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# « Continuous film, sculpture and mime: a triple heuristic to think the singularity and continuity of a human being »

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### Abstract

In this paper, the question is this one: how do we describe a human being? It starts from the assumption that no discipline is really concerned with this question and that it is up to existential anthropology to deal with it. On the one hand, the paper calls for a method: the continuous film focused on an individual, and the most accurate description of this continuity. On the other hand, it reinforces its epistemological choice from the technique of sculpture in the round used by Rodin for *The Age of Bronze*. This sculpture, disconnected from the architectural space and from any context, is produced with a precise methodology that invites anyone to walk around the statue. The paper then refers to Decroux's words on mime, establishing a link between the still images of the film (as a support for the description) and the mimes. The movement is thought as a transport of immobility and analysed in its capacity to be restrained rather than to dissolved or to flow.

### Résumé

Dans cet article, les auteurs se demandent comment décrire un être humain. Ils partent de l'hypothèse qu'aucune discipline n'est réellement concernée par cette question et qu'il reviendrait à l'anthropologie existentielle de la traiter. D'une part, l'article préconise une méthode : le film continu centré sur un individu et la description la plus précise possible de cette continuité. D'autre part, il conforte son choix épistémologique à partir de la technique de la sculpture en ronde-bosse utilisée par Rodin pour *L'âge d'airain*. Cette sculpture, déconnectée de l'espace architectural et de tout contexte, est produite avec une méthodologie précise qui invite tout un chacun à tourner autour de la statue. L'article se réfère ensuite aux propos de Decroux sur le mime, établissant un lien entre les images fixes du film (support de la description) et les mimes. Le mouvement est pensé comme un transport d'immobilité et analysé dans sa capacité à être retenu plutôt qu'à se dissoudre ou à s'écouler.

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so? (James 1986, 37).

Trinh T. Minh-Ha quotes this sentence by Barbara San Severina as the heading to a chapter: 'Faculty once asked me 'why are you in Anthropology?', I replied, 'because it's so much easier to love all of Mankind than one solitary man?' (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 47). It is possible to interpret this sentence in various ways. In any case, if we want to understand 'all of Mankind?', it's good to be in anthropology. But if we want to look at 'one solitary man?', anthropology is not necessarily the best place. It should be.

We have an epistemological, theoretical and methodological question - how to describe a person? - and its corollary - which scientific discipline is concerned with this objective <sup>(1)</sup>?

It is easy to answer that there is no discipline that works on the scale of the person: psychologies are

concerned with a part of the person, neurosciences or cognitive sciences are in the same position on an even more focused scale, sociologies are concerned with the grouping of individuals or with the relationships between them. It could have been anthropology, but its history is that of a social and cultural anthropology. There are certainly many portraits in anthropology. Some have become classics, for example Catarina (Biehl, 2013) or Tuhami (Crapanzano, 1985). There are many others. But, despite occasional descriptions here and there, such ethnographies do not remain focused on the person in question. The anthropologists have other objectives: they want to understand the medical-social system in Brazil or a part of Moroccan culture, they seek to find their place in a relationship with the individual they have chosen, describing themselves sometimes more than the latter (Heiss, 2015, pp. 241-250). We thus take seriously Virginia Woolf's remark that 'it is so difficult to describe any human being' and that biographies 'leave out the person to whom things happened' (Woolf, 1985, p. 65). This difficulty reaches also social anthropology which focuses on social relations. We think that existential anthropology should be describing people. Yet Michael Jackson himself insists on an existential anthropology 'whose object is to understand [...] the eventualities, exigencies and experiences of social Being' (Jackson, 2005, p. XXVIII). Social relations or the social being, it's not the entire and complete person who is targeted, as Michael Jackson says, but the 'event' - what happens (ibid.: p. XI).

We believe that the description of individuals presupposes a rigorous methodology: the continuous film. In such a perspective, existential anthropology, focused on an existent, is necessarily visual. This article aims to give an account of such a filmic experience. It has the value of a test or experiment, since it is one of us (AP, so designated in the following lines) who was filmed by the other (CB) - a bit like Freud himself had tested his theoretical objectives on his own dreams. 'Thus it comes, he writes, about that I am bed to my own dreams, which offer a copious and convenient material, derived from an approximately normal person and relating to multifarious occasions of daily life. No doubt I shall be met by doubts of the trustworthiness of 'self-analyses' of this kind; and I shall be told that they leave the door open to arbitrary conclusions. In my judgement the situation is in fact more favourable in the case of self-observation than in that of other people, at all events we may make the experiment and see how far self-analysis takes us with the interpretation of dreams' (Freud, 2010, p. 130).

It is not just the film. It is the medium of an equally rigorous writing focused on the being thus filmed. Made from still images, this writing will force us to move from the verb to the noun, if we want to maintain the objective of describing a person. We will then find a new legitimacy and a double support: in the sculpture and in the mime, the stake being to keep this focus on the being, with the least possible slippage towards what is around.

The ultimate objective of this article is to set out epistemological principles, which have been refined after the filmic experimentation, without going into the analysis of the chosen example.

## Continuous film and description

We called this film 'Really twelve hours'. It consists of a working document. It was made on 19 January 2016, starting at 6.38 a.m. at AP's home. It ended, in the same place, after a day spent in the Parisian RER, in the corridors of the University of Nanterre and several hours of teaching. In such a continuous film, the images in sequence shots show a focus on a person - we call it 'volume of being' (Piette 2017 and 2023b). Of course, an ideal 'volumography' would have to continuously film existence from the first second to the last. 'To give a description of the developing human being starting at conception, gradually working through intra-uterine life' (Winnicott, 1988, p. 33). We would be satisfied with a continuous anthropology from birth onwards...

What were the preconditions for this experimentation? The protocol for this film started with conversations between AP and CB about the value of a strict focus on a human being. CB then contacted Samuel Dématraz, a Swiss videographer, in order to be accompanied in the making of the film and not to lose any moment. There is only one principle: the continuity of the moments and not to lose anything of the seconds that pass. A date has been set for 19 January. On that day, AP will give a five-hour teaching about 'observing and describing' to a group of students in the Master 1 anthropology department at Nanterre. In an email to AP, CB summarised the objective of the experiment:

*?It is a question of being at the service of your project, even if it interests me on many levels. We must think about the way to record quite precisely - the passage from one place to another, the retrieval of the image immediately by another camera so that the thread is absolutely continuous. Such a film is not a montage, but just an end to end. Filming a continuity forces an anticipation : it is necessary to produce the continuity of reality?.*

*Another document drawn up by Catherine and Samuel, which summarises her exchanges with Samuel, specifies the filmic devices. The challenge is to obtain ?a continuous, uninterrupted face and body in medium shot, never losing face and hands in the rhythm of activities?. The idea of ?a helmet in selfie mode with a GoPro - which is the simplest formula - is ruled out. The image produced would be quite ridiculous and without nuance, since the face is distorted by the optics, with the selfie equipment necessarily visible. With the GoPro hidden in the filmers' bags, there is a framing problem : it is always a wide shot.*

*On the evening of 18 January, we clarify a few points. Samuel repeats that AP must act as if the filmers were not there : ?Play at not being filmed?. So AP cannot offer a coffee or a biscuit to the filmers. When it comes to peeing or going to the bathroom, the door is closed and the filmers are waiting. We also know that journeys by RER are not without possible problems. AP also hears the connivance between Catherine and Samuel for their camera relays.*

*After the film, we meet again the next day. Various points emerge. It was pointed out by CB that it was impossible to have a single 12-hour file online. How can we cut it up ? Truncation by activity does not seem relevant, as it risks reproducing analyses that are classically focused on these activities. What is at stake is the existence that continues. AP prefers 12 X 1 hour or 6 X 2 hours<sup>(2)</sup>. We agree above all on a working time at Samuel's place in Sierre to adjust the relays between CB and Samuel, or to make one or the other choice when they have filmed each other simultaneously, for example, during the teaching. Samuel splices everything that has been filmed, then cuts it into twelve parts for posting and analysis.*

In the film, the interactions and the place of others are indeed shown at a minimum, the focus being as constant as possible on AP. There is no wide shot, no overhanging camera. As it was important not to widen the shot, the interlocutors AP meets are sometimes not made visible. On the other hand, AP is always visible, most often from the front, without interruption, acting, without the viewer seeing what AP is seeing - which would imply, from a GoPro for example, in addition to the problem just mentioned, adding a counter-field and undoubtedly complicating the intended focus on the individual concerned.

Andrei Tarkovsky can enlighten us, including on the specificity of our experimentation: « This is how I conceive an ideal piece of filming: the author takes millions of metres of film, on which systematically, second by second, day by day and year by year, a man's life, for instance, from birth to death, is followed and recorded ». Tarkovsky even indicates that « even though it would not be possible to have those millions of metres, the ?ideal? conditions of work are not as unreal as all that, and they should be what we aspire to ». But why should we, as he immediately suggests, retain only « two and a half thousand metres, or an hour and a half of screen time » and say « how different they would all be » if the resulting films were made by different directors? And he adds: « Nor do I think that it's necessary to follow one particular person. On the screen the logic of a person's behaviour can transfer into the rationale of quite different?apparently irrelevant?facts and phenomena, and the person you started with can vanish from the screen, replaced by something quite different, if that is what is required by the author's guiding principle. For instance it is possible to make a film in which there is no one hero character figuring throughout the film, but where everything is defined by the particular foreshortening effect of one person's view of life. » (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 65). When Arnd Schneider (2021, pp. 5-11) comments on Tarkovsky, it is not this question of the human entity that he is considering. This is undoubtedly one of the challenges facing visual anthropology, which in our view lacks a theory of existence if it is to be able to look at human beings in their continuity and singularity<sup>(3)</sup>.

However, let's note the Tarkovsky's theoretical rejection of editing as a determining factor. He did not want to think that the film would be created « on an editing table » (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 114). On the contrary, he notes, « The cinema image comes into being during shooting, and exists within the frame » (ibid.: p. 114). Schneider takes up this idea by asking how to respond to this « provocation » (Schneider, 2021, p. 5) in the ethnographic field in the practice of filmmaking: « How, he writes, can this hallucinatory, dream-like power of the image be transported into an expanded visual anthropology, and anthropology at large? For this, the subjective act of perception must be translated so that it can achieve for the viewer the status of an observation. » (ibid. p. 10). « This is the reason, he continues, why a more direct and radical engagement with the arts and moving image practice is necessary, both for visual anthropology and anthropology in general. » (ibid., p. 2).

In our work, as we have just said, continuity without editing is essential, the continuity of an uninterrupted series of images in which the time experienced during the filming is the same as that which is imposed on any viewer of the film, in which the seconds of a person's gestures and facial expressions stand out thanks to this rigour. Could some attempts of experimental cinema provide support in our work? This is the case for the human entity and less for the continuity. The answer to the question of editing is ambiguous. Indeed, we can see that the continuity of a shot centred on the same individual, with no unity of location and no knowledge of what is going to happen, is not exactly the same as the filming methods used in experimental cinema. Let's give three examples to briefly sketch out how, despite their essential differences, they provide possible tools for analysing both the shooting process and the images themselves. Our first example, Jonas Mekas's film *Walden* (1964), lasts three hours. It was conceived and produced with total discontinuity in order to create a sense of continuity. In a recent DVD devoted to the film, Mekas sums up his working method: taking notes every day with a camera and creating a filmed diary, putting together the small fragments of his life (Mekas, 2012). Andy Warhol's 'anti-films', a second example, are long still shots made to give viewers the experience of several hours' continuity with the subject being filmed. *Sleep* (1963) was intended to recreate eight hours of sleep by the poet John Giorno. In fact, it is a montage of still shots from different angles, with repetitions, the duration of which depends on the speed of projection - five hours and twenty minutes at 16 frames per second. *Empire* (1964) is a six-and-a-half-hour still shot of the *Empire Building*, from sunset to pitch black - projected in slow motion, it lasts eight hours and five minutes. In both cases, the camera records immobility and it is the unity of place that creates the continuity of the shot. The title given to our film, 'R ellement, douze heures', is a clear indication of what we are looking for: real continuity in time independent of unity of place.

*Following Piece* (1969) was one of the first urban performances by Vito Acconci, our third example. It lasted twenty-three days. The rule was as follows: follow a person at random walking down the street until they enter a private space. Acconci's place is that of the author of the protocol and its experimenter, then its annotator. In this sense, he takes his protocol and himself as the object/subject of study. « I'm using, he says, my own person in pieces, but I'm trying to turn my person into a nonperson in the sense of a person without will, without volition. I'm subjecting myself to a scheme. And I thought, if I'm going to go on using my own person in pieces, maybe I have to concentrate more on person. Rather than attend to a world considered as if it's out there, I have to start to attend to me » (Jackson, 2006/2007). There is a certain similarity with our method. The big difference lies in the way the recording is made, in the trace of the experience. The four photographs in which Acconci follows a person are a reconstruction of the process. They accompany the systematic device he then developed, a follow up to following piece, in order to inscribe the performance in the field of art - we are not in this configuration (see also Beaugrand, 2017; Torterat, 2023). Learning from experimental film and performance does not mean that the images in our film belong to the language of art. They are the result of a dialogue between two disciplinary fields that do not instrumentalise each other.

What are the points we can highlight from our experiment?

Unquestionably, the continuous focus on one volume of being in successive situations, from moment to moment, has a strong effect in our research: it takes the individual out of his context, or more precisely out of his contexts. Here it is not a particular activity that is targeted. Such following of an individual is what we call a 'volumographic reduction' or an 'existential reduction'. It is in fact as if the continuous gaze helps to de-situate a volume of being, that remains in the foreground, as the central figure, the one to be looked at, extracted from the successive contexts through which it passes. With the close-up and medium shot in this case on AP, as different backgrounds pass by, the volume of being seems more in time than it is in the world. If, for example, one camera had been placed at one place in particular, another camera at another place, etc, the focus on AP would still have been possible, but probably at some distance. This would have reintroduced the issue of context and situations, aiming to capture what is happening *in this or that place*<sup>(4)</sup>.

Such a film can therefore be presented as a record of the continuity of a volume of being. This is the basic scale that remains the same from film to analysis, without slipping into other objectives. Is it a documentary? But about what? We would say: on continuity, on being, or on a method, and thus on anthropology or a form of anti-anthropology - since anthropology consistently claims a valuation of others and contexts. In no case can the film be seen as the story of one of AP's days. It is certainly not a montage that aims to narrate, to keep the salient or the important. There is no narrative as such, and the viewer does not feel any particular empathy, as might be the case if the film were presented as telling the day of an individual carrying out various activities and if the title specified such a theme, which would then be transformed into a 'story'.

The filmic following of twelve consecutive hours generated over 130 pages of description, and a reiteration of this in supplements on social habitus, personal style, details of modes of presence (Piette, 2017). The filmic continuity then becomes a descriptive continuity, without losing the slightest moment, and without passing, as in narratives, from one situation to another distant from the first. It is the filmic continuity that allows a textual continuity, which a note-taking of discontinuous situations would not allow. In this sense, starting from a continuous close-up, such work constitutes a methodological break that avoids the casual and impressionistic descriptions which contributes to the loss of the person. We consider that only note-taking without such films, as well as the writing that follows, contributes to the dilution of the human being and the return of the contextual background. In its most common expressions, ethnography in fact reveals that it is not the human entity that is its relevant focus.

In our work, it is thus possible to speak of a true radical empiricism, we will say literal. We want to emphasise this issue of literalness. The word 'literal' designates a type of interpretation which conforms to the letter, the word for word of the text. How can this be relevant to epistemological, theoretical or methodological debates? Just as literality concerns the letter, the word for word of the text, the 'anthropologicality' of a description would reside in the fact that it says what the human being does to the letter, moment by moment. Apart from any narrative effect, the value of the text lies in what is written, and nothing more, about the human being, the basic 'letter', continuing from situation to situation. 'He does this, he says that, then this, then that, in such and such a way': it is the scale - focused continuously on a human being - of what each observer is not really used to seeing or describing, while limiting himself to specific moments, chosen according to the theme of study.

In the description, the situation-context is therefore also secondarised. Let us say that it is minimal information mainly about time and place where the volume of being is located. What belongs to the background is like blurred. It may simply be mentioned in the logical follow-up of the description, for example an element of its immediate environment that solicits it or that it solicits. This is true of the objects he handles, but also of the different persons he talks to moment by moment. There are no descriptions of these other people, sometimes an indication of what they say to AP at most, to ensure a minimally legible description. This creates a radical inequality of treatment between the chosen entity and the others, humans, institutions, barely present in the description and analyses, which is not the case in anthropological portraits, as we have indicated (Piette, 2019, pp. 115-123), for which the others, the institutions and the culture remain very present, as significant interactants and relational issues. Of course, many contextual elements are 'carried' by the individual himself. He shows them, through his words or actions. It is also worth noting that, by focusing on an entity in this way, the anthropologist can also look at the other elements of the volume of being, not directly and strictly concerned with the situation in question, to understand the structuring of what constitutes it <sup>(5)</sup>.

As announced, there is a second level of description which aims to move from the flat text of the description, which most often remains on the surface of the volume of being (with its gestures, actions and words), to a redescription which gradually allows other components to be specified, for example states of mind, emotions, moods, thoughts. It thus indicates varying intensities, as well as a personal style, a well-established mode of existence, which runs through the acts and moments of the day. All these elements could be added at the same time as the first level description, for each moment, in the succession of situations.

In a systematic way, complementary to such careful observations, explicitation interviews are essential. They have nothing to do with classical interviews. The aim is to access states of mind that were implicit, to have a person verbalise forgotten thoughts or feelings, including those that may have nothing to do with the issue in the situation. 'Even now, writes Pierre Vermersch, I am still greatly fascinated by the practice of the explicitation interview: questioning a person who begins with the affirmation that she does not know how she did what she did or what happened (subjectively non-conscious to her), and to gradually hear her describe her actions, with precision, as the interview unfolds, while discovering simultaneously (she and I) the detail of her lived experience. This is exactly what we are looking to do with the explicitation interview: the verbalization of the lived experience of action will occur during an awareness that is provoked by the elements of which the subject does not yet know that he knows them and even believes that he does not know them!' (Vermersch, 2018, p. 54; see also Vermersch, 1999; Petitmengin and Bitbol, 2009). In these interviews, which anthropologists must try to adapt if they want to work over a long period of time, they may find different issues. It seems important, in the objective of precise descriptions of singular moments in their succession and in their synchronic thickness, not to forget that what is said must correspond as much as possible to what was really experienced. It is also possible that the person is confronted with the film. Then, from a gesture or a look, one can indeed make implicit statements explicit, but also the emotions of an action, the intensity of feelings, the degree of sharpness of an intention, with the aim of describing how an individual was at this moment. The difficulty

of making precise descriptions of experiences over long periods of time should not exclude the possibility of doing so. The result is of course always imperfect and also needs to be completed. And this can also be done, in trust of course with the researcher, but without the empathic dimension such as it is often valued in the ethnographic relationship (Petitmengin, 2006). One of the regrets of the present work is that AP was not exposed to explicitation interviews (e.g. the next day). He noted down, for example in the RER, what he very quickly remembered from his breakfast experiences. The demand for precision is always to be increased. We thus recognise that this film was an experimental film, the decision and realisation of which was not in itself an easy task. The analysis should be further developed. In any case, it is important that anthropologists interested in this type of work, focused on another human being than themselves, think about carrying out this stage of the explicitation.

To observe continuously is also to observe the presence of some constancy. Who is this human who sometimes has this experience, sometimes another experience, who performs this action and then another action? Thus to consider a volume of being as the continuous reference point of observation, in the follow-up of its continuous movement, reveals gradual variations, but also identical elements, some of which are actualised, others remaining dormant, as situations and moments change. Self-observation thus has the advantage of allowing a mental back-and-forth with other, sometimes old, situations that AP can remember, which makes possible to identify stylistic constancies. The constancy in a volume of being can be spotted from a set of rather stabilised traits (gestural forms, mimics, ways of smiling or looking, but also elements of character and temperament) which cross actions, emotions, roles according to the moments. This is what we have called 'style' (see Piette, 2017, 2023b, for more details).

It is possible to think that some stylistic elements, repeated in various daily experiences, are independent of social influence and that they are not marks of a social class. They produce recognisable forms, even if, within each of these, random variations arise *hic et nunc*. 'It's all you?', some people will say, recognising in these gestures or these traits of character, a singular mark, the identity of a form or a movement. It is possible to practice a comparative look from a series of still images. In any case, the requirement for not significant details, for feelings but also for stylistic expressions is a challenge.

## The heuristics of the sculpture in the round

Our epistemological principles could stop here. This would be to miss what, alongside the filmic document, confirmed our approach, giving it a new force, which we would not necessarily have thought of. To establish this focus on one entity, this contribution came from sculpture, and particularly from Rodin's *The Age of Bronze*. This artwork was a decisive support for our work, which we have both extended after the film. Our question is this one: how such a sculpture is heuristic for the anthropologist when he wants to grasp the continuity and singularity of a being?<sup>(6)</sup>

*The Age of Bronze* is a statue that Rodin made in 1877. If we look at the movement of the arm raised towards the head, we see that it reveals the armpit, which is presented from the front, and makes the edge of the shoulder blade, which belongs to the back, stand out. This is not insignificant because it is an unveiling of what belongs to the back and not to the face, as if it were an invitation to follow its line. It is an almost unbelievable incitement to go around this body. The hand placed on the head gives the measure of the human being represented. This one holds between the top of the head and the tip of the foot<sup>(7)</sup>.

According to Simmel, sculpture 'bears a more intrinsic character of loneliness than painting. A sculpture lives in a world and ideal space whose limits are no greater and no different than the limits of its bodily being. Beyond those limits, no world exists with which it might have rapport' (Simmel 2020, p. 284). But this does not apply to all sculptures in the round. In fact, there are at least two configurations. Each time, the sculpture is separate, but with a significant difference for our purpose. Either it is thought in relation to its surroundings, and in the space where it is placed. Hegel wrote that 'a sculpture does nevertheless remain essentially connected with its surroundings. Neither a statue nor a group, still less a relief, can be fashioned without considering the place where the work of art is to be put. A sculptor should not first complete his work and only afterwards look around to see whether it is to be taken: on the contrary, his very conception of the work must be connected with specific external surroundings and their spatial form and their locality. For this reason sculpture retains a permanent relation with spaces formed architecturally' (Hegel, 1975, p. 702). This is the case with Michelangelo's *The Dying Slave* (1513) - from which Rodin drew inspiration. But this sculpture does not continue the movement backwards, because it was designed to be seen mainly from the front and placed in an architectural space. 'Up to the nineteenth century, Günther Anders pointed out, the sculptor isolated only in order to integrate. He was

always architect's second officer? (Anders, 1944, p. 295). Isn't this typically what the anthropologist does, when he links the human being to a space, a situation, a context? Sculpture was supposed to occupy 'a definite place within the whole of an architecture; thus within the whole of a society' (ibid., 295). Separated, the sculpture in the round is indeed 'a massive three-dimensional object' but it remains 'among other objects' (ibid.: 294). It is, in this case, as if the 'enclosure' could not be realized around the sculptural object itself, but also included what surrounds it, the background elements.

Here we find again *The Age of Bronze* with its radical configuration accentuating the effect of the sculpture's emergence from what surrounds it. Commenting on this specificity, Rilke notes that the sculpted object can exist on its own: 'a sculpture did not require a wall. It didn't even require a roof' (Rilke, 2011, p. 19). The enclosure, the one that could designate within it an object of research, is then made around the sculpture itself. This is indeed what Rodin achieved: freeing the sculpture from the space, the architecture or the context of its installation. In a very explicit way, he becomes 'the isolating artist' (Anders, 1944, p. 294).

We could then define the sculptural being in its radicality of being separate but also extracted from what surrounds it. It is important to add another point, a corollary of the previous one: *The Age of Bronze* is a sculpture in the round not only separate and extracted from its surroundings, but also designed in this way so that we turn around it. As Rilke himself writes, 'it was good to provide it with the essence of a thing, which one could walk around and view from all sides' (Rilke, 2011, p. 19). It can thus be viewed from any angle, unlike the front sculpture, which is only finished on its front and sides, and cannot be seen from the back.

This is a methodological level. Turning around the sculpture implies that it has an outline and its own enclosure, that it is not attached to something. It is the entity to be looked at from all sides, without including what is around, with or beside it. How does Rodin proceed? 'In sculpture, he says, the beautiful execution is the profile; it is the volume' (in Dujardin 1992, p. 32). In a way, the profile is what separates the fullness from the emptiness or from a distant background. It is indeed with the method of the profiles that Rodin really specifies his work. The enclosure of the sculpture and the fact that one can go around it as well as any human being are associated with the method of profiles. This is what he himself says: 'When I start a figure, I first look at the face, the back, the two profiles on the right and the left, that is to say, its profiles in the four angles; then, with the clay, I put in place the large mass as I see it and as exactly as possible. I then make the intermediaries, which gives the profiles seen from three quarters; then successively turning my earth and my model, I compare them with each other and refine them.' And Rodin continues: 'In a human body, the profile is given by the place where the body ends; it is therefore the body that makes the profile. I place the model in such a way that the light, cutting through a background, illuminates this profile. I execute it, I turn my saddle and that of my model, I see another one, I turn again, and am thus gradually led to go around the body.' (ibid.: pp. 22-23). From a requirement for completeness, faced with the enclosed wholeness of an entity, we have a focus at scale 1, without perspective including other things. We find the focus of our film.

In opposition to the sculpture in the round, the reliefs are instructive in this respect. They could constitute a third configuration. While the sculpture in the round may imply the enclosure of itself, the relief is its negation, since the figures represented are attached to a background that is intrinsic to them. Relief is in fact a sculpture in which the entity represented is more or less connected, engaged, dependent on a background. It is said 'high-relief' when the volumes are more than half protruding. It is said 'bas-relief' when the volumes remain more than half engaged in the background. It is interesting to note that the relief does not have to worry about statics since the figures are engaged, i.e. held by the background - they therefore do not need to have a relationship with the ground, no point of balance. Movements are free from support. The sculptures in the round must, on the contrary, stand on their own. We could say that anthropology is an expression of the human in 'high-relief' and 'bas-relief'. Relief: the expression is not so well chosen, since it would imply that the human being is in relief. In fact, it is the opposite, since it is associated with other elements, anchored in situations and contexts.

The experimentation of *The Age of Bronze* and Rodin's discourse indicate that this separation from contexts and situations is an issue and an objective for him. It can also become an issue and a methodological objective in anthropology. The basic principle is indeed separation, with the boundary that allows it: 'Given that there are some things that are separate and some that are not separate, it is the latter that are substances' wrote Aristotle (2004: 365/1070b) specifying the limit with these words: 'the extreme point of a particular, the first point outside which no part of the thing can be found and inside which all parts of the thing can be found' (2004, p. 139/1022a). In this case, it is the entity in itself, as separated, that is first, and not any of its components, for example subjectivity or consciousness. We

consider that this sculpture in the round, conceived by Rodin, invites us to think and to give as much 'in-itself' as possible to what is the starting point of anthropology and to 'look' at it: the human being, let us say the human entity, a human entity. There is nothing hidden or inaccessible about a thing-in-itself: it is what appears in its entirety, with its contours that make it possible to go around. We mean: to look at it as thoroughly as possible, decipher its 'surface' and its 'interior', to describe, understand or explain it from within itself and not from outside entities. This is the challenge of the descriptions to stick as closely as possible to such wholeness and its singularity.

In this regard, the unity of the sculpture in the round is not without heuristic effect for the anthropologist. First of all, *The Age of Bronze* is not divisible. No part of it is separable or escapable from the smoothing that has been done. As we have seen, it is possible to consider that the artifice of the profiles fragments the form on its surface in order to see each 'slice', but then the reconstitution of the whole is done by adding and smoothing them, in the simple manual sense. Rodin insists on this: 'the human figure is a whole where everything fits together, where everything has its reason for being and its character; to translate the truth of it, it is therefore important to follow it in the exactitude of its profiles; otherwise it is disharmony and the destruction of its equilibrium' (in Dujardin, 1992, p. 48). The surface is considered by Rodin as 'the extremity of a volume' and, consequently, it is 'the cubic reason [that] is the master of things and not the appearance'. We could translate 'cubic reason' as 'volumic reason'. This procedure assumes that the sutures between the successive faces do not remain visible, unless they threaten the unity of the whole. Thus, Rodin, working on each face as if it were the main one, only seeks the unity of a whole. On the other hand, it is well known that Rodin's work is made up of different sculpted body parts existing separately, in their own right. And this is very often interpreted as the typical fragmentation of modernity. But precisely, for Rodin, such body parts, such a foot, such a hand, only have meaning in relation to such a part, for example such a leg, and not in relation to such another part. It is once again a process of structuring that is at stake in this operation, and not a process of division, with the objective, privileged by Rodin, of saying, always and more precisely, the singularity of the figure represented.

## Mime and retained movement

The reader may be surprised by the contrast between the movement of humans and the fixity of a statue. Between the one and the other, mime, as analysed by Étienne Decroux, constitutes a relevant mediation. As a mime actor who also theorised his practice and teaching, Decroux was attracted to sculpture, which he did not separate from bodily mime. He considers the latter as a mobile sculpture, in order to think about what a body is when it makes such and such a gesture, such and such a movement, and then another gesture, another movement. The body mime is like a still image of a movement, but which has been preceded by other gestures and which will be followed by other gestures. Isn't that what we see in our still images of the film? Decroux does not like dance, which is fluid, elusive, not fixed, 'not articulated', nor does he like traditional pantomime, which overplays extremes by gesticulating. 'Mime, says Decroux, is movement on the spot [?]. It is movement in external stativity. As if man were a shell within things happen that we can guess at and not see. [?]. And the mime artist has a means, it is what I call the transport of immobility' (in Pezin, 2003, pp. 139-140)<sup>(8)</sup>.

Decroux wants to think 'the transport of immobility' and 'movement on the spot'. In order to think the body in its movements, which he sees as 'the continuation of something that is usually cut with the scissors of the social' (ibid., p. 78), Decroux segments. It is segmenting to find the whole, and to follow the movement of each part. He wants 'to see beings in their separable parts. To isolate these parts. To make them independent in order to give them a new dependence' (ibid.: p. 337). And Decroux specifies the making of the mime: 'movement is contagious: whoever wants to move only the head, moves the neck without knowing it' (ibid.: p. 333). Or again: 'moving one segment after another in the course of the same movement amounts to detailing the latter, and, despite the fragmentation sometimes brought about by immobilities, to insisting on its unfolding. Segmentation thus produces a kind of distillation of duration' (ibid.: p. 342). This segmentation is heuristic for thinking about the volume of being and the activation of its components. There are not only gestures. There is also 'intonation, speed, more or less slow or more or less fast, and finally force. [...] Force is like electricity, you can't see it and yet you can guess it, you can deduce it' (ibid.: p. 128). Decroux also mentions 'character [which] is the crystallisation of a dominant or determined feeling. Take pity, for example. Everyone has felt pity, no one has a monopoly on it. A character can have pity as a dominant and it is a crystallised feeling. However, he will not seem to be in the throes of pity all the time, he may be happy or sad. But there will be one emotion that will be dominant, pity' (ibid.: p. 133).

We find our wholeness. The activation of one component of the volume of being leads to the activation of



another. Some components are more directly 'linkers' than others, as Decroux would say (ibid.: p. 62). A feeling, an emotion can thus link (but not necessarily) other components, actions, thoughts, which can also leave traces in the medium or long term, on other actions or thoughts, as if resurfacing from a possible burying. A thought may well link fewer elements of the volume than an emotion at a given moment, but it may leave traces at a given moment and then link gestures, actions, values and emotions. In this case, they would be 'promising' (ibid.: p. 62).

'Somebody thinking, says Decroux, is a man who blocks himself, who stops. Even when he moves, his movement is like an immobility that he moves. It is as if the world moved before his immobility, and, as the world does not move, it is he who moves' (ibid.: p. 358). It is not surprising that Decroux was interested in the work of Rodin, who knew how to stop the movement, in order to capture it in its transitions. Both Rodin and Decroux aim at a decomposition of the movement, but to recompose it, with the idea that it will continue (ibid.: p. 350). Rodin does this with his materials, Decroux with his body. This confirms our reading of Rodin that allows us to see not fragments but an 'attitude' (ibid.: p. 357). 'We are not imitating Rodin, adds Decroux. [...] It is Rodin who does mime. The only thing missing from his statues is movement' (ibid.: pp. 350-351). 'If they did, [...] they would have a mimic movement, punctuated by immobilities, heavy with thought' (ibid.: p. 351). And Decroux also claims: 'Each immobility, however brief, transforms the body of the mime into a statue; it offers the spectator clear contours, easily discernible by the eye and the mind' (ibid.: p. 357). And so from still image to still image. We find again Aristotle, *The Age of Bronze* and the volume of being cut off from what surrounds it.

There is a point here that challenges us: how does a statue or a human being stand? More precisely, we understand that 'it is stability that is to be explained', as Pierre-Michel Menger says about Rodin's sculptures, movement being only basic evidence (Menger, 2014, p. 6). Commenting on Rodin's works, Rilke's vocabulary is particularly enlightening for our purposes. He notes that 'the motion in the gestures of this sculpture [?] takes place within the things, like the circulation of an inner current, never disturbing the calm and stability of their architecture' (Rilke, 2011, p. 134). Rilke insists on movements that 'withdraw within themselves, curling up [?]. Rodin returns again and again in his nude figures to this turn inward' (ibid., p. 45). The sculpture in the round thus completes its heuristicity: at the heart of the movement, there is restraint and determination: 'No matter, Rilke continues, how great the motion in a work of sculpture may be, and whether it comes from infinite expanses or the depths of the heavens, it must always return to itself the great circle of solitude in which the art object passes its days must be closed' (ibid., p. 40): everything is summed up here. Movement has its 'logos', we might say.

Rodin himself sheds light on the modalities of movement and stability: 'I believe, he notes, that aplomb is not only that vertical line determined by the laws of gravity [...]. The true aplombs result from the general movement of the figure, and those whose line passes through all the planes that give the whole its stability and balance' (in Dujardin, 1992, pp. 23-24).

To say that sculpture retains movement, illustrates - illuminates - the continuity of a human being. Between the still images, so it is not discontinuity, but continuity that is shown, and this on several levels. In dialogue with Rodin, Gsell describes *The Age of Bronze* as follows: 'The legs of this adolescent who is not completely awake are still soft and almost vacillating. But as the glance moves upward, one sees the attitude grow stronger: the ribs lift under the skin, the thorax dilates, the face is directed toward the sky, and the two arms stretch to shake off their torpor' (Rodin, 1984, p. 30). And Rodin explains: 'He [the painter or sculptor] makes visible the passage of one pose into the other; he indicates how imperceptibly the first glides into the second. In his work, one still detects a part of what was while one discovers in part what will be' (ibid.: p. 29). From immobility to immobility in still images of a continuous film, we observe indeed that a moment of presence is infiltrated by details of previous or later presences, for example gestures, but also by thoughts, states of mind of other moments more or less close, as if assuring a thread. Also, and above all, stylistic traits continue from one moment to the next. Indeed, in a volume of being, on an existential scale, we find the Rodin's aplombs especially in these 'impregnating' or 'infiltrating' components, of which we have spoken, which are repeated in this gesture, this smile, this body posture and also in this trait of character or temperament. The movement of the action is achieved in such a way that it expresses this limitation or this restraint, and thus the singularity of a volume of being. In its step by step instants, there is no real advance, there are only attempts, always already retained. When we insist on this mode of being, we are not referring to a retreat into an interiority that might make one think of Augustine or Descartes, nor to the withdrawal of humans from the common world in an alienating modernity, nor to the withdrawal that makes one escape the responsibilities of the public space, nor to some moral control of the self. It is the principle of the volume of being that does not escape its entity and its singularity, even when it dialogues with others in the world and in the public space. In fact, every time a volume of being acts, it expresses that it is itself that acts, through its mimics, gestures,

accent or expression of character, its 'style', the analogue of the Rodin's aplombs.

This questions 'viscerally change-oriented' descriptions and analyses (Milo, 2019, p. 67). Wouldn't Daniel Milo's remark, which he addresses to evolutionary biologies, also apply to what concerns existence, once we accept to look at it closely? It could be addressed to thoughts of becoming, of flows, of permanent alterations, of dislocations, of multiple 'shiftings', in the course of the events of everyday life, which have become dominant paradigms in the social sciences, from which the analyses of anthropologists do not escape.

This structuring of a volume of being, with the different modalities of restraint, is the specific object that we consider to be that of existential anthropology. It now seems to us that we have our holds and levers to reach our goal, a way of looking.

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We have just carried out an analysis through the notion of the volume of being, through the continuous film and through the heuristics of sculpture in the round and mime. Such an analysis makes us aware that describing a human being in a detailed and non diluted way requires a lexical field that does not value relationship, fragmentation, heterogeneity, but return on itself, wholeness and unity. The human entity needs to be 'tight' to be described. The challenge is to look at the volume with the light of endo-explanation, not hetero-explanations by others, relationships and context. To look at a volume of being is *not to look at it going towards, but to look at it staying within*.

So we have the possibility of continuous films, as many as possible and as long as possible. We also have a method, or rather the spirit of a method, i.e. an epistemology: to focus on a being, to describe its entirety, leaving aside as much as possible what surrounds it, the other beings, the context. In this way we hope not to answer the difficulty mentioned by Virginia Woolf, but at least to try to propose a solution, undoubtedly among other possible solutions.

Between neuronal connections, cognitive systems and psyches on the one hand, and relationships, groups and societies on the other, there is a place for the human entity, with a method of focusing on it and the objective of an analysis of its components' structuration's modes. We cannot dissociate these remarks from what constitutes the field of anthropology in many American universities, but not only, with its four axes determining research and teaching: archaeology, linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, social or cultural anthropology. In this framework, existential anthropology would be a fifth axis, finding in the existential volume the analogue of the physical entity of physical anthropology.

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## Notes :

1. This is a question that has been on our minds for a number of years. It was recently posed in an article based on what we called theory drawings (Piette, 2023a). The present article is another form of the experiments we are seeking to answer our question.

2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ3Bv9cK4fo>

3. On the question of theory in visual anthropology, readers can refer to the issue presented by Paul Hockings (2014).

4. This enlargement is typically what often happens with shadowing or following, practised with film or note-taking. It does not resist changes in scale and, rather than aiming at a human entity, it seeks, for example, to understand the practice of an activity or the functioning of an organisation, and without

necessarily integrating, in the analysis, the continuity, i.e. the uninterrupted succession of the most different modes of presence possible (Cooren and Malbois, 2019 ; Czarniawska, 2007).

5. Ideally, one should observe each human entity of an interaction, one at a time, but separately, to decipher its volume of being, of which the interactional dimension is only a part. And after the moment of this encounter, one would have to follow each of these entities... This can constitute a collaborative research, each one for example following a different entity of the interaction that preceded. But at some point : you will have to choose one entity in particular... because of the multiplication of contacts and the emergence of new entities.

6. We would like to make it clear: this is only one reading, among others, of Rodin's work, which is associated with various experiments and expressions. What is at stake for us is not to make a diagnosis of Rodin's work, but the particular dynamic that certain works have created with our work centered on the idea of "volume of being" and the conception we have of anthropology.

7. See figures at Rodin Museum at Paris:

<https://www.musee-rodin.fr/musee/collections/oeuvres/lage-dairain>

8. We quote Etienne Decroux's words from the book edited by Patrick Pezin (2003), referring directly to the page.

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