[2] and Marion), can be described as transcendental in a loose sense of the word.[3] It emphasizes that events operate as a condition of possibility of experience and, as such, they are not explainable by everyday experience. Another approach most distinctly articulated by Merleau-Ponty (which can be also found in Barbaras and Richir)[4] relies on emphasizing the *circular connection* between our everyday experience and an unexpected possibility of reorganizing this experience. Second, I will also argue that the second strategy, although somewhat less radical, is also more logically consistent and less explanatorily costly, making it possible to establish a cooperation between "evential hermeneutics" and empirical sciences.

I. Romano's Event

Romano's phenomenology of events starts with a systematic criticism of what he calls "ousiology" (Romano 2009, 13) – an ontological assumption of the primacy of substances and a collateral attempt to explain all the possible effects and relations of substances in terms of their attributes or "ontic structures." The explanatory strategy here consists of ascribing something like a substrate to every effect; effects find themselves reduced to the status of a predicate of a substance. Romano offers a different strategy. An event – what "happens," "comes to pass" or "come[s] about" – in other words, a "pure taking place" – is something that should be taken as a methodologically

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[2] See also Gert-Jan van der Heiden (2014, 188).

[3] It should be stressed, of course, that Romano himself is critical of the transcendental approach, which he mainly interprets as an attempt to investigate the "*a priori*"' structure of subjectivity that further enables *a posteriori* events in the world. In this article, I will use the term "transcendental" in a different sense, dwelling on the explanatory inequality between "transcendental" explanans and "empirical" explanandum. This alternative usage is not meant to be a criticism of Romano and occasionally corresponds to his own usage (see, for example, Romano 2009, 49 and esp. 68.)

[4] On distinguishing between those two camps in phenomenology, see also Prášek (2019).

privileged starting point. Instead of going into this endless task of pulling the event apart and redistributing the general effect among the relative contributions of particular substances, Romano starts with an assumption that a manifestation – something that happens *to* something – presupposes an irreducibility of the holistic context of interaction that "pre-exists its parts" (Romano 2009, 67). Parts are now interpreted in the light of the holistic interaction: if we forget that entities can only appear meaningfully in the context of an event, which indicates that something happens to something, we would eventually obscure their own intelligibility (what would lightning *mean* if it doesn't pierce the sky?). From this perspective, it becomes obvious that the event also "remains fundamentally indeterminate, because [it is] multiply determinable" (Romano 2009, 25). Not only is an event irreducible to its parts; it also can potentially include newer and newer parts, thus acquiring newer and newer meanings. From this perspective, we cannot "assign an ontic substratum" to an event, i.e., we cannot take it as explainable in terms of particular entities and their ontic structure. Events require "ontic support" for their manifestation, but once this ontic structure enters the holistic context of manifestation, it becomes irreducible to such support. As DeLay puts it, emphasizing this productivity of events: an event is "a *birth* of sorts" (DeLay 2019, 149).

This starting point leads to the introduction of a distinction between intra-mundane events or facts and events in the proper sense of the word; outlining something like "events" relies on distinguishing them from "ordinary changes…, the banal modification of being-there" (Vinolo 2013, 52). A fact always presupposes "the worldly context that explains it" (Romano 2009, 66) (the "world" here is defined by him as "a whole that preexists its parts, an articulated unity of possibilities that cannot be detached from one another nor understood in isolation" (Romano 2009, 67)). So, intramundane events might not be explainable through downward movement to substances and their structures, but they are at least explainable in terms of an upward one, which ascends to the established unity of possibilities; the "whole" "explains" (Romano 2009, 66) the meaning of particular facts. Facts are inscribed into the system of other events, interactions and possible recipients of such facts, so they obtain distinct, clearly identifiable meanings and a certain repeatability by relying on this stable background. Romano stresses that the "world" operates as "the swarm of circumstances that illuminate the fact itself without thereby being a part of it" (Romano 2009, 66). By offering the stable background for facts, the world also establishes itself as something

more or less independent from them. Being one-sidedly explained by this holistic organization of possibilities, a fact does not have the potential to influence it in return; the general organization of the world is preserved intact without any regard to whether or not the fact takes place.

