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The interpersonal space between gift and annihilation*

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Abstract

From the viewpoint of the studies of Scheler, Hildebrand and Stein regarding the human person, we can infer two typical aspects of human existence:

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on one level to be full and complete in self, on another to be naturally open to relations with others. The first aspect – what we usually call *Substance* – is discussed in a different way from the three authors because Scheler, for instance, has a critical approach to it, but Stein and Hildebrand speak about substance as something fundamental and ineradicable. However, all three authors consider the second aspect the most important and consider love as the act by which a human person affirms another and encounters him/her for a full personal realization. This implies giving something of self and detaching oneself from what is given for the other. In this paper we will instate a dialogue with the three authors to define the interpersonal “space” as something profound constitutive for the human being, and to understand what it means to “lose oneself” in a relationship, without extinguishing oneself.

Keywords: Philosophical Anthropology, Person, Relationship, Love, Intersubjectivity.

1 A look into today’s human condition

We are living at a time in which the quantitative level of interpersonal connections has grown in a drastic manner and very rapidly, compared to the past. We live in a world of interconnections; we know everything about people living very far away from us, and we are interdependent with

one another.

“All the human beings that populate our planet live in a relationship of mutual dependence. A person cannot be a hundred percent sure that his/her action/non-action has/will not have any consequences on the condition of others, though they be spatially and temporally far away. And, vice versa, the condition in which an individual make a particular choice and the success or failure of his/her actions are influenced by all that happens in the world.”¹

The level of our relationships seems therefore unlimited as we move from one encounter to the next, but in reality, we only touch one another not really experiencing a glance, which can reach a person’s inner depth. Technology, industrialisation and urbanisation – great conquests which mark the progress of humanity, always searching to overcome new forms of difficulty – have fostered such great competitiveness and bureaucratisation that ever-new illnesses and social problems have appeared. Some contemporary philosophers² have spoken about our times as “the night of the world”, “the dark night of humanity”, meaning not the death of God or the experience of this dead, but precisely the fact that we do not experience all this as a death! As Marià Zambrano notes, it is the human being,

¹Zigmund Bauman, *Una nuova condizione umana* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2004) 49 – non-authorial translation.

²I refer here in particular to Martin Heidegger and Maria Zambrano.

which is disappearing, that perfectly rational being whose glance has acknowledged, estimated and gained all things in Europe, giving a name and a value to all.

This backdrop marks the start, or perhaps is an outgrowth of some previous processes, that in an unexpected and unforeseeable manner shook human consciousness at the beginning of the world wars, arousing a movement of searching and rethinking the concept of person. It is a movement, which is still underway. Human beings are capable of producing the atomic bomb to sweep away thousands of their own kind in a few minutes; humans have conquered space, reaching far away planets, and have developed medicines and techniques to heal illness, chasing the Spector of death. Humans have achieved levels of communication with all other human beings. Yet, this very same human person meets up with the limits of his/her existence and the existence of others, of the world around him. This happens especially on the level of communication: 'In the season, in which we are living, language does not give space and breath to the word'³ says Zambrano: the authentic word, that which is able to give meaning, struggles to become space in a time in which the abuse of the word led to its progressive devaluation. Like man and the world in which he lives, also the word suffered progressively a process of impoverishment, becoming a fruitless production of sounds that a person uses as a kind of good, to meet his own needs or extend his power above all

³In questa stagione che viviamo il linguaggio non lascia quasi spazio e respiro alla parola'. Maria Zambrano, *Dell'aurora* (Genova: Marietti 2000) 93.

else. The consequence is, that the human being is unable to practice authentic communication not only with other persons, but also with the “completely other.”

Yet, we do not have the perception of a real increase of the level of humanity in our relations; and I refer here to the encounter of our glances with one another that touches the depth of the person. Indeed glances of this type are incarnate in a feeling that generates and expresses what is specifically human: the spirit. Instead, the relation to the world around us – according to Trans- and Posthumanists - does not need necessary sentient bodies or sentient spirits; it uses only a sequence of neuronal bits, pure and aseptic, that do not allow getting involved⁴. Yes, because it is precisely in the real unitary conjunction between spirit and body through feeling that qualifies the human being as such: in this is its limit, its fragility, its greatness and

⁴According to many Posthumanists the human being needs to overcome him/herself in something superior and this is the machine, the artificial product of science and technology. A new concept of human – H+ - is the hybridization between man and machine. Some thinkers support new techniques in experimentation as mind uploading, anti-aging, cryogenics. In prosthetic experimentation, for example, the question about the non-sensitivity of some part of the body is very important. The reduction of the human being to his/her mind and reason alone has a dramatic consequence – or at least ethically important: to consider some human categories that are no longer such, something like embryos, fetuses, disabled people without the rational faculty, people in a vegetative state. Cfr.: Roberto Marchesini, *Il tramonto dell'uomo. La prospettiva post-umanista* (Bari: Dedalo, 2009); Giuseppe Vatinno, *Il Transumanesimo. Una Nuova Filosofia per L'uomo Del XXI Secolo*, Scientia (Roma: Armando Editore, 2010); Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

uniqueness in all creation. In addition, a first example is my person as author of this article: I can give only my personal perspective to this theme and my perspective is that of a young Italian woman, a philosopher, born in a particular family, with a specific education and values, existing here and now in a precise culture. All these factors are my richness and my limits. It is my presence in the world, in this world of the II Millennium, in Europe, in a cultural background, in a family, in a network of relationships – given and perhaps stolen relationships, wanted or suffered relationships, individual or collective one.

Among the many Philosophers of the last Century who let themselves be questioned by human tragedies and the consequent questions about the human being there are Max Scheler (1874-1928), Edith Stein (1881-1942) and Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977) – all three Phenomenologists –. They have experienced on their own skin – in their personal life as in their intellectual reflection - how limiting it is to look at man only from a perspective and what it achieves at the level of interpersonal relationships. Their philosophical interest was to re-give to men and women an identity in a metaphysical horizon, starting from a phenomenological analysis⁵ of him/her. This is a perspective

⁵These three Thinkers were all students of Husserl and new each other. Edith Stein was one of the most loyal pupil who developed the master's thought albeit with originality; particularly interesting for her was the human person in her individuality and in her communitarian dimension. Scheler was a very independent thinker, an intellectual genius who has taken seriously the reflection on the spiritual dimension of being human and developed the theory of values and the ethic question. Stein was very impressed from the origin-

that still seems to me to be current and to be developed for the actual reflection on person. They were not the only philosophers, who investigated the human being as a central theme, but we do not have here the necessary space to deal with the question of intersubjective relationship in all the thinkers, who have treated it.

2 To feel the other: a key for the encounter between persons

Max Scheler was one of the first philosophers in the twentieth Century, who began to write in a systematic way about a philosophical reflection on the human being as a philosophical Anthropology. For Scheler, what is typical of the human person is an original ecstatic disposition or the propensity toward the external world, which does not exclude perception or inside knowledge. In the social and

ality of him, but she did not agree in all with his understanding of empathy. Probably knew Stein all the works of Scheler and she understood him as one of the most important phenomenological Philosophers with Husserl and Heidegger. Particularly had the Analysis on the person and the philosophical Anthropology, which influenced Stein's research. Hildebrand was the director of the Munich circle of phenomenologists and were interested in ethical questions too, and in the aesthetic. He were a friend of Scheler for many years, but then he turned away, because he did not agree with some later ideas and theories of him. He met Stein perhaps by the funeral of Reinach and then by a conference, but later he asked her to translate John Henry Newman for his anthology in German. All three found trough the phenomenology a way to the Christian religion and were Christian thinkers, particularly Stein and Hildebrand.

emotional actions of various kind, one can know the other through *feelings*, conceived as an unusual function of the axiological perception (*Wertnehmung*) that accompanies, rather it precedes in the order of foundation, the ordinary perception (*Wahrnehmung*) as the basis of every form of taking a position towards the reality.

The givenness of the other and his/her experiences offers itself in a direct intuition; it does not require a cognitive description, and the base of this givenness comes from what Scheler defines as unipathy: a process of mutual affective fusion in which the two I's are constituted. The ways to feel with others, which somehow characterize all the living, is specified in the human being through human sympathy (*Mitgefühl*) and then, even more in love – the only source of real mutual knowledge among people. Only in the *ordo amoris*⁶ of a person is it possible to gather the fundamental nucleus: love is the original act through which one can be transcended in order to participate in the life of another human being. The human person realizes himself/herself only through and in the love toward others.

“Love is originally directed to objects endowed with value, and also to men, only as much and in the measure in which

⁶The concept of *ordo amoris* refers here to the Augustinian doctrine about an order of and in love. But Scheler will not only underline the divine order – as S. Augustine done – instead he will point a dynamic centre of our interior affective life. We can say that the schelerian *ordo amoris* is similar to the Pascal *ordre du Coeur*. The fundamental requirement is to reevaluate the affective dimension of the human being near the intellectual one, and to characterize a centre – the heart – of this affective life with proper laws and a form of ordering that not only depends from the ration.

they are carriers of values and as much as I am capable of an increase in values.”⁷ Thus, love recognizes the valuable dimension of the other person; it recognizes him/her as another individuality and focuses on their value for himself/herself and not for itself. To understand in itself is fundamentally and contemporarily an understanding oneself as the other: the primary degrees of feeling, therefore, – as for example feel-again and feel-with⁸ – allow us to understand the other, even if we do not know anything of him/her and we cannot know of it unless the other is freely given to me, or is in the disposition of opening in my comparison and reveals me, what expresses his/her spiritual dimension, that through the only living body is not readable. Interpersonal relationships are characterized by a going to the other and receiving its gift from him/her. Yet, also the relationship of deeper and complete love cannot reveal to us that intimate person which characterizes every living being, because this part remains to the other as to itself, in its transcendence, an absolute unknown.

Our way of relating to others is destined always to en-

⁷Max Scheler, *Wesen Und Formen Der Sympathie* (Bern: Franke, 1974) - non-authorial translation.

⁸Max Scheler, as other phenomenologists of his time, makes a profound and precise analysis of the feelings. In the book of Sympathy, he distinguishes four types of inter-emotional feelings: 1) Community of feeling (*Miteinanderfuehlen*); 2) Fellow-feeling (*Mitfuehlen, Mitgefuehl*); 3) Psychic contagion (*Psychische Ansteckung*); 4) Emotional Identification (*Einsfuehlung*). See here: Manfred Frings, *Max Scheler. Eine kurze Einfuehrung in die Welt eines grossen Denkers*. (Duchesne University Press: Pittsburgh, Pa 1965), p. 55-56. What I call *feel-again* (*Nachfuehlen*) and *feel-with* (*Mitfuehlen*) belongs to the category of fellow feelings.

counter an impassable limit that leaves the other in a zone of shade in which we are not able in some way to enter, but only to approach. Moreover, it is only by accepting this absolute relational limit, due to our transcendence and which we experience only in a relationship of authentic love, that we can truly realize ourselves in relation.

What appears crucial in the interpersonal space – beyond the impassable limit of the intimate person – is the relational bond linked to the actions of feeling: love always calls for a “counter-love”, or rather, being reciprocated. This means that the love of A for B reawakens that of B for A and thus A realizes a double value, that of his/her love and that of B. However, if B refuses the love of A, this would not only cause the missed fulfilment of the positive value of the love in itself, but it would be also responsible for the missed existence of a positive value in A. In a certain sense, we can speak of interpersonal relationships as mutual gift because there is a revealing of oneself to the other, which requires consent; and at the same time we can speak of annihilation, understood as co-responsibility in the non-realisation of determined positive values in the other, even in oneself.

“The mutual relationship of essential implication among love toward the other and the sanctification of self involves that one considers every love toward the other pure and authentic only in the measure in which the person who loves is sanctified; it will be pure and authentic, in turn, every sanctification of self only in the measure in which it is embodied in actions of

love for one's neighbour."⁹.

3 The human person – spiritual living body

But the actions of love for the neighbour again requires an incarnate body, and here begins for Edith Stein the experience of the world – both of the purely material things, and of other living beings – because of the affections, of the feelings, thoughts and decisions.

The incarnate human being, the psycho-physical being, has also a sensibility for values and creativity, demonstration – according to Edith Stein – of the spiritual sphere: “The human personality, taken as an all, presents itself to us as a unity of qualitative characteristics, formed by a nucleus, by a formative principle Soul, body and spirit constitute it, but individuality engraves entirely in a pure way, deprive of any mixture, only in the soul.”¹⁰. It follows that the soul, as a substantial unity that manifests itself in the physical experiences, has its foundation in the living body and with it forms the psychophysical individual. This individual is centred in its living body, as in a zero point of orientation beginning from which the world is perceptively given to him/her. As long as the individual remains

⁹Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, *GW Bd. 2* (Bouvier: Bonn 2000) 490 – non-authorial translation.

¹⁰Edith Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, vol. 6 (Herder Verlag, 2010) – non-authorial translation.

in his/her individuality (which also means in his/her zero point of orientation), it is not possible to have complete knowledge of him/herself and even less of the surrounding world.

It is the other – with his/her physical presence - that allows the human being to experience itself as such, as an embodied spirit: the insuppressible experience of the other, because someone is always present in my life - manifests one of my characteristics to me, namely that of being an open and related to someone/something. We are able to “establish a vital contact, initially founded upon a concrete exchange of vital energy that constitutes the nonverbal base from which the concrete knowledge begins to take place of the others, of his experiences, of his/her socio-economic-political and cultural context, without prejudices or mental cages.”¹¹. Through empathy I am able to put myself in the place of the other, in their zero point of orientation, and to see – to feel from their perspective, that which allows me to broaden my knowledge and thus to have a more profound experience of myself.“ When I inquire into its implied tendencies (try to bring another’s mood to clear givenness to myself), the content, having pulled me into it, is no longer really an object. I am now no longer turned to the content but to the object of it, I am at the subject of the content in the original subject’s place. And only after successfully executed clarification, does the content again face me as an object”¹².

¹¹Luigia Di Pinto, *Il respiro della filosofia in Edith Stein* (Bari: Laterza, 1999), 149 - non-authorial translation.

¹²Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein, 3rd ed., vol. 3, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein* (Washington

Through my emphatic move in other people's bodies, I also have an experience of the other as a sentient body and psychophysical individual. For example: if we see a man beat the fist on the table, we do not feel only the physical pain to the hand that can derive from it, but also the anger or the restlessness behind the gesture. Another example: if I see another person blush I am able to empathetically blush in their place and grasp their state of shame; at the same time I am able "to see" their shame in the external phenomenon of their blushing.

To put oneself in the place of the other is not only a possibility to know the other and to have a different point of perception of the world, but also the true possibility to know oneself as an "other". I do my experience of individuality only – so means Edith Stein – because this individuality emerges in front of the alterity of another person. If my Self remains always and only in itself, I would thus realize only a minimal part of myself, the part that comes from my zero point of orientation and the same would apply to the physical level.¹³

I am an intersubjectively comprehensible being, and this not only at the spiritual level: without the other I cannot entirely develop myself because it is in the measure in which the other gives me back to myself¹⁴, the part of my-

D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989) 10.

¹³See in: Edith Stein, *Ibid.*, 10f.

¹⁴This happens only through the body: our face, arms, and legs are the bridge to the external world and we cannot divide our way to approach the other with the spirit from the physical level. The encounter with the other is always physical and spiritual at the same time, because the body expresses, what we are thinking and feeling.

self which would remain obscure to me from my point of view, that I know myself and I am realized. At the same time when I put myself in the place of the other empathising their sensations, their desires, their fantasies, I grasp that potential me that is not yet developed and as such unable to show itself to me. In the span of life that is conceded to us, we are not able to experience all that a person could: it is others that we find such fulfilment.

Therefore, to go out of myself in order to enter in the other and to gather what they are living, which means to forget myself, somehow to lose my Self, it is a gain for myself, not only for the other. In fact, the moment I return to myself, I have a new experience that perhaps I had not yet done; for example, when I do a religious experience through another person and I did not know it before. Such an experience is mine: in the emphatic process there is no fusion with the other, rather the other's experience, though distinct, becomes also mine, but with another shade of colour. If I empathize the actual state of mind of my mother who has just received the news of being seriously ill, I remain another person, distinct from her, even if I move into her in order to understand her state of mind. Her pain does not become *ipso facto* mine: it gives itself to me, in fact, in a non-original¹⁵ way. Nevertheless, it touches me, it hurts me.

¹⁵Edith Stein distinguishes the feelings of oneself from the feelings of the other, that one can empathizes in order to the originarity or non-originarity of the same: the empathical feelings are always non-original for the person, which empathizes some state of the other; on the contrary the feelings by empathy are always original, because they are own feelings.

Certainly, the experience of the other is not always easy or pleasant, because the other one, through his/her experience, can reveal to me aspects of me that I do not like or of which I would prefer to remain unaware. Also the other one's wound can become mine and modify completely my life. "Exiting oneself without preserving oneself is also a consummation, if it is not a gift to God or in God, in whom the one who gives himself turns himself."¹⁶

This is of great importance within the discourse of the development of one's own personality, which according to Stein has a unique and specific form – given to us from God – that must be drawn out during the course of life through a process of self-formation. This process is at the same time a "with-formation" or formation together with the other, beginning from the other and for the other, therefore in a mutual process aimed at making us correspond evermore to the image of God in us.

According to Edith Stein each person forms itself during his/her entire life and this process needs others, so that all persons can influence my forming-process through their lives, but this is especially evident in the field of education.

"The spiritual nature of the human being – reason and freedom – demands spirituality in the educational act. Thus the common action of educator and learner must keep in mind the progressive growth of spirituality, in which the educating action of the educator gives more and

¹⁶Edith Stein, *La struttura della persona umana* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2000), 159 - non-authorial translation.

more space to the action of the learner, in order to bring him or her, in the end, to complete independence and self-education.”¹⁷

The interpersonal space between educator and learner is characterized by the empathetic relation, which means that each one has to be oneself and to feel the other, to meet the other, to feel as he/she feels, but without confusing one's own position with the other. The other needs to be known as he/she thinks, feels, believes, namely as a real different person, with his or her own identity.

We can immediately understand that the risk of subjugating or annihilating oneself or the other in this relation is considerable and the balance between giving and losing has to be found at every moment.

4 There is no I without a You

This invokes the personal and communitarian responsibility towards our being a person. According to von Hildebrand the human being is indeed the only living being that for some verses is characterized by a great autonomy in front of others, being at the same time dependent on others; so much so that only in the encounter and in the contact with others can one fully realize oneself and open up completely. “The biggest and most important part of personal experiences concerns other persons, like love, worship, care, hate. . . The features of man would be meaningless if there were no ‘you’ whom he could address and no ‘we’ to live

¹⁷Edith Stein, *Ibid.*, 50.

for. In addition to that, man's bodily and spiritual development would be impossible without any community."¹⁸.

In virtue of this own ability the person expresses himself/herself not by staying closed within his/her potentialities, on the contrary by opening himself/herself to the other and relating to others at different levels¹⁹. Among these, the level of the experience of the other is the most typically human, because something very amazing happens: in some way the human being abdicates his/her own *Eigenleben* (one's own life) to go out completely into the open and encounter the other. It is precisely in this ability to cross the threshold of one's own life that the person realizes itself. Not in holding one's own life for itself, not in egoistic thinking about itself, on the contrary, in delivering itself to the other. The concept of one's own life is a particular notion of Hildebrand: the ownness is here not in contrast to public, but it means all the things that belong to the very intimacy of a person, something, that makes this person happy. "When I step out of my subjectivity in loving my neighbour I am by no means abandoning my subjectivity, or losing interest in it, or dying to it."²⁰. If a man, in fact,

¹⁸Paola Premoli de Marchi, 'The Role of Relationality in the Actualization of the Person. A Reflection upon Dietrich von Hildebrand's Philosophical Anthropology', *Aletheia*, no. 7 (1995): 221–48.

¹⁹According to Paola Premoli de Marchi we can find four eminently personal relations in human beings: 1) man's relation to truth, in knowledge; 2) man's relation to the good, in his moral life; 3) man's relation to other human persons; 4) man's relation to the Absolute, in religious experience." See: Paola Premoli de Marchi, 'The Role of Relationality in the Actualization of the Person. Cit.: 221–48.

²⁰Dietrich Hildebrand von, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby and John Henry Crosby (South Bend, Indiana: St. Au-

did not possess his own life, he could not even deliver it in the sense of giving it to the other, to then receive it again from the other.

The interpersonal relationships are defined according to an interaction that happens among two I's who meet one another, and in this meeting a form of becoming aware one of the other and a coming into contact with this awareness takes place. If I put forth a question, if I call someone by name or I make a promise, the other one – appealed upon by me – answers somehow to my question, call or promise. When this happens, a “spiritual place” is created between us, a space that Hildebrand defines as an “interpersonal space”. Here three moments occur: 1) the contact – understood as a form of brushing one another physically and spiritually – 2) the meeting – a conscious looking upon one another – 3) the relationship – as awaringly intertwining and exchanging of lives. Because the human being is in contact with different you's, he/she will be the place of different and manifold interpersonal spaces, of which some weave together, others are one close to the other, without channels of mutual communication, and others slightly intersecting a place perhaps even only temporally in contact.

Now we can ask: I brush upon the other, I consciously look at him/her and I place myself in a relational attitude towards her/him, but he/she might not react to this; why should he/she answer me? What moves the other one to do so? It is the fact that the other one is not only an object of my attention, of my request or question, but he/she is also a subject of actions that move him/her to do something

gustine's Press, 2009) 210.

likewise toward me. My social actions always consider the other as subject and not as object, and this means that my way to approach another human being is fundamentally different from the way I interact with a natural landscape or with a dress that I want to buy.

Since the human being lives in many and different interpersonal spaces, we can imagine the person as a house, in which there are many rooms, each characterizing a specific relationship, as for instance that of the matrimonial relationship or that of friendship, that with colleagues from the workplace and so forth. Therefore, there are as many rooms as our relationships. Alongside the relationships we have thus far taken in consideration, which are prominently social, there are other forms of relationships that are created by feelings such as love and hate. When these are communicated to the other, they provoke in him/her a reaction that cannot simply be limited to just taking note of what was communicated and perhaps reacting to it. The other one must be touched by the content and consequently turn to me.

Let's take a simple example: when one falls in love with someone, one can even hold his own feelings in the secrecy of his heart, and the person of interest perhaps would not even notice anything; if, however, one decides to communicate his feelings of love to this person, it cannot be ignored, and he/she will have to somehow answer to this "revelation". If the other one responds to this declaration with similar feelings, life will be completely changed because the beloved person will enter in their life and take part of it in such a decisive and penetrative way, that

he/she will drastically modify it²¹. In the case in which the other one cannot correspond the same feelings, we remain alone with a disappointment, which will colour in turn the following relationships and actions. This means that certain affections sometimes modify our existence in a decisive way: others, in fact, can react differently to them and according to their reaction, a real change happens in us.

To let oneself be touched by others is a first manner of relating, which remains, however, unilateral in itself: the other touches me or rather, I let myself be touched by the other; the other, in turn, can be indifferent and not let himself/herself be touched by me. If, instead, it does happen, then a real reciprocity is created. It is the I-You contact, what Hildebrand calls the *urmodus* of the human person, that is to say its original way of being, alongside which the way of “We” develops that defines all the relational moments in which we – for instance – make a particular experience together with others, or we find ourselves in a situation that interests more people and we look together at the same object. “As soon as a man experiences true, real love, the blissful adventure that every love is, we find that he breaks through the network of self-centeredness, that he is widened, that he pierces through his own petti-

²¹In *The Erotic Phenomenon* Jean-Luc Marion says that we are ‘all our loves’ meaning that every relationship of love changes our life, even when it fails because the person dies or goes away. Therefore, we are “other persons” after each relationship in a way as we receive an indelible mark. See: Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Books, 2006).

ness. Indeed, it is in loving alone that one can truly live.”²²

In whatever form our relationships realize themselves, through such relationships we always enter the world of values of the other and this because the human person by itself is constituted in such way that he/she can know and recognize values. Therefore, a new community will always spring up among two or more people, who meet and enter in a relationship of reciprocity, and this community is a community of shared values. When it is the love that directs me towards the other I affirm him/her in his/her being and their being as they are, and I unite myself to him/her, because according to Hildebrand all the forms of love are characterized by an *intentio unionis*, a deep desire of union with the other.

Such uniting intention, that drives all the relationships of love, is destined to lose itself in the moment in which the reciprocate and reciprocating answer of two people produces union, it produces a space in which each of the lovers gives themselves to the other losing themselves in each other – we can say in a certain way annihilating himself/herself – to receive oneself again from the other one. Therefore, it is a gift to give oneself, to put oneself in the hands of the other, and it is a gift to receive because in receiving is inherent the gift of something that is moved for the other. It is understandable how relating oneself to the other is never lacking of risks, because there is no guarantee that the other one put himself/herself in the same dynamic as myself and welcome my gift, so something of me could ir-

²²Dietrich Hildebrand von, *Man and Woman. Love and the Meaning of Intimacy* (Sophia Institute Press, 1992) 17.

reparably be lost.

5 Conclusive remarks

Scheler, Stein and Hildebrand show that the human being is structurally, ontologically, a relational being. In fact, only the glance of others, which we grant entry into ourselves, completes us by dilating our personality; it is only in the movement of going out of oneself in the selfless gift of self that one has a true and complete experience of self, of true humanity.

The condition for this is a personal encounter, it is a relationship that doesn't stop at contact - today often characterized as virtual contact -, but which moves all the dimensions of the human person towards encounter with the other and risks letting himself/herself be touched in depth. Therefore, it is not possible to have an interpersonal space in the virtual world, because there is a lack of the physical dimension of the encounter, particularly communicated by the glance as well as by the word in the fullness of sense. The cybernetic space widens the possibility of contact, but it loses depth, we could say that it increases in extension and quantity of connections, but it loses in depth and quality. Dietrich von Hildebrand has, in this regard, a beautiful expression *Ineinanderblick der Liebe* - something like love's mutual glance - that points to the entering into one another of the glances among people who are in a relationship of love. However, I think this expression applies to every relationship that does not want to stop at the threshold of the other.

In addition, Stein underlines the human spiritual dimension as an expression of the eye that makes itself like a bridge between inside and outside: through the eye and therefore looking, the human being brings the external world inside of itself and goes out his/her own inner self giving it to the world. The communication of the interpersonal space becomes, then, a perichoretical²³ dynamic among poles that are not contrasted, but rather are themselves losing themselves in the other that welcomes them and makes be what they are. Really, when someone – a You – meets me, calls me, demands of me, and I answer to him/her opening myself and getting involved with him/her, by accepting and questioning: what happens? The You-Subject becomes a You-Object and this encounter makes you a you, gives you the possibility to unfold itself. Only in relationship, I become a You, because alone I remain an I; as my mother is a mother because of me and I am a daughter because of my mother, we can generally be a “you” because of an “I”. At the same time that you receive meaning from me, I make the experience of myself as an I: I realize that I am constituted as an I in front of you, so I can unfold myself too. I cannot be what you are and you cannot be what I am; we can both be ourselves only

²³ *Perichoresis* is a theological expression used to describe the mutual relation between the three Persons of the Trinity. By using it, I refer particularly to Klaus Hemmerle – a Philosopher and Theologian at the school of Bernhard Welte. See: Klaus Hemmerle, ‘Wahrheit und Liebe - ein perichoretisches Verhältnis’, ed. Jaskòly, Piotra, *Veritati et caritati. W s?u?bie teologii i pojednania. Prace dedykowane Ksi?dzu Biskupowi Alfonsowi Nossolowi z okazji sze??dziesi?tej rocznicy urodzin i pi?tnastolecia ?wi?ce? biskupich*, 1992, 106–18.

in the encounter and in answering to one another²⁴. The community cannot arise if everyone wait that something happens; only through the initial, spontaneous and not calculate act of each person is communion possible. One must goes beyond the other, to the encounter with him, without reservations and expectations. This asks for an opening of oneself, an emptying, in order to make place for the other. When his/her becomes mine, when my staying in front of the other one is to the meantime being the one in the other, each one of us takes part to the life of the other, to his/her word and the relationship becomes mutual. In this reciprocity of giving and receiving lives, the community founded upon the love.

Therefore, the interpersonal relationship, also in the dynamic tension between gift and annihilation, is not destined to fail, if both the poles maintain themselves in their identity without making this identity an absolute.

“If love is Self-gift, then is love always and above all a renouncement of the own for the other one. If I want to give myself to the other, or if I want to do a present of me, I must love myself because I cannot at the same time remain by myself and to go out beyond the other. This lost by loving is a gain too, when the other also gives him/herself to me. The reciprocate gift of oneself from the lovers is a reciprocal confirming about being valuable of one another.”²⁵

²⁴Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Gesammelte Schriften I/1. Person* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2006).

²⁵Valentina Gaudiano, *Die Liebesphilosophie Dietrich*

The gift of self to the other is a free offering of oneself to the other, without imposing. The annihilation of oneself is in turn not negation and renouncement of self, but positive and active assent to the reality of the other, it is awareness, or rather renouncement to the pretension to be the absolute self.

Certainly, the tension and the risk of falling in one or other pole as crystallized extremes remains and it challenges ever again to the courage of authentic relationships. Love is in a certain sense always a gamble, but three categories, which today have almost disappeared in common language, can perhaps give support and make interpersonal space something meaningful and essential for the human being: *courage*, *fidelity* and *responsibility*. Only the courage to put oneself completely out there with the other and faithfulness to oneself, as well as to the other, recognized and welcomed in his/her alterity, can create an interpersonal space or a community of liberty and fulfilment that makes us authentic men and women in reciprocal responsibility for one another. Responsibility for oneself is at the same time responsibility for the other and vice versa. “To love is assumption of responsibility toward oneself and the others and it places weather in me nor in you, but in the ‘among-us’, that escapes to every possible definitive, last, definable and individual capture.”²⁶ The expression of in-

von Hildebrands. *Ansätze für eine Ontologie der Liebe* (Freiburg/München: Alber Thesen 2013) 305, Selftranslation.

²⁶Antonio De Luca, “La responsabilità più grande”, in: (Hg) Daniela Verducci, *Vie della fenomenologia nella post-modernità. Confronto con la fenomenologia della vita di Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka*, Percorsi di Etica 6 (Roma: Aracne 2014) 456.

terpersonal space can then become authentic dialogue, in which word and silence, you and me, are both necessary and both only existent through the other.