

## THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF ANTHROPOLOGY AS A SCIENCE OF HUMAN BEINGS<sup>i</sup>

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*“Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches, to leave the tedious lingering method, which we have hitherto followed, and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march up directly to the capital or centre of these sciences, to human nature itself” (Hume, 1984: 43)*

*“And for the citation of so many authors, it is the easiest thing in nature. Find out one of those books with an alphabetical index, and without any further ceremony, remove it verbatim into your own: and though the world will not believe you have occasion for such lumber, yet there are fools enough to be thus drawn into an opinion of the work; at least, such a flourishing train of attendants will give your book a fashionable air, and recommend it to sale; for few chapmen will stand to examine it, and compare the authorities upon the compter, since they can expect nothing but their labour for their pains. But, after all, sir, if I know anything of the matter, you have no occasion for any of those things” (Cervantes, 2000: 6)*

### HUMAN BEINGS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

**I**s there really a science of human beings? This introduction wants to address two points. The first aim is to trigger astonishment at the difficulty of radically observing a human being, and nothing else. Secondly, this idea is connected with the absence of specific objects for anthropology, which cannot be social or cultural phenomena. The paper will then clarify a set of theoretical principles in order to make anthropology the science of human beings.

#### *To Observe a Human Being: is it so Difficult?*

Atom, molecule, cell, neuron, social relation, institution, the universe: each has its experts. Is it only the human unit that does not have its own? Today, much philosophical thought is given over to consideration of twigs, dust, objects or nations, without establishing a hierarchy between beings. A philosopher can even add an extra level: being amazed by the fact that each of these units is

there. He can look at them as things to which the fact of being is inherent.

It does not seem to bother researchers to have to follow a distinct molecule with fluorescent markers using a sophisticated microscope in order to observe its fluctuations, or to have to follow an institution or even a divinity through people's discourse or actions. But nothing can be taken for granted when it comes to the human unit. Between the biologist's cells, the social sciences' social groups and the physicist's atoms and universe, the "human" unit is written off, has vanished, is removed, the victim of voluntary and involuntary oversight.

In this context, it is not pointless to recall a few of the individual's philosophical characteristics: his indivisible unity, with boundaries that enable him to be counted, his separation from other entities, his trans-temporal identity, as well as his unicity, it is to say his own intrinsic singularity, and sometimes a consciousness of his individuality. One might say that in order to be an individual, an entity must satisfy criteria of separation, identity and unity "at least to some degree, and the more it satisfies them, the more it is individuated" (Pradeu, 2008: 98). Separation, unity and identity might also characterize other entities than human beings, but these features are more relevant to human beings than they are to an action, an event, role or feeling, whose uniqueness and specific boundaries can strongly be questioned. Yet, social sciences do not hesitate to study them. A human being would seem to have as much, even more unity and singularity than an urban district, a landscape, a rule, a law, the religion of a given region, or an ethnicity—all entities that have never really been the object of methodological, epistemological or theoretical hesitations. Moreover, of course, each human being not only has this dimension of differentiation with regard to other entities, but he can also be conscious of his unity, and capable of thinking this unity as his own, saying that it is himself and valorizing it. I believe that this characteristic reinforces the need to approach a human being as a specific unit of research.

It is as if observing the human unit entails difficulties that one would be inclined to avoid, as if it would risk introducing an inequality, a new hierarchy between beings. In philosophy and the social sciences today, anti-anthropocentric positions are more common than contrary views that stress the originality of humans among all of the living entities in the universe.

I should point out that those who focus on neurons or molecules observe at the same time what emanates from these, what happens to them, and how these happenings are integrated. The same could apply to the study of human units, which are constantly confronted with movements and messages, those which come out of them and those which come to them.

