



Deleuze, Sartre, and Levinas: a difficult heuristic for a science of existents

The following remark by Virginia Woolf should be taken seriously: “Here I come to one of the memoir writer’s difficulties – one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: ‘This is what happened’; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened?”¹ We have got into the habit of calling this person a “volume of being.” This has an edge, which is like its envelope, and also contents, namely a set of components, actions, emotions, gestures, words, ideas, skills, habits, roles, characters, and temperaments. These components follow one another with different expressions, while others have stabilised expressions. It is this volume of being that we want to examine and describe, rather than the events that happen to it. Our aim is to create a “science of existents.” We take the view that this science does not exist, and that it therefore needs foundations. What do Deleuze, Sartre, and Levinas have to say about this?

To conduct this work of observation and description, as Woolf criticised, it is necessary to “extract” the volume of being from its contextual background. Extraction is a movement performed by the observer,

1. Virginia WOOLF, *Moments of being*, New York, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1985, p. 64-65.





which consists of drawing a particular being out of its surroundings. We distinguish extraction from focalisation, which consists of a movement towards this being, a directional gaze on it – or an “anthropofocalisation” which gradually adds things around it, even if it is the main figure. Extraction implies that the interpretation or explanation lies in the entity itself and not in its relationships or in what surrounds it. The refusal or the risk of abstraction may have encouraged researchers not to take such a radical interest in a human entity, associating it with its situation in the world – in cultures, social systems, interactions, and the various relationships with other beings – in the belief that all of this guaranteed its empirical specificity. Extraction is not an abstraction; in Latin, *ex-* denotes an exit, while *ab-* denotes a removal. The being thus extracted carries what it is and what it has. It is extracted from somewhere, and it carries that “somewhere.” Abstraction is fuzzier, presenting an indefinite being. Looking at, or learning to look at, a volume of being implies cutting it off from its context, from the beings that surround it, grasping it with what it “contains” within it, and – in this case – observing in its continuity how it is when things happen to it, but without dissolving or diluting it in various elements that would be added to a description. It is this dilution that Woolf criticised. To put it another way, contextual information is only preliminary. The same applies to the background, to other beings in particular: they are rendered secondary. This would be the principle of a science of existing beings or, more concretely, of singular persons.

With this objective in mind, we begin to grapple with Deleuze, Sartre, and Levinas. In this paper, we present them not as philosophers but as anthropologists, imagining what kind of human they represent from their texts.





Plate I: The volume of being

Our choice is to start with a “realistic” human being, who is extracted, with a firm contour and dense inner substance. From this we will see the transformation of the human being in the three philosophical works.





We accompany our comments with drawings – we call them drawings of theory – of the human being we think each of the three philosophers represents. We accept that our reading may be partial or biased, but it is thus marked by the confrontation with a difficulty in view of our objective. We conclude that Deleuze, Sartre, and Levinas, each in their own way, prevent us from thinking about extraction; in short, they do not help us to look at or learn to look at a human being, according to the principle that we have just set out. We are guided solely by our question and avoid entering into the debates and commentaries that these three works have generated separately, nor do we touch on the comparisons they may have elicited.²

DELEUZE: DISARTICULISM

In Deleuze’s discourse, sometimes accompanied by Guattari, we see an anthropology that describes a disarticulated, deformed, even formless human. Deleuze seeks to oppose what he sees as a characteristic of Western thought – namely that of the “substantial, completed and well-constituted subject.”³ Becoming, decentring, affection, flux, multiplicity, and heterogeneity: the words of Deleuzian “disarticulism” create a strange swirling effect

2. We are thinking in particular of recent research by Camille Chamois and Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos: Camille CHAMOIS, *Un autre monde possible. Gilles Deleuze face aux perspectivismes contemporains*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022, Frédéric FRUTEAU DE LACLOS, *L’Existence des autres : Deleuze, Sartre, Chastaing*, Paris, Vrin, 2023. See also Jean-Michel SALANSKIS, *L’Humanité de l’homme. Levinas vivant II*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2011. And also Jean-Michel SALANSKIS, “Existence against Being”, in *The Routledge International Handbook of Existential Human Science*, Huon WARDLE, Nigel RAPPORT and Albert PIETTE (eds.), London, Routledge, 2023, pp. 194-201.

3. Gilles DELEUZE, *Difference and repetition*, P. PATTON (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 118.





that appears to us as an absence of holds for grasping a human being. The beings he presents are multiplicities – and macro – including multiplicities of multiplicities, with the characteristic of never ceasing to vary and modify themselves according to their relationships to others, human or non-human.⁴ The result of this “becoming-other,” of becoming another point of view or other points of view according to a principle of “inclusive disjunction,” is a subject “with no fixed identity, forever decentered.”⁵ Thus, changes of state take precedence over the now relegated entity: “figures are considered, write Deleuze and Guattari, only from the viewpoint of the affections that befall them.”⁶ This commentary on Deleuze’s anthropology, according to which “a body is not a thing, a substance, it does not really have contours, it exists only insofar as it affects and is affected,” is unambiguous.⁷ Deleuze insists that an encounter is not a homogenisation, but rather a reciprocal implication that modifies and is not prevented by the difficulties of communication. In this thinking about events, “individuation is mobile, strangely supple, fortuitous and endowed with fringes and margins.”⁸ Being is then nothing but the identities of its becomings, indecisive and open, different from itself: “A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or

4. See Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, B. MASSUMI (trans.), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

5. Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane (trans.), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 20.

6. Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

7. François ZOURABICHVILI, *Deleuze, une philosophie de l'événement*, Paris, PUF, 1994, p. 101.

8. Gilles DELEUZE, *Difference and repetition*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.





subject.”⁹ We are at the opposite of the volume of being, with its contour, edge, and consistency associated with a stable character and temperament.

Indeed, the notion of “haecicity” can challenge us. Deleuzian thought does not designate individual singularity but rather the event and instantaneity of what emerges, as an intensity distinguishable from another,¹⁰ in the form of a difference or a differential relationship. This is the opposite of Woolf’s point of view. What Deleuze looks for is not characters, an identity, or qualities,¹¹ but rather singular traits according to relations of speed and allure, among others; that is, he seeks event haecicities through which each thing, as he writes, loses its centre.¹² They are deviations that correspond to particular events, capable of determining other elements, but are not confused with personality or individuality.¹³ They are critical points that are “displaced, redistributed, [and] transformed into one another.”¹⁴ Haecicity is an “individuated aggregate:” “It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life.”¹⁵ The result is “compositions in which beings are no longer detached from the setting or the atmosphere, but are composed

9. Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, op. cit., p. 260.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 261 and ff.

11. François ZOURABICHVILI, « Qu’est-ce qu’un devenir, pour Gilles Deleuze ? », in <http://www.horlieu-editions.com>, p. 4, 1997.

12. Gilles DELEUZE, *Logic of Sense*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2001, p. 180.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 51 and ff.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

15. Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, op. cit., p. 262.





immediately, originally with them.”¹⁶ The human figure is thus propelled into the background, with no enclosure around itself. This is the very opposite of extraction.

In addition, Deleuze and Guattari speak of a “body without organs.” This body, which is not the whole human being, is thought to comprise “dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation” and conceived as a “connection of desires,” “articulation,” opening to “connections” and opposition to the “organism,” the “organization,” and the various layers that “bind.”¹⁷ “Consistency,” it might be highlighted, is no stranger to Deleuze’s lexicon – but it is that which “knows nothing of substance and form”¹⁸ (which prefers “heterogeneity”) and retains only “that which increases the number of connections,”¹⁹ always transforming itself in acts and through events.

Even if Deleuze were to consider the human being as an assemblage or aggregate, would he not see above all that “which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities,”²⁰ “in connection with others”?²¹ In any case, the contour is called into question, with no enclosure around it. We have a human being without an edge, immersed in and with what surrounds him, without a consistency that would allow us to say that something is happening to him, except to think that he is in constant transformation.

16. François ZOURABICHVILI, *Le Vocabulaire de Deleuze*, Paris, Ellipses, p. 62.

17. Gilles DELEUZE & Felix GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, op. cit., pp. 149-166.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 507.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 508.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

21. *Ibid.*





Plate II: the individual of Deleuze

PII-1

The Deleuzian individual is represented without contour,
traversed by diverse flows.

PII-2

The result is disarticulating cracks that are so many
“multiplicities” within the individual.

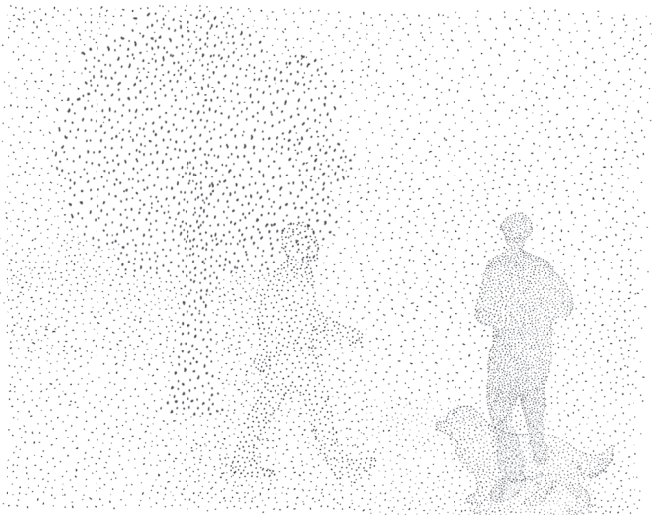
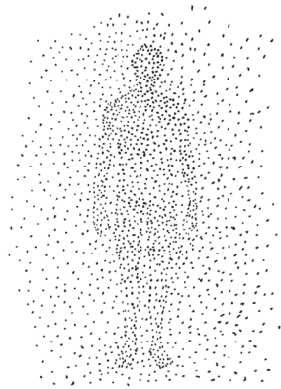
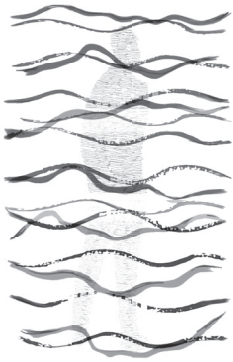
PII-3

Affected by external forces, the becoming-other is not
becoming another, but a progressive dissolution. The Deleuzian
individual is represented without distinguishing where
a being ends and begins.

PII-4

Deleuze’s human is dissolved with the others to which it is thus
linked, making haecceity an affecting “event” every time.







SARTRE: EX-ISM

The human being of existentialism is undoubtedly different from the one described by Deleuze and Guattari. The singularity of the existent is central in existentialism. Sartre asks us to study “that privileged existent which is man (privileged for us).”²² According to him, “the sciences of man do not question themselves about man; they study the development and the relation of human facts.”²³ He mentions that “existentialism is anthropology too insofar as anthropology seeks to give itself a foundation.”²⁴ In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre posits the person as “a totality” that is not “a collection,” “an addition or, by an organization of the diverse tendencies which we have empirically discovered in him.”²⁵ Sartre is one of the few philosophers to have attempted to link his theoretical propositions with the application of a methodology to several biographies, namely those of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Genet, and – most successfully – Flaubert. He also suggests that every human being could be the object of such an exploration, from birth to death.

Yet, existentialism in turn leads us to the impossibility of looking at a human being who, without being “disarticulated,” is presented as untenable or unapproachable – not “a stable substance which rests in itself,” but “a perpetual disequilibrium, a wrenching away from itself with all its body.”²⁶ This lexicon is very strong: man is “always outside of himself [...] in projecting and losing

22. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Search for a Method*, H. E. BARNES (trans.), New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, p. 168.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness*, H. E. BARNES (trans.), New York, Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 563.

26. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Search for a Method*, *op. cit.*, p. 151. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Questions de méthode*, *op. cit.*, p. 136.





himself beyond himself.”²⁷ Sartre invokes the notion of “transcendence” characterising man as one who “passes beyond himself,” “in the sense that he is not an island unto himself:” it is “not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human.”²⁸ The human being is thus the one who takes off from himself, an ex-istence coming out of its possibility, introducing play and the negative, “as being what it is not and not being what it is.”²⁹ This is what we call “ex-ism.” In this movement, it would undoubtedly be possible to see an attempt at extraction by the individual himself, but it is realised and thought *in relation to*. The situation is essential to this movement: existence is presented as “going beyond a situation,”³⁰ while the human being is presented as someone who “perpetually goes beyond the condition which is made for him; he reveals and determines his situation by transcending it in order to objectify himself by work, action, or gesture.”³¹ The human being, untenable, in situation and acting: this does not assist in observing and describing an entity itself in its consistency and volume. Very explicitly, actions and relationships remain clearly at the centre, taking precedence over the person, once again in the words of Woolf.

Freedom and the project, seen in this way as exits from the self, reject any “nature” of man, who is “before all else, something that projects itself into a future and ‘prior

27. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, C. MACOMBER (trans.), New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 52.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

29. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness*, *op. cit.*, p. LXV.

30. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Search for a Method*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 150.





to that projection of the self, nothing exists.”³² Sartre continues as follows: “Man is therefore without any support or help, condemned at all times to invent man”³³ – “he will be what he makes of himself”.³⁴ In a way, what we have here is an almost devolumised being. In *Being and Nothingness*, referring to Flaubert, Sartre writes that “we feel obscurely that Flaubert had not ‘received’ his ambition [...]. Neither heredity, nor bourgeois background nor education can account for it.” Sartre puts these various explanations aside and regards Flaubert’s goal as “a fact with all a fact’s contingency.”³⁵ However, Flaubert does have this ambition, and he deploys it in ways that are his own. There is, in this Sartrean reading, a temptation to ignore the fixed and limiting dimension of style (i.e., character and character traits), allowing interpretation to unfold in terms of choice, freedom, self-construction, and invention. This is certainly the case in some of Sartre’s texts. When he talks about the inferiority complex, he does not see it as “a prior formation” that explains it, but rather as “a way of choosing myself,” “chosen from the start”: “it is the way in which I choose to assume my being-for-others.”³⁶ “Projection towards” replaces the causal mechanism. Even when Sartre uses the expression “stuff of my being”³⁷ (which could have been brought closer to the volume of being), he associates with it freedom as action and as the wrenching away of the past, which he explicitly posits as the very structure of existence. In this case, does the image of “stuff” not typically indicate a flying surface that folds and tears?

32. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

35. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness*, *op. cit.*, p. 560.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 439.





Around this being in situation, as if wrenching itself away from itself, always turned towards and somewhat emptied, the enclosure is far from being built around a human entity. It is explicitly inclusive in two ways. On the one hand, the human being – in the process of wrenching himself away – does not escape being in intersubjectivity with others. Sartre rejects solipsism:³⁸ he does not want to reduce the Other to a mere representation of consciousness, or to think that nothing exists outside oneself, believing, following Hegel, in the importance of “to make me depend on the Other in my being.”³⁹ “Therefore, he writes, the Other penetrates me to the heart. I can not doubt him without doubting myself since ‘self-consciousness is real only in so far as it recognizes its echo (and its reflection) in another.’”⁴⁰ Whatever the more or less tormented place of intersubjectivity is in Sartre’s world, it exists, and others are omnipresent in both philosophical analyses and literary texts. Tension and conflict are central to each person’s encounter with another: “Thus ceaselessly tossed from being-a-look to being-looked-at, falling from one to the other in alternate revolutions, we are always, no matter what attitude is adopted, in a state of instability in relation to the Other. We pursue the impossible ideal of the simultaneous apprehension of his freedom and of his Objectivity. [...] We shall never place ourselves concretely on a plane of equality; that is, on the plane where the recognition of the Other’s freedom would involve the Other’s recognition of our freedom. The Other is on principle inapprehensible”.⁴¹

38. *Ibid.*, p. 223 and ff. However, Sartre seems ready to admit the possibility of a methodological solipsism, evoking Watson’s behaviourist psychology (*ibid.*, p. 229).

39. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, p. 408.





Plate III: the individual of Sartre

PIII-1

At first glance, Sartre's human being might appear to be a volume of being with a contour and a substance.

PIII-2

The Sartrean individual is constantly in a state of wrenching away from itself. It cannot be represented as outlined, dense and firm on his feet. It is drawn with a dotted outline on tiptoes, in unstable equilibrium.

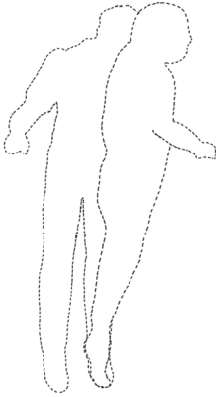
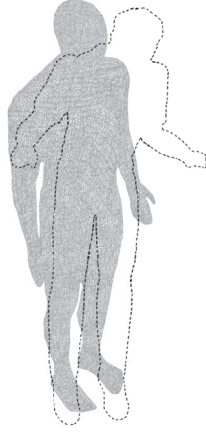
PIII-3

This wrenching away is that of a being who realises itself by not remaining within itself. It then thought it can move freely.

PIII-4

In its disequilibrium, Sartre's human being is in a constant state of projection, like a stuff caught in the wind. With what remains of its singularity, it reaches out to others, at the risk of diluting itself.







In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, the formulations are more softened. Starting with subjectivity, Sartre writes that everyone “discovers all the others,” which is “the condition of his or her own existence.”⁴² “He realises that he cannot be anything [...] unless others acknowledge him as such [...] The other is essential to my existence.”⁴³ Sartre adds the following: ‘My intimate discovery of myself is at the same time a revelation of the other as a freedom that confronts my own.’⁴⁴ The result is that “we are thus immediately thrust into a world that we call ‘intersubjectivity’. It is in this world the man decides what he is and what others are.”⁴⁵ From now on, a human being cannot be detached from others.

On the other hand, there is also the situation which, although transcended or surpassed, is also considered a determining socio-historical context. This is the case in certain texts, such as *Search for a Method*, in debate with Marxism, in which Sartre explicitly seeks to understand the role of contexts: “Nothing can be discovered if we do not at the start proceed as far as is possible for us in the historical particularity of the object.”⁴⁶ Sartre writes of the “existentialist method” or “progressive-regressive” as follows: “It will progressively determine a biography (for example) by examining the period, and the period by studying the biography” – “a continuous cross-reference.”⁴⁷ Sartre’s biographies are a case in point. Thus, Sartrean anthropology amounts to following man in “the project which throws him towards the social possibles in

42. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

46. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Search for a Method*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 135.





terms of a defined situation,”⁴⁸ understanding “the transcendence as the side-of-itself in relation with the Other-than-itself and the Other-than-man.”⁴⁹ In no case is there an extracted being.

LEVINAS: EXTRACTION THAT IS TOO DAZZLING

“I touch an object, I see the other. But I am not the other. I am all alone.”⁵⁰ This principle of separation radically expresses the irreducible singularity of a human being, particularly the face, which Levinas presents as “signification without context.”⁵¹ He adds that the other “is not a character within a context.”⁵² His “nudity” has value in itself and “not by reference to a system,” “having meaning by itself, *kath’auto*, signifying before we have projected light upon it.”⁵³ It might seem possible to see this as a radical extraction from each human being. We would thus be in a different configuration to the other two philosophies, which present a being relative to others, to events, situations, and contexts, whether it is affected by, determined by, or goes beyond them. What emerges more precisely as we read Levinas?

Levinas placed great emphasis on the contractive movement of the human being, thus far from the ecstatic movement of existence. In some of his writings, he indeed presents an existent as a being “riveted to himself.”⁵⁴

48. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

50. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Time and the other*, R. A. COHEN (trans.), Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1987, p. 42.

51. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Ethics and Infinity*, R. A. COHEN (trans.), Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1982, p. 86.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, Alphonso LINGIS (trans.), Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969, pp. 74-75.

54. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Time and the other*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.





Furthermore, he uses a highly specific lexicon, describing a form of enclosing of the existent, which “gathers itself together,” “with a base,”⁵⁵ which “cannot detach itself from itself,” in “an enchainment to itself.”⁵⁶ Even if, Levinas adds, “substantiality” is above all “substantivity,” that of “beings capable of bearing names,”⁵⁷ it is indeed “a departure from self and a return to self.”⁵⁸ “The interiority that ensures separation, he writes, [...] must produce a being absolutely closed over upon itself, not deriving its isolation dialectically from its opposition to the Other.”⁵⁹ Would we then not have the existent that we seek? Not really.

For Levinas, this position of the human being is deeply insufficient and unsatisfactory, since it has as a corollary the suffocation under the weight of identity, subjectivity, and egoism. Once again, we are seeing a demand for escape, for de-cluttering, which Levinas does not cease to think about in various ways through the relationship with the other. This critique of being-identity-totally, present in *On Escape*, is about the sufficiency of being, full and appropriating, reducing the other to the same. Levinas suggests that the escape is “the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I is oneself.”⁶⁰ It is not an escape, he explains, from the limits of

55. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence & existents*, Alphonso LINGIS (trans.), The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1978, p. 71.

56. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Time and the other*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

57. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence & existents*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

58. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Time and the other*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

59. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

60. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *On Escape*, B. BERGO (trans.), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 55.





a finite being and its “limitation,” but rather an escape from “the very fact that it is.”⁶¹

What will happen? With pleasure, for example, escape fails: “It breaks just at the moment where it seems to get out absolutely. It develops with an increase in promises, which become richer the closer it comes to its paroxysm, but these promises are never kept.”⁶² The individual then remains riveted to himself, attached to his ego, with the impossibility of escaping.⁶³ Becoming and movement are not exempt from this appropriation either: Is that not what we see when we look at a human being? We have the impression that Levinas is describing, in a way, the volume of being, in its inability to get out of itself, whatever it does, says, or feels, and that we are faced with the entity we want to observe. However, as a new restriction for our objective, it is this process of escape that Levinas continues to think about, increasingly strongly, until the encounter with the Other makes de-cluttering possible. The Other thus returns to his argumentation, displacing the existent towards an ethical requirement. Conceived in terms of its radical heterogeneity, the Other shatters the same. It “empties me of all consistency.”⁶⁴ In this vein, “the singularity of the subject is not the uniqueness of an *hapax*. For it is not due to some distinctive quality, like fingerprints, that would make of it an incomparable unicum, and, as a principle of individuation, make this unity deserve a proper noun, and hence a place in discourse. The identity of the oneself is not the inertia of a quiddity individuated by an ultimate specific difference

61. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 62 and ff.

64. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso LINGIS (trans.), Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 85.





inherent in the body or in character, or by the uniqueness of a natural or historical conjuncture. It is in the uniqueness of someone summoned.”⁶⁵ While this is clearly stated, uniqueness only emerges in response to the other’s summons. “The other hails me and signifies to me, by its nakedness, by its destitution, an order. Its presence is this summons to respond. [...] To be Me/Ego thenceforth signifies being unable to escape from responsibility.”⁶⁶ The subject is halted in his self-integration, now caught up in his responsibility to others. For the social sciences inspired by Levinas, it can only be tempting to see “responses” and ethical issues as an essential focus of their research, rather than existents with their consistency. In this ethical shift, the transcendence of the other takes precedence over the consistency of the subject, substance, and presence of the self. Subjectivity exposed to others then becomes “without continuity with self, without continuation of self.”⁶⁷ For the sciences inspired by this, extraction does not exist but rather the study of two beings meeting, dazzling, and taking responsibility for each other. The observer is faced with a relational configuration. There is no extraction of a single existent.

Would the observer want to save the possibility of extracting a single being? With the aim of a science of existents, it seems difficult to follow Levinas and his idea of otherness that does not depend on a singular quality. “But the idea of Infinity, he writes, is transcendence itself, the overflowing of an adequate idea. If totality cannot be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that

65. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

66. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Humanism of the Other*, N. POLLER (trans.), Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2005, p. 33.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 65 (Levinas quoting Jeanne Delhomme).





prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other.”⁶⁸ The scrutinising gaze would be impossible in the face of such an Infinity. Whereas Sartre sees transcendence in and through situated action, for Levinas transcendence here seems radical, intrinsic to a human being, irreducible to any totality, be it a group, a community or a culture. It is the face in particular, the brilliance of its exteriority, that “arrests totalization.”⁶⁹ However, would this also stop our anthropology, faced with the person who becomes the other, when we seek to describe, to cover as completely as possible, right down to the last detail? It is certainly important to insist on the unique, irreducible, and irreplaceable aspect of each human being; yet, in this objective of a science of existents, it is above all crucial to be able to represent and conceptualise it. To “grip” the human entity, can we think of it as irreducible, “excess”, or “transcendence”? We can listen to Levinas when he presents the human as relevant in itself, as we have indicated. This can undoubtedly constitute a first look at an individual. However, after that, unless we turn anthropology into a literary genre, which would not respond to the difficulty raised by Woolf, methods of observation and deciphering are necessary. The anthropologist of existence cannot think, it seems to us, that seeing “a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin” is reductive and that “the best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes.”⁷⁰ Is it not these features, particularly those of a face, that are the traces of this uniqueness, the very ones that the anthropologist would have to look at and take note of?

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68. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

70. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Ethics and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.





In this paper, we have sought a heuristic to constitute a science of the existent – a radical science that would learn to look at a human being – each one – without dissolving him or her with others. In these three philosophers, we have in fact found a counter-heuristic that at least enables us to understand what an extraction or volume of being is not. With Deleuze and Guattari, there is indeed the refusal of homogenisation, but above all we have discovered a deformed and disarticulated entity, in permanent modification from its context. With Sartre, we thought we had rediscovered a singular wholeness – and, gradually, we lost it. In neither case is there any extraction. With Deleuze, there is a being scattered, diluted, immersed in the world; with Sartre, there is a being turned towards, situated, intersubjective, and desubstantialised. There is not even an “anthropofocalisation” with Deleuze, who looks for haecceities of events, in which entities are modified and deformed. With Sartre, there is perhaps no deformation or disarticulation. There can certainly be “anthropofocalisation,” but without extraction, with “anthropofocalisation” embodying the tension of the individual towards others, the situation, and the back-and-forth with socio-historical contexts. There is “anthropofocalisation” with dilution. With Levinas, radical extraction is seen as a relational issue, excluding any form of observation. The observers cannot approach, and if they did, they would have to see beings singularised by each other, allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by each other, to the detriment of continuity.⁷¹ We find the same renunciation of being,

71. An initial sketch was attempted in our chapter: “Existence et existantisme : de la relation à la relatéité”, in *La Vie entre science et éthique*, Flora BASTIANI and Joëlle HANSEL (eds.), Paris, Manucius, 2021, pp. 59-68.



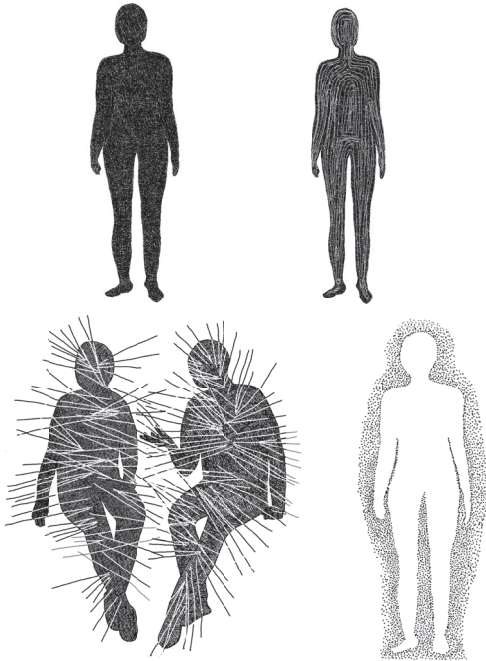


Plate IV: the individual of Levinas

PIV-1

Levinas's individual is a gathered being.
It is clearly comparable to the volume of being.

PIV-2

Its state of contoured density is thought to be heavy
and suffocating. It is represented here by a centripetal
movement within the individual squeezed into its volume.
At this level, the Levinasian individual is very different
from a diluted or wrenched away entity.

PIV-3

This state of suffocation can only be broken by the presence of
the Other and by the responsiveness that the Other demands.
The result is a mutual dazzlement.

PIV-4

It is also in this encounter that the levinassian individual is
emptied of its consistency, as if losing its inherent singularity.





of substance, and a valorisation of a constitutive other – and therefore of relationships.

CODA

Whether an individual feels enclosed or open, withdrawn or reaching out to others; whether they feel comfortable in the closed or the open; whether they believe in the possibility of freedom; or whether they perceive the possibility of surpassing themselves – in all of these cases, they cannot escape their entity, their way of feeling, believing, or perceiving, of being optimistic or pessimistic, of being lucid or not. Whether they feel a lightening by the pleasure or a clearing of clutter by someone else, this will occur in their own way, intrinsic to their volume of being, of feeling lightened or challenged. Whether an existent sees another as filling a gap or as an infinite desire unsubordinated by needs, aware that it has before it an irreducible, non-totalisable being, the way it looks at another is indeed that of a particular volume of being, again with its own ways of doing and being. In all cases, the entity does not come out itself, on the contrary. This is the volume of being.

With our analysis and drawings, we feel a certain strangeness in our diagnosis when faced with philosophies that lend a great deal to human beings: freedom, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, consciousness, transcendence, escape, and responsibility. Obviously – and this is an essential point that would require another text – these philosophies are closely followed by a number of anthropologists who claim to be interested in existences and individuals, but who do not separate them from analyses in terms of ecology, intersubjectivity, responsibility, and freedom.⁷² We sense a certain forced joyfulness in

72. We are thinking in particular of the researches of Tim Ingold, Michael Jackson and Nigel Rapport.





this type of analysis, with this corollary: by dint of not seeing this clutter; of not separating each one from the others; of anchoring it in situations and in the world; of surrounding it with other living beings; of overloading the epistemological difficulty; and of thinking of the human in this way as irreducible, untenable, and elusive, the possibility of observing and describing each human being in the process of living is suspended and always postponed. Here, there is a significant conclusion: what seems problematic – enclosure and solipsism – for many philosophies would in fact be a major key to a radical science of singularities that consists of looking at one being at a time in its continuity.⁷³ Writers seem to have grasped this with all the more astonishing force, and before the 20th century building the lasting establishment of an exacerbated relationalism. Woolf wrote the introductory text (of this paper) in 1939-1940. In 1925, Marcel Proust wrote the following: “The bonds between ourselves and another person exist only in our minds. Memory as it grows fainter loosens them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we want to be duped and with which, out of love, friendship, politeness, deference, duty, we dupe other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape from himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying.”⁷⁴ In 1927, in his *Journal of the Counterfeiters*, André Gide wrote the following: “Never present ideas except in terms of temperaments and characters. I should, by the way, have this expressed by one of my characters (the novelist) – ‘Persuade yourself that opinions do not exist outside of individuals. The trouble with

73. We would like to thank Frédéric Vandenberghe for drawing our attention to this point.

74. Marcel PROUST, *Albertine Gone*, T. KILMARTIN (trans.), London, Chatto & Windus, 1989, p. 33.





most people is that they think they have freely accepted or chosen the opinions they profess, which are actually as predetermined and ordained as the color of their hair or the odor of their breath...”⁷⁵

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75. André GIDE, *The Counterfeiters with Journal of “the Counterfeiters”*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1962, p. 374.