Unlike facts, fundamental events are not simply inscribed into the ready-made order of the world but indicate an "advent of the world" (Romano 2009, 2). The fundamentality of events is measured by their ability to *establish* an order and reconfigure the system of significance. While facts refer us to "changes that occur in the world," events "happen *to* the world" (DeLay 2019, 156). Romano gives the example of a sudden illness that collapses my ordinary possibilities and restructures the context out of which they normally appear; everything acquires a new meaning given my new condition. In this sense, Romano stresses that the whole here no longer operates as a rigid *explanans* of possible facts, i.e., as their stable background. Instead, the world itself becomes the locus of events: events "expose" the cohesion of possibilities, the style of their unfolding wiping out certain possibilities and introducing new ones. "[E]ventual possibility," says Romano, makes "projectual possibilities *possible*" (Romano 2009, 119; see also Tarditi 2013, 79 – 80). Events, in other words, address the whole as such, which "preexists its parts" and explain each particular part; although appearing "through" those parts, the whole cannot be explainable in terms of the contribution that the parts make. As a result, the world no longer appears as "a multiplicity of facts in light of which events might be explicable," a passive irrelevant "ambience" of events, but manifests itself as the "the structural, hierarchic, and signifying unity that confers meaning on them" (Romano 2009, 67). By hitting right at the heart of the organization of facts, events show themselves as the "origin of the world" (Romano 2009, 59); they manifest that at the centre of the world lies not a numeric accumulation of possibilities but a resilient fabric of meaning.

This means that events are "unexplainable," properly speaking. Facts are explainable because they refer to other facts, which are organized into the coherent system of the world. When it comes to events that indicate the arrival and origin of such a coherent system, we have nothing left to appeal to. Events occur "without why": an explanation refers us to the accepted frame of explanation, while the frame itself remains unexpected. Established intelligibility cannot explain the very possibility of establishing intelligibility, which is something that the notion of events is meant to grasp. As Romano puts it, events do not realize a priorly available possibility but "rather [make] possible the possible in their an-archic bursting forth, this is so in that they originate in

themselves and in that their meaning can be understood only on the horizon they have themselves opened by their arising" (Romano 2009, 43). By employing this expression, "an-archic bursting forth," Romano seeks to demonstrate that an event's starting point cannot be located within the established system of coordinates; it has no origin (arche) but itself becomes one while lacking any further ground that would explain it. While facts are explained by their context, events "impose their own context" (Vinolo 2013, 56). As a new possibility of organization of experience, events, thus, are unexpected and unexpectable: "[a]n origin-origo, Ursprung – is what arises (orior) and lifts itself by a *leap* (Ur-sprung) that breaks with all provenance … distinct from any cause (Ur-sache), for causes always refer to another thing (Sache) from which the rest would follow" (ibid., emphasis mine). In the light of events, the tendency of our everyday understanding to rely on its "*a priori*," i.e., the previously accumulated horizon of understanding, becomes insufficient. It becomes obvious that understanding's *a priori* is always, in fact, the *a posteriori* of an event that has first opened something like a horizon of understanding (Romano 2009, 152). Thus, this unintelligibility of events according to given standards does not signify "the *absence* of intelligibility, but an *excess* of it" (DeLay 2019, 147): originally, we fail to make sense of events because we lack appropriate tools, as we are yet to work out what this "novel beginning" means and what horizons of meaning it opens up.

The radicality of this unexplainable status of events can be explicated based on Romano's discussion of the motivational model of understanding. Sensing the objection that events are inexplainable only in terms of preceding causes but might nonetheless be explainable in terms of motives, Romano claims that the explanation in terms of motives, just like the causal explanation, belongs to the domain of established intelligibility. It presupposes a certain range of goals, motives and desires which add up to a frame that provides a horizon for interpretation, this "worldly context" with its clear hierarchical organization. Understanding's main goal, in this sense, is to fit the *explanandum* in this organization. Thus, treating facts as explainable in terms of motives would place them dangerously close to the domain of anthropology, psychology, and sociology as it tries to interpret their radical novelty as a mere continuation of a more fundamental influence that is already operative on a different level of analysis. Unlike motives, events do not belong to history, they "open history" (Romano 2009, 44). What is unique about events is exactly their irreducibility both to causes and motives; events unfold when any kind of "why" becomes insufficient, and it doesn't matter whether this why comes

from an investigation of our neural system or our economic background. This strategy of Romano carries with itself one aim only: to stress as much as possible the irreducible novelty of events and to differentiate them against all other possible happenings and processes. It becomes fundamentally important to oppose empirical sciences such as anthropology and sociology on the one hand and evential hermeneutics on the other. What is unique about events is that we can only understand them "on a horizon of meaning that they have opened themselves"; this "evential understanding" (Romano 2009, 152) is always delayed because it must wait until an event discloses its own horizons before grasping it as it is.

From the very beginning, we should emphasize the crucial methodological role that this opposition between facts and events is charged with.[5] Events and facts are defined in this opposition to one another (see also Mackinlay 2005, 174; Vinolo 2013): while facts are explained by the world, events describe an occurrence of the order of the world that is "inaccessible to any *explanation*" (Romano 2009, 43). While facts are repeatable in virtue of their stable background, events indicate the reorganization of possibilities that will further serve as a framework for any repeatability. While facts are a part of history, events are the origin of history. While facts are conditioned, events are conditions. Romano, in other words, constitutes them through their opposition: events only make sense insofar as they are distinguished from facts; facts make sense insofar as they are contrasted with events. Stressing the importance of the facts (as much as the importance of an individual who is faced with the task of "recognizing" an event) "blurs" the very distinction among them (Vinolo 2013, 52). Here you can see the bones of his argumentative strategy, which makes it possible for Romano to offer what might well be the most radical notion of event in phenomenological scholarship.

As is often the case with such radical accounts, it comes with a package of logical problems. Now, one of these is particularly significant for the goals of this article and follows directly from the decision to counterpose events and facts, which moves the question of their cohesion into a blind zone. Since events and facts obtain their relative definitions in virtue of their opposition to one another, we are left deprived of tools that would help us to explain how and why events belong to a certain context and how contexts are linked to possible events (see also Prášek 2019, 417). That Romano's account indeed

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[5] It has been argued that Marion's gradual distinction between saturated, common and poor phenomena is, in fact, an equally rigid distinction between types (see Koloskov 2022; Gschwandtner, 2014).

presupposes the importance of these questions even despite being unable to account for them satisfactorily follows from the examples that he offers us – like that of death, friendship, or illness – which are common sensual examples. We should ask ourselves: why does Romano stick to the everyday standards when describing something completely extraordinary? Why do we keep finding events exactly where we are *normally supposed* to find them? The death of a close person, illness, friendship, or a fundamental decision all seem to have a special location in our everydayness. Everydayness *prepares* this transformation and even expects us to be transformed by them (think, for example, about Camus' *The Stranger* and the way everybody was appalled at the fact that the main character didn't cry at his mother's funeral). Here, the everyday setting does seem to provide some explanation of transformation or, at least, an explanatory occasion for it. As such, it might not explain the possibility of an event completely but at least indicates some explanatory value by demonstrating that something is more likely to become an event and something less likely. If we want to follow the letter of Romano's approach and think of an event as defying all possible conditioning and escaping all possible explanations, it would seem that an appropriate example would be something like picking up a pen from the table or waking up on a Tuesday morning – here, explanatory relation does seem to be entirely absent. In other words, we can make events unexplainable only at the cost of making them equally unintelligible.

This premise would, no doubt, be challenged by Romano and like-minded philosophers. DeLay, for example, argues that this notion of event does not presuppose randomness or unintelligibility of events but a "different magnitude of its intelligibility" (DeLay 2019, 157) that no longer fits the accepted frame. This is a reasonable claim. The trick, however, is to draw a line between what Romano wants to account for and what he is actually entitled to according to his methodological system. Otherwise, we might end up implicitly overtaking certain everyday intuitions that do not sit well with our explanatory strategy in general. If we are talking about different "magnitudes" of intelligibility, for instance, the question is whether the very reference to the magnitude does not already presuppose a firmer foothold in everyday intelligibility than Romano is ready to admit. Is it not exactly the ability to surpass the established intelligibility that becomes a measure of the magnitude of change? If so, are we not presupposing that what is surpassed in such an overcoming retains at least some explanatory power over the event itself – at least by virtue of providing this foothold from which it pushes off?

Again, this would bring us back to admitting that the everyday setting constitutes a positive condition for the possibility of its transformation. If we are talking about friendship, for example, there must be something *to be* transformed, like mutual sympathy, a shared sense of humour, a similarity in opinion; without these everyday constituents, the event of friendship would make so little sense that it would be barely intelligible. Talking about the magnitude of change, therefore, presupposes that events themselves are measured against the background that they are reconfiguring. Thus, this background, again, does have at least *some* explanatory value.

Or take, for example, Romano's claim that events can be "exhausted" and then substituted with other events. By itself, this is a fairly intuitive claim: even the most important events stop being as inspiring as they once were. Sometimes they are just left aside and substituted with other events. Sometimes they are assimilated and pave the way for further possibilities. But again, Romano here seems to go further than he has initially planned. This possibility of exhaustion assumes that something – a perspective, a possibility, a process or an expression – that events have opened up and explained also has this possibility of affecting that which enabled it in the first place. A particular realization of a project makes the frame that opened it up somewhat less appealing (i.e., "exhausted"). This means that the opposition between event and facts refers us to a more fundamental and mutual dynamics, rather than one-sided relation of explanation: just like events explain facts, the dynamics of those facts and possibilities explain the intelligibility of events. Similarly, Romano assumes that the exhaustion of one event somehow opens up the road for other events. But doesn't this imply that we ascribe some common logic to events and their succession? From this standpoint, events lose part of their explanatory power and find themselves explained by this logic of events that consists of disclosing and maintaining the intensity of disclosure, which, again, seems like a contradiction to his basic definition of events as *explanans*.

This problem calls for a different account of events that would preserve their radical novelty and unexplainability, but at a lesser price. This account should preserve the motivational relations between events and facts and explain the cohesion between them.

II. Merleau-Ponty's Expression
Although the notion of event is not among those that Merleau-Ponty uses systematically, his concept of expression bears a striking resemblance to

Romano's descriptions. Playing a crucial role already in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, "expression" gradually moves to the forefront of his interests in the later writings. Although Merleau-Ponty discusses this notion mostly in relation to the problem of language, Barbaras has argued convincingly that Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on expression signals a shift in his attention that treats linguistic expression as a model of our relation to the world (Barbaras 2004; Fóti 2013). Assuming that this argument is correct, I will demonstrate in this section not only that the problematics of event is central to Merleau-Ponty's thinking (on this see also Edwards 2011) but also that he offers a unique contribution to the debate that makes it possible for us to integrate the novelty of events with corroboration with empirical sciences.

The integral feature of Merleau-Ponty's approach to the problem of expression consists of his emphasis on the unity [or, speaking more precisely, "interwoven duality" (Hass 2008, 191)] between the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of language. The synchronic dimension refers us to the fact that language can only signify or "express" anything by relying on a differentiated system of signs. Thus, language cannot be seen as a result of an objective influence of the world; it attains its signifying power by appropriating those external influences and situating them according to its own system of distinctions or "inner logic" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 86). The diachronic dimension emphasizes that a synchronic system can only be held together insofar as it is mobilized in a "single attempt to express" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 85) something *that is to be said* or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, a "signification." The mobilization or intention to signify is itself factual: only in the context of my attempt to express a meaningful situation that would be relevant for me does the signifying apparatus obtain its meaning. So, if the synchronic dimension of language incorporates any possible signification into its inner logic, the diachronic dimension of language contaminates this inner logic of language with *facticity of performance* by the speaking subject; as Barbaras puts it, "speech must allow in its heart a weakness … which exposes it to facticity" (Barbaras, 2004, 57). Merleau-Ponty, thus, stresses that the expressive unity of language, its ability to say something meaningful, is a "moving equilibrium": infected with restlessness, the language is constantly on the move, searching for new possible significations and gradually letting go of old ones. So, some linguistic constructions – some cases, declensions or idioms – are on the way to disappearing, having lost some of their expressive power, and some are on the rise, still unclear and fuzzy but carrying with them a certain potential.

This "signification" or situation around which concepts crystallize is an interesting explanatory tool. It has nothing to do with the Myth of the Given. Merleau-Ponty describes "significations" as a type of "regulative ideas" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 89): they "magnetize" discourses, becoming "a pole of a certain number of convergent acts of expression" without being themselves directly present *in* discourses; as Barbaras puts it, the meaning of a situation should be seen as "what magnetically attracts expression, as the dimension of variation and calling forth which inhabits expression but which expression does not possess" (Barbaras 2004, 55). In this sense, signification is a sort of "thing" but conceived in a very unusual, Merleau-Pontian way: it is something that makes it possible for different perspectives (*Abschattungen*) (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 91) to converge and interact with one another because it endows them with a common style that presents a *behaviour*, an overarching similarity across different perspectives. Signification is, thus, nothing but a "determinate gap, which is to be filled with words." If we borrow a Heideggerian expression, we might say that signification refers us to the possibility of finding "the way into truth of being so as to dwell there" (Heidegger, GA 9, 191, 239). So, signification is *expressed* insofar as it makes possible cohesion among words; at the same time, however, words obtain this cohesion along with their expressive power insofar as *they manage to outline a certain signification*. Far from being vicious, this circularity signalizes that Merleau-Ponty no longer wishes to lay fixed objects or equally fixed structures at the foundation of language, outlining instead the constitutive dynamics of language, a movement of words into the world and the world into words which "miraculously" (Merleau-Ponty 1958, xxiii) results in the expression.

Just like event, expression of a new signification indicates a new possibility of organizing our experience that is not explained by our currently achieved significations and the corresponding signifying apparatus, i.e., the established meanings, but instead indicates the possibility of transformation of this apparatus. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty argues in favour of the unpredictability of different expressions. The logic of particular linguistic acts and their intelligibility are dependent upon the signification: only because a signification guides us into this open space do our acts display a certain cohesion. In case this signification is for some reason lost, the acts themselves dissolve and disintegrate, losing their signifying power (a typical example would be Schneider's brain trauma, which undermined among other things the sexual meaning of his existence, leaving only logical and hollow knowledge about sexual signification). The point here is that if a given cohesion of linguistic signs

is considered by itself, it does not contain any seeds of self-surpassing to yet another signification. The possibility of a new expression arrives unpredictably. It breaks the previously established coherence and transforms particular acts in the light of new signification, leading them to places those acts have never foreseen. Expressing something new, in this sense, "does not use history: it makes itself history" (Barbaras 2004, 58). Merleau-Ponty, thus, describes expressing a new signification as the "leap that these operations take from already available significations to those we are in the process of constructing and acquiring" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 95). It is this leap conceived as a possibility of expressing what was yet unexpressed, and transforming our expressive tools, that should be laid at the foundation of human experience.

This match with Romano is partial. Emphasizing that acquired significations are not a *sufficient* explanation of acquiring new ones, Merleau-Ponty wouldn't say that new significations are not *explainable* at all. Expression is "the common act of the signifying and the signified" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 95): it is not the signification that one-sidedly explains the signifying apparatus. It is the interactive engagement between the signifying and the signified that gives birth to expression. It is not the transformation of events or the already established background that are decisively explanatory, but the transformative ability—the realization of the "leap" that animates our signifying apparatus in its attempt to "retrieve the world." Instead of being enabled by signification, our signifying capacities are seen as constituted by "anticipation through which each spoken word or acquired truth opens a field of understanding." There is this capacity ("anticipation") of passing from the elements *of* a certain "field of understanding" to using them in order to open up the field itself, where they would organize our experience rather than just be organized; each element retains this sort of inner electricity, an ability to be deployed as a background or a measure for other elements. As Edwards puts it, here experience becomes the "invisible and open curvature of a significant moment" (Edwards 2011, 45).

This capability renders expressions explainable but does not deprive expression of their unexpected character. The language was not designed to signify what it signifies. Again, if we take a synchronic cut of a language, we will find nothing like a possibility of transformation. Nothing will lead us outside of the current standards of intelligibility. In this sense, we can always turn a blind eye to the new expression and interpret the world in terms of an established hermeneutic frame. There is nothing, for example, that would prove to me convincingly that a date with a woman is not just another way of

"spending time" but a beginning of deeper relationships. But recognizing that any synchronic cut consists of already transformed significations and, thus, acknowledging the tacit but ever-present capability of transformation, we also acknowledge the possibility of breaking with the current standards of intelligibility in an attempt to organize experience differently. The established signification is a result of a continuous act of blind experimentation, which never makes good sense at first but which endows us with the possibility of putting things together differently and reconfiguring our experience. This unnecessitated leap might end up finding nothing – maybe it was just a way of spending time after all. But it also might stumble across a new network of connections that outline something radically new. Once the language gropes this sudden deepening, a certain unexpected cavity, which is to be "filled with words," the already acquired meanings flow into the unexplored area, modifying one another and producing new possibilities of expression. Before this massive reinterpretation is realized, however, the expression itself is neither necessary nor self-evident.

Recognizing this capability of committing a leap as explanatorily significant, we also restore the explanatory significance of motives. Of course, previous significations cannot cause new ones or prescribe any established motives for them. This is because events introduce their own set of motives, which wouldn't be clear until after we have been transformed by the events. But even though the old signifying apparatus was not originally meant to grasp a new signification, it can also motivate us indirectly by giving us something to *experiment with*; it gives us "facts" that can always be transformed into "measures." Since new significations are opened up through novel usages of old signifying apparatus, possessing such an apparatus is an indispensable condition for the opening up of a new signification; in order to open up a new field of understanding, I must have all the elements for this opening up, although employed in a different field with a different meaning. Established significations are the "background against which new expressive break-throughs are formed" (Hass 2008, 187). They cannot level down the very need to commit this leap by ourselves. What they can do is to put us closer to the event and give us more points of contact with it. The new signification, thus, relies on previously established significations just as much as it transforms them: this fold or this cavity, eventually, should not be conceived as something that one-sidedly happens to our experience but as a shared effort of all the cavities that produces the possibility of anything happing *to* them.

Let me get back to Romano's example of friendship for an illustration. Imagine a sympathetic relationship between two individuals. Under the forces of circumstances, they frequently interact and have learned to enjoy their interactions. Not only do they – by sharing certain economic interests and being exposed to similar risks – manage to act for their mutual benefit; they also share a similar cultural background and the same reserved irony towards their situation, which has infused a great deal of unspoken solidarity between them. This sympathy, however, remains a function of their environment. Despite having made "a virtue out of their necessity" (Bourdieu 1980), they won't reasonably expect their sympathy to go beyond the frame of their respective self-interests. Imagine, however, a sudden crisis that happens to one of them. From the other's standpoint, it would be reasonable *not* to do anything about it: the intelligibility of his self-interest dictates treating this crisis as perhaps a sad but irrelevant circumstance. There is also, however, an as-yet unreasonable call to help the other self-devotedly. Doing so would reorganize his experience and place him in a different situation with new standards of intelligibility of friendship. Committing such an act, thus, "turns experience into meaning" (Merleau-Ponty 1964): it takes self-devotion as a new frame of intelligibility, through which previous experiences are interpreted. This turn is only possible insofar as the self-devotion manages to find its foothold in previous experiences, i.e., insofar as cultural similarity, mutual help, and sense of humour enter into reaction with self-devotion, manage to outline a new signification and successfully "magnetize the discourse." As a wholistic transformation, it cannot be reduced to any concrete part or forced: each part of the relation *can be* interpreted according to different systems of intelligibility. But, at the same time, it can be nothing but an organization of individual parts that have been concretely encountered in the world. Without a set of motives expressed in such mundane facts as a shared sense of humour or economic self-interest, transformation would be impossible. A new whole is simultaneously recognized *in* its empirical parts, gathering them together anew and, thus, requiring them as footholds of transformation.

This also means that even though events are not fully predictable or necessary, their succession presupposes a certain common *logic* and a sense of accumulation, which Merleau-Ponty describes with the term "*hyper-dialectics.*" The succession is never meant to find a reconciliation in some final point. Merleau-Ponty never allows us to attain this view from the whole as such – a view that would determine the final meaning of each past event. Instead, hyper-dialectics shows us how past expressions were transformed and

surpassed in order to obtain their current expressive power. Past expressions are only given to us from the standpoint of the current expression: while flowing into this new determinate gap, redefining itself, acquiring new meanings and reinterpreting old meanings in the light of this newly opened dimension of experience, language transforms itself. Having done so, it can only see the past as the gradual preparatory movement towards the present, the "logic in contingency" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 88). So, a new event does not so much mean putting "past events at a distance" (Romano 2009, 148): by attaining a new expression, we transform past experiences and preserve them at the same time. As Hass puts it, "[w]e draw upon [them], just as we breathe air" (Hass 2008, 187). Or, to quote Merleau-Ponty himself, "[o]ur present expressive operations, instead of driving the preceding ones away—simply succeeding and annulling them—salvage, preserve, and (insofar as they contain some truth) take them up again. … Our present keeps the promises of our past…" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 95).

III. Conclusion

In this sense, Romano's and Merleau-Ponty's relative emphases on the whole–part relationship illustrate the entire scope of their methodological difference. While Romano claims that a "whole preexists its parts," stressing the positive irreducibility of events to their parts, Merleau-Ponty stresses that just as parts do not add up by themselves into a whole and require something like a holistic organization that would be irreducible to parts, this organization itself cannot be seen as having a one-sided explanatory priority over the parts it organizes. For Romano, the unexpected character of events is explained by the recourse to *the explanatory priority of the whole in regard to its parts.* For Merleau-Ponty, this unexpected character refers us to the *circular dynamics* between signifying and the signified elements. A new signification is opened up *simultaneously* with the secretion of new usage of old conceptual tools and, thus, cannot be forced or even convincingly predicted. From this Merleau-Pontian standpoint, a meaningful whole, in fact, explains its part just as much as it is explained by them, by their possibility of hanging together and opening up a domain of experience. Merleau-Ponty, thus, no longer treats the horizon as "insignificant" (Romano 2009, 66) but emphasizes the inner electricity and its ever-present capability of unexpected transformations and going into the unknown. An event here should be seen as a sort of a *gem of everydayness* – an unexpected by-product of an ideal compression created and sustained by everyday language, a by-product occurrence which retrospectively endows

the whole linguistic system with a new *telos*. That's the specificity of the Merleau-Pontian method, which substitutes rigid distinction between facts and events (just like any other rigid distinction) with a sense of their mutual belonging and interpenetration. From the very beginning, he acknowledges that the difference between facts and events, in fact, also presupposes their unity in the context of movement of expression; their difference is a difference in unity and unity in difference.

Covering this gap between events and facts, we also cover the gap between "evential hermeneutics" and empirical sciences. Our ability to undergo transformations turns out to be much more dependent on the infrastructure of the world than it would seem from Romano's account. Facts of the world, inadvertently, turn out to be building blocks of events; without determining the meaning of events, they indirectly motivate their occurrence by supplying this factual material that becomes responsive to those new ways of organization of experience at a certain point. Without the mundane background of facts, a new organization of experience remains an abstract possibility too detached from everydayness in order to affect individuals. This background remains in principle open to empirical investigations of facts and categorizations of various sorts, which would demonstrate how contingent and historical circumstances provide occasions for happenings and how happenings are inadvertently prepared through the multitude of contingent, disorganized facts. From this perspective, not only can we explicate how those seemingly inessential factors have an indirect motivational effect on events; we could also demonstrate that our ability to transform ourselves is not some eschatological openness to what comes but an active, although unpredictable, capacity.

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Daniil Koloskov
Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences
Philosophical Faculty
University of Hradec Králové
Rokitanského 62
500 03 Hradec Králové III
Czech Republic
e-mail: daniilkoloskov94@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1856-3832