There are a wide variety of objections and resistances to confronting the human unit as such:

- ❖ Its openness to the outside world and its relational dimension are posited as foundations of the human being himself. This is the commonly held idea, particularly in the social sciences, that the human unit is entirely social. But in order to know, confirm or refute this, is it not necessary to make detailed comparisons between individuals in order to analyze what constitutes a unit and determine the part played by the social?
- ❖ But if it is only a matter of noticing this obvious relational openness—as obvious as the act of breathing—we can observe it all the more precisely when confronted with an individual who is in the process of opening and closing himself to all that surrounds him (other humans, other living beings, objects, environments). The aim is then to focus on the unit itself in its temporality in order to get a good understanding of its forms of openness and closure, and of the transformation effects in the course of the existence.
- ❖ The epistemological argument stressing the irreducibility of experience, which cannot be captured by observation and concepts that are always a step behind it. This is a good reason not to underestimate the methodological difficulty of exploring feelings, moods and flows of consciousness, and also to accept this limitation, face up to it and find the best means of arriving at even partial answers.
- ❖ The disgust that humans can inspire, since they are responsible for many evils and catastrophes on Earth.

But I would repeat that this is all the more reason to better explore and understand them.

- ❖ The obsolescence of the human figure, so omnipresent in the history of thought. Against this objection, one could make the observation that this figure has been absent since the birth and development of the human and social sciences, whose classification system has not reserved a place for the human-as-unit.
- ❖ The risk of “pathos”, and that the label “pathetic” could be applied to an analysis of human units. There is in fact a pathetic risk of saying over and over again in philosophical and anthropological propositions that human existence is the main problem, that the world was emptied of the presence of human beings by philosophies and social sciences, that human existence has an inexhaustible dimension, that individual singularities should be favored rather than structures and systems. And this is all the more true if one injects themes of finitude, contingency and solitude. This risk is real, but it must be taken, with a certain vigilance, in order to shoulder the science of man, as well as that of human units.

One can find it insufferable when human beings are presented as the centre of the universe, but this is what they are. And does this stand in the way of considering what a science of humans would be? Does it amount to positing a hierarchy? Is this the right word? In any case, the “hierarchy” does not suggest magnificence and sublimity (the human is an animal, of course), but it designates an obvious fact that reinforces the need for a science of humans. The hierarchy is evoked as an observation, not an ideology. The observation is that of the presence of humans in practically all spaces worldwide, humans with contacts, histories, productions or creations that, according to various perspectives and parameters, carry more weight than those created by other beings. This is what is often designated by the term “Anthropocene”. And who is this “man”?

An ontological argument can be added. Not without irony, Bertrand Russell mentions what he considers an obvious fact posited by Aristotle: “Suppose I say ‘there is such a thing as the game of

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football,' most people would regard the remark as a truism. But if I were to infer that football could exist without football players, I should be rightly held to be talking nonsense. Similarly, it would be held, there is such a thing as parenthood, but only because there are parents; there is such a thing as sweetness, but only because there are sweet things; and there is redness, but only because there are red things. And this dependence is thought to be not reciprocal: the men who play football would still exist even if they never played football; things which are usually sweet may turn sour; and my face, which is usually red, may turn pale without ceasing to be my face" (Russell, 1995: 176). Not to mention the fact that the same people who play football also do other things before, during (to an extent) and after.

From this I could conclude that it is up to the science of man to study human beings, whereas it is for other sciences to study collective systems like football or parenthood. This science of man attributes a lower ontological status to social configurations than to human beings, on the basis that it is impossible to discover organizations without humans. It considers a social organization to be an indication of the presence of humans, instead of the reverse. Essentially, when social science looks at a human, it says: he is full of the social, culture, and logics of action and relation. And so it speaks of these. But when anthropological science sees groups, interactions and conversations, it says that all of these are indications of humans. And therefore it asks: Who are they? What are they like? From this perspective, and faced with an inflation of the notion of existence, I prefer to avoid waste by reserving this notion for entities that are not just separate and tangible (because this is the case for objects and animals), but that also have an idea of their own existence and its end, entities that exist as "individuals", with "an elaborate sense of self" (Damasio, 1999: 13) and are also capable of attributing an existence to inanimate and invisible entities.

### *The Human Being as the Core Unit of Anthropological Analysis*

Thus, contrary to the atom, the cell, the social relation and the state, the human being as a unit is not the subject of any discipline. Within the current range of sciences, in order to be interesting, the human must be linked with others or split up. Then he is no longer a unitary volume. In the social sciences (which include social or cultural anthropology, since these explore cultural diversities and social relations), the human is examined as something linked,

immediately considered in conjunction with other units, particularly other humans but also objects, divinities, animals or the environment. Split up, he is examined in his psychological functioning (for psychologists) or physiological functioning (for movement specialists). Cut up differently, he can also be grasped as an action, activity, role or state, which are partial expressions of the human unit. Immediately viewed in relations with other beings, the human unit is then suspended.

Of course, individuals are sometimes chosen as object of observation in social sciences and also in social anthropology. I am thinking about the works of Biehl and Crapanzano for instance. But when one individual is chosen as the unit of research, it is not to examine the unit itself, but rather a particular situation, a psychological state, a social becoming (for example based on long-term comparisons), a society or a culture, that is to say social or cultural phenomena that he exemplifies (for a critical stance, see Heiss, 2015: 241-251; Heiss and Piette, 2015: 6-9). It is as if the observer could not settle on the human unit and had to immediately change scales.

So there is something of a dual availability: that of the human being as a scientific unit and that of the word “anthropology”, which, in the classification of the sciences, only exists linked to qualifiers. If one believes that the word “anthropology” has etymological relevance in confronting this unit, this obviously amounts to a criticism of the tradition of social and cultural anthropology, which has never stopped examining cultural diversities and social relations.

Of course, all of these disciplines of the human sciences can be viewed as anthropologies, insofar as they are sciences of social, cultural, spatial, historical, speaking humans. But only one well-established institutional discipline is called anthropology: social and cultural anthropology. Either all of the human and social sciences are anthropologies (history, geography, sociology, literary studies, linguistics, etc.) and in that case there is no reason to reserve the word “anthropology” for the study of social and cultural diversities (in the lexical logic that I have just indicated, this study could be called sociology, ethnology, culturology); or there is something more or different in “anthropology”, but this cannot be the social or the cultural, since these things are already being examined by other disciplines.

Furthermore, to assume that anthropology studies human beings insofar as they are culturally different means to assume that the other “insofars” are not anthropology, and to forget that these other disciplines also study diversities and differences. The structural option that consists in finding relations of opposition tells us nothing about what the subject of anthropology is, about its specificity. One thing that appears to be implicitly or explicitly constant in the institutional history of anthropology and in its theoretical discussions is the opposition between “us” and “them”, between “Westerners” and others. Does it really need to be said again? Anthropology is as if imprisoned by this opposition, unable to escape it even when criticizing it. Most works in cognitive anthropology or phenomenological anthropology cannot resist this opposition and the attraction towards cultural differences.

Thus, what occurred in anthropology, in the human and social sciences, was something of a hijacking of the word, and a loss of specific meaning. It is as if the science of man concerned only a part of him, the social and/or cultural part. A kind of equating of a part to the whole. In this sense, anthropologists do not sufficiently question the history and the institutions of ethnology and social or cultural anthropology. The concern and subject are still predominantly cultures, the separation between cultures and cultural areas. Today this is well illustrated by the ontological turn, a turn that is also religious and animalist in some of its expressions. It constitutes a discipline’s “maximum”, by intensifying culturalism, by reinforcing thought that emphasizes differences, that of natives or aboriginals thus grouped into a cultural whole (see Wardle and Schaffner, 2016; Piette, 2016). So what has changed in academic anthropology over the past century? This is the relevant question raised by Keith Hart, whose criticism of cultural relativism, restrictive localism and cosmopolitan interpretation of the Kantian anthropology are essential in my view (Hart, 2010; 2013). Nothing much has changed; there are hardly any new theoretical models; method is barely moving.

Then what could anthropology be? As the reader will have understood, the solution I propose is to associate anthropology with the study of the human unit, of the “volume” it constitutes, a volume of being, insofar as each one is separate. I am convinced that in order to firmly establish anthropology as a specific discipline, it is important to emphasize the human entity and extricate it not just from cultures and societies, but also from actions and experiences,

which impose themselves upon the observer's perspective and analysis too quickly, cut off from the human individual. Some anthropologists indeed might raise the objection that they no longer examine cultures, that these are only a pretext to work on action, experience, this activity, that space, this social particularity, etc. Much research—I am thinking particularly of phenomenological or existential anthropology that is well represented in the United States—is in fact marked by these focuses, but ultimately lost the human volume, which it seems to lose in favor of its parts (for example the body, subjectivity or perception) or which is absorbed into the analysis of relations to others or to the world in general, or into an emphasis on the researcher's relationships and experiences. Their descriptive objective—with its questionable level of detail—and their way of understanding reflect the history of social and cultural anthropology, giving precedence to intersubjectivities, interactions, language, narratives and cultural models (see Ram and Houston, 2015). I recall Blumenberg's criticism of Husserl's phenomenology and its "anthropological prohibition", which sees "man falling, so to speak, outside of any systematic framework, or if you prefer: he passes through it" (Blumenberg, 2011: 44). In this context, I believe it is relevant to spell the French term "anthropologie existantiale", with an *a* after the first *t*, to indicate that it is an anthropology of existants, volumes taken in their unity and continuity, without necessarily any dependence on the phenomenological tradition or on philosophical existentialism. The English language does not enable this insistence.

Working on units in their separation from one another and developing an appropriate lexicon are crucial from a radically anthropological perspective. This is not to say that in the course of their explorations, anthropologists will not at least partially encounter cultures, actions and experiences. Or that they will not make notes on individuals in the process of talking, acting, gesturing, experiencing and feeling. Therefore, what is targeted and described is a human being in time, continuing, trying to be with others. This perspective implies a critical examination, more particularly:

- ❖ a criticism of ethnographic forms of observation and description that revolve around the sharing, homogenization and interaction of individuals;



- ❖ a criticism of theories of action as opposed to analyzes of forms of presence, with the aim of considering the “volume of being” itself instead of just the action, activity, experience or interaction of the volume;
- ❖ a criticism of relationism conceived as “all-consuming relations”, in order to favor an analysis that mixes both the advance and the withdrawal of the relation;
- ❖ a criticism of the overly widespread use of “existence” and “existent”, in order to instead conceive of the individual as the sole existent surrounded by non-existents to which he attributes existences (collective beings or divinities, for example).

The foundation of the anthropology (of human beings) thus involves radically forgetting the them/us, here/there difference and getting beyond ethnography and the relationist problem.

Given that other disciplines have their centre—space, the past, society or economics—is the anthropologist supposed to apologize when he posits human beings as his centre, as a reality, and when he claims to be able to say true things about them? For the anthropologist, the challenge is to learn to consider a human unit relevant. Let us recall that one of the rare anthropologists who thinks about and from the individual is Nigel Rapport (for instance, Rapport 2003). According to my view, an anthropology of human units implies a shift of perspective, with concepts that encourage this shift. This is why I am trying to establish a lexicon that is not used by any existing discipline, but leaves open the possibility of bridges and dialogues (which will be more feasible as anthropology gets more clearly defined) with all other disciplines: the social sciences, biology, physics, neuroscience, cognitive science or psychoanalysis. Knowing that a “principle” is “a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*), I propose the following set of terms (volumity-separity-relateity; multiteity-continuity; remaindrity-lessereity), which can serve as principles for an anthropological science. They cannot be considered independently of one another. These principles would not have come to me clearly had I not had the experience of being filmed without interruption for almost 12 hours by two artists, Catherine

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Beaugrand and Samuel Dématraz. An unedited film of this day, January 19<sup>th</sup> 2016, is available through the following link: [www.lesheuresinegales.fr](http://www.lesheuresinegales.fr) (soon online). To observe and re-observe images of such a film—this work is in progress (Piette, 2017) - allow to follow the volume in its different moments and situations, while trying not to lose it. It is not an easy exercise. But it helps to understand better the reality of the human volume, of its unity and its continuity. In this text, I want only to clarify these theoretical principles.

What would we learn from an anthropological science? This question, which I am asked regularly, implies that we will learn nothing that we do not already know through literature and ethnography. One might answer that it is possible to learn nothing from an ethnographic monograph or a social science theory. The same goes for an article on particle physics or molecular biology, which cannot speak to an anthropologist.

Working on one human individual, only one—even if I recommend establishing comparisons: what is to be done about the objection that it is nothing but a single person? Does an observer of social life, whose unit of research is a Paris district, or Catholicism in a region of Romania, or relations between teachers and students in suburban high schools, not also work on only one single unit: a district, a local Catholicism, a hierarchical relationship, etc.? And yet this does not expose them to criticism. To build an anthropological science, one must bring oneself to consider the relevance of the unit “human being” and realize that, in the course of a human day, there are several minutes, several actions, several gestures, several forms of presence. Like in a given district, religion or hierarchical relationship, there are several people, several social relations, several interactions.

What do I mean? The human volume is the most important in a science of human beings; it is what the anthropologist must not lose, must not dilute in the background, in the situation or in the different expressions of the context.

### *VOLUMITY-SEPARITY-RELATEITY*

Firstly, let us consider these three principles, which clarify what “human unit” designates. The principle of *volumity* presents the human unit as a volume: this individual here, that individual there. The meanings of Latin root words can shed light on the

characteristics of volume. *Volumen* designates a roll of papyrus forming a book or part of a book. Other meanings of *volumen* are coil, twist or convolution. In Latin, the verb *volvere* indicates a set of actions that could be tracked as essential to the movement of a human volume: rolling, unfolding time and months, but also being moved in one's heart, and meditating in one's mind.

According to *the Oxford Dictionary of English*, the word “volume” was initially “a scroll of parchment or papyrus containing written matter”. Other meanings were added: all of the notebooks joined by binding, or “a single book or a bound collection of printed sheets”; a written work; and also the portion of space occupied by a body. A volume is also measurable, whether this measurement concerns a mass, a sound, air or blood. In connection with these meanings, a volume can also indicate an intensity, scope or modality. A human volume is a very individuated volume, filled with being, existence, presence according to different intensities.

The volume cannot be pejoratively associated with geometry. The word “volume” presents an extraordinary lexical field, ranging from the motion and flow of time or thoughts to three-dimensional solids, due to its ability to contain. A volume is what moves and contains, as well as the “sheets” that are contained.

I believe that the notion of volume—immediately attributable to every unique new cell born of the meeting between a spermatozoid and an oocyte—can make it possible to avoid what was not necessarily avoided by the notions of individual and person: being too often conceived in terms of construction, categorization, individualization or morality. Volume, which has a physical resonance but is no less suggestive of contents, would seem to offer a good opportunity to directly confront the human entity. The notion of volume can also make it possible to avoid the aforementioned pathos, and can foster reflection on the ways of working on the human unit.

Insofar as it contains various visible, invisible, inner and outer elements, insofar as it moves around, the volume constitutes a singular perceptible unit, beyond his roles and activities, having a set of changes, without this empirical unit being called into question, without it ceasing to be recognized or experienced as such. Contrary cases are specifically connected with problematical or pathological situations.

As Varela has written: “Unity (the fact of being distinguishable from one's environment and therefore from other unities) is the *Yearbook of the Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies*, 2017(3)

sole condition necessary for the existence of a studied field”. Unity remains “a unity... independently of the transformations it may undergo” (Varela, 1979: 61-62 ). The volume of being enables us to draw attention to the fact that properties, qualities and accidents (which all play different roles in the formation of the empirical unit) arise, settle and change, but they never completely change this unit.

The principle of *separity* designates the separate character of a living being or an object. Latin can enlighten us once again. The Latin prefix *se-* means “without”, “apart from”, “on the one hand”. It is found in *sepono* (to put aside) and in *seduco* (to lead astray, to take aside, hence also to seduce). The idea of “without” is of course not insignificant. Separating (*se-pars*), is putting one part aside, without the other parts. The idea of separity aims to draw attention to the fact that this human volume is separate from others, with clear boundaries that differentiate and separate it.

There are a few famous “stories” of embryology in the history of literature. I am thinking of Montaigne, who described a fourteen-year-old child he had noticed: “Just below his breast he was firmly attached to another child with no head and with the spinal canal blocked, though the rest of the body was entire: one arm was in fact shorter than the other, but that was accidentally broken at birth. They were joined facing each other, looking as though a slightly smaller child were trying to put his arm round the neck of a slightly bigger one. [...] There was no sign of a navel in the imperfect child, though all the rest of the belly was there: the parts of that imperfect child which were not attached, such as the arms, buttocks, thighs and legs, dangled down loosely over the other one, and in length could reach down to his knees.” (Montaigne, 2003: 807)

A few years ago in the United States, a pair of conjoined twins turned sixty years old. A very rare event. I dare not imagine what their reality must be like, when they each have their own stomach and heart, but share an anus and penis. There is another spectacular case that has received a lot of attention on American television: the Hansel sisters, born on 7 March 1990 in Minnesota. They are bicephalous, with a single body containing two hearts and two stomachs, but having only two arms, two legs, two breasts, one pelvis and one reproductive system. Each of them coordinates one half of the body, something they had to learn in their day-to-day activities, which include sports. Some of their actions can only be performed with cooperation, while there are others they can do separately, like writing or eating. This state of non-separation was

chosen by the parents when the girls were born. One can of course observe a system of individuation that enables them to have different actions, tastes and feelings, but this happens against a backdrop of near non-separation that makes the anthropologist curious to conduct detailed observations about such cases.

Once detected, pregnancies of this kind are usually terminated. As if it were normal for human beings to be empirical units that are separate from one another. No unit is included in another, or is in attached contact with another. When faced with a case of conjoined twins, the feeling that one is observing a kind of monstrosity, or at least an oddity, reminds us that the common denominator of human beings and many other living entities is the separation of bodies. It is the condition of existence since their birth: being separate and continuing in this way.

A volume is a separate being. It almost becomes amazing, even incomprehensible, that the philosophical and anthropological lexicon treats individuals like the eggs and flour of a cake made by the baker. Is it not almost trivial to point out separation? Is it not empirically obvious? And yet: I recently read the abstract of a bibliographic article “that acknowledges the interconnectedness and inseparability of humans and other lifeforms” ([https://www.academia.edu/19373244/Multispecies\\_Ethnography](https://www.academia.edu/19373244/Multispecies_Ethnography)). There is indeed this contemporary trend, what I would call an ecolo-relationist ideology that never stops considering and describing things and beings in terms of links, interactions, connections, networks, identification, empathy and attachment. This abstract presents itself as a critique of the “humanist epistemology” and “anthropocentrism” of anthropology, which I think has never been anthropocentric or connected with a humanist epistemology, but has always turned away from the human being, focusing instead on cultures and nonhumans. I precise that I am not against the observation of other living species in anthropology—it can be important (Piette, 2016: 58-64)—but only if the anthropologist also focuses on human beings, without absorbing them in relations, groups and cultures. While some anthropologists want to decentre the human beings, it is all the more astonishing and crucial to notify that a focus on them has almost never been done in anthropology and that they have always been “hoovered” into other levels and perspectives.

In some ways, for instance, Tim Ingold’s anthropology is typical of a very relationist rooting. In Ingold’s world, there are

people, organism-persons in fact, but they are not delimited entities. They are “nexuses composed of knotted lines whose slack extremities spread in every direction while mixing with other lines and other knots” (Ingold, 2013: 9). These humans do not live inside their bodies, but are in “continuous exchange of materials through layers of constantly extending and mutating skin” (ibid.: 10). There are not individuals on the one hand and an environment external to them on the other, but “an indivisible totality” (ibid.: 28) and an uninterrupted relational field. In such a painting, we should not search for singular, autonomous individuals. They have no place, other than as processes and movements “generated within a relational field that cuts across the interface within its environment” (Ingold, 1990: 220). “Separate parts” are only useful for considering machines, not life. According to Ingold, to understand life, it is important to conceive of it not as separate fragments but as “the unfolding of a continuous and ever-evolving field of relations” (Ingold, 2011: 237). Thus, the relationist painting abandons any ontology of the individual. “In organic life, every part unfolds his or her relations with every other person”. This recalls Marilyn Strathern’s work on Melanesian people, whom she says “contain a generalized sociality within” (Ingold, 1990: 222). Being indissociable from relations, people are thus represented in their engagement and not their disengagement, an active engagement in an environment or an activity that enables them to engage in direct, perceptual relations with humans and nonhumans. According to Ingold, it is not a matter of choosing between an individual and the external reality, but rather of painting a fluid space where “there are no well-defined objects or entities. There are rather substances that flow, mix and mutate, sometimes congealing into more or less ephemeral forms” (Ingold, 2013: 86). Again, with Ingold, we have an anthropology, which shifts its attention away from individuals as entities that exist in the world and deserve to be studied as such. His individuals “dissolve” into relations. There are no volumes !

Of course, humans engage in relations, shape relations and are shaped by relations, but their existence cannot be reduced to or deduced from the set of relations they are part of. Separity needs not imply that the volume does not move towards others. It is even the principle of separity itself that makes this movement possible. I link this to the principle of *relateity*. I appeal to this new term in order to avoid “relation” and its highly-charged meaning (associated with link, interaction and connection) but keep the radical appeal to the

Latin etymology of the word “relation”, with the impact that this root meaning has for my argument. In Latin, *relatum* is the past participle of two verbs. It is the first verb that engendered “relation”. But both are interesting. *Refero, retuli, relatum* means to report, to recount, but also to bring back, to withdraw, to take something back to its point of departure (I find this remarkable), whereas *relaxo, relavi, relatum* means to loosen, to relieve tension, to relax, to give respite (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*). On the one hand, this etymology makes it possible to free “relation” from the lexicon of links and draw attention to movement as a departure and a return towards the self, and on the other hand it enables this movement to be linked to a kind of distance.

A human being can be presented as a “radiant” presence. The rays emanating from each person, projected at someone else without getting all the way there, return to their point of departure, as if they could not be stretched all the way to the other presence. The separate human volume has also the possibility to receive foreign elements. It even does it a great deal. Strictly speaking, it does not integrate beings, does not annex them or merge with them; I do not dare speak here of bacteria it may have encountered, perhaps without this having any effect on the volume’s unity. In the form of an emotion, disposition or thought, it integrates effects and traces of presences, gestures, words and events. But what is also apparent is that it receives and integrates partially and obliquely. In a similar vein, I like to recall Ralph Waldo Emerson’s analogous thoughts in his essay “Experience” (1883). He writes that “the soul is not twin-born but the only begotten” (p. 79), “our relations to each other are oblique and casual” and that “the dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop” (p. 53).

In light of this focus on volume, relations all the more clearly appear to be something incomplete, certainly not a line that links and interconnects. Therefore, from an anthropological perspective centred on the human unit, what needs to be described is not the line or the “between”, but rather the moment of departure and arrival, as well as the ways in which what is sent and received is issued and absorbed. It is important (and difficult) to observe the effects and consequences of gestures, words and events on a unit, at one moment and at subsequent moments, in the short, medium and long term. In order to contribute to an anthropological science, it is necessary for the people themselves—those who would agree to do so—to take regular, detailed notes. This could consist in taking a

specific statement, gesture, activity or event, seeing their impact and watching how they are absorbed by the volume. They might be immediately forgotten, or get buried in the volume, with the possibility that they will later loom up and suddenly become an object of thought and rumination, or trigger an immediate act, gesture, or a verbal response. They can also generate a longer cycle of thoughts or acts, and lead the volume into a process of accumulation with other things, generating a new state, new rhythms and new habits. Something arises in a situation, and it can be taken up as a detail, integrated as a reference point and then forgotten. It may become a direct relevancy and then either get integrated into a routinization process or get eliminated.

This movement originating in the volume I have called “exo-action”. A few explanations are needed to characterize exo-actions. The prefix “exo” clearly indicates that it is a matter of expressions that emerge from individuals, and that these actions are forms of their presence. Exo-actions refer to actions of individuals. These exo-actions are not independent of their carriers since it is they who perform them, but their concrete performance is not absolutely determined by the characteristics, roles or statuses of these people, and certainly not solely by the elements which are relevant in the situation. The exo-actions that are expected in the course of an action are not performed without a reserve of other possible actions that may or may not leave traces, sometimes minute, in a moment of presence.

Exo-actions can of course change the individual entities, but very rarely in a total sense. Individuals usually preserve a feeling of continuity and remain recognizable to others. These actions do not affect the whole volume of being of the person executing them or the person at whom they are directed. They only affect this or that stratum, with very diverse, sometimes very minor consequences. One might say that these exo-actions are more or less implicative, generating changes that have various impacts—passing or lasting, sudden or gradual—on the continuity of the existence of the individuals concerned. Only through detailed observation of a person can one grasp this movement of continuity and change. Before they are performed, many of these exo-actions—those of the individual engaged in them or those of other people in a situation—are not entirely “essential” to his existence. Afterwards, certainly nothing would really have been the same if these exo-actions had



not been what they had been, but the differences between before and after would vary widely.

It seems to me that the notion of exo-action immediately raises questions about the degree of “sticking” between the action and the volume of the person performing it, the degree of “determination” between the act in progress, the volume and its leftovers. I believe all of this suggests a proposition that still needs to be verified: the volume is in a play of dependence-independence in regard to actions and relations, let us say to various exo-actions. On the one hand, its own exo-actions or those of others never completely constitute the volume (it is more than the sum-total of these). On the other hand, the exo-actions, which are always more or less marked by “other things”, can form a gap, even a reduced one, from the volume’s characteristics, its ongoing action, its past relations and also its style.

#### *MULTITEITY-CONTINUITY*

The principle of *mult-it-eity* designates the multifarious dimension of a volume. The suffix “-it(y)” refers to the Latin verb *eo, ivi, itum*, which means to go, to walk, to advance, as found in *co-eo, co-itum, co-ire* which means to go together, to join, to reunite and of course in English it means coitus. Something is said to be multifarious when it is not simple and has “many varied parts and aspects” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). This relates to the “sheets” of a volume, which can concern feelings, thoughts, emotions, social dispositions, but also multiple ways of being present according to situations and moments. The French word “aller”—stemming from the Latin *ambulare*, which means to go and to come—indicates this dimension of movement and displacement, with a tangle of modes.

Through this notion of multiteity, I wish to stress the volume’s complexity at every moment. The presence of a volume in a situation at moment  $t$  constitutes an action and a state of mind resulting from a dynamic between several elements: an event, a set of previous events, a decision at moment  $t^{-1}$ , all of which can be traced back to other space-times; the integration of these into a background built in the course of life, made up of various strata (habits, skills, experiences...); the activation of certain strata, and the placing of others on standby; the possible relaying of the current act through commitments, promises and desires; the perception of external supports, according to different levels of attention (from

infraperception to vigilance); the experiencing of the moment—according to various moods, feelings and emotions—as an obligation or constraint, as an expectation, a strategy or a freedom. And also, leftovers, details, in the form of nearly infinite gestures and words. It is the intermixing of these elements in simultaneity and succession that gives a presence its specificity. Harmony between these elements gives the act its facility and the presence its tranquility; disharmony creates hesitations, difficulties and tension.

When looking at a volume, one can be amazed by the facility of its acts. The volume stands up in order to get an object, with a view to a certain other action, followed by yet another. The performance of each action is thus an almost obvious succession of gestures with a knowledge—just as obvious—of the surroundings. The volume assembles a stock of successive actions capable of being deployed almost automatically. Would I say that the volume is caught in a basic “actionity”? Carrying out an activity or performing a gesture would seem to fit within a series of actions that are as if already proposed, appointed and placed before the volume, including when it is adapting to a disparity or surprise. In that case, a distance arises that other acts will attempt to reduce, by quickly relinearizing the course of the action or by creating another course that will be momentary—but a new course can also endure in the face of situations and events of another scale. In so doing, the volume holds together; it is also a presence with ways of being. They would have to be measured by an existential barometer, according to a few parameters, on the model of Hoffmann’s “spiritual barometer”, used to note the different temperatures and atmospheres of his “soul” (Baudelaire, 1995: 31).

In previous research (Piette, 2015), I presented the repositivity chart (below), which I will henceforth call the multiteity chart. Its goal is to offer criteria with a view to observing the interweaving of various “layers” in a volume, particularly forms of presence, engagement and disengagement in actions. The notion of repositivity is central to my analysis. On the one hand, this consists in the ability of human beings to sit and repose upon supports. Some of these belong to individuals (their skills, experiences and reasons for acting), others come from the situation, and may be present before their arrival. On the other hand, it consists in the ability to establish new supports against a backdrop of older ones. It is on the basis of these supports and the possibility of setting oneself down on them that human beings develop an ability to repose in the form of trust,

relaxation or a certain passivity. In French, the word “reposité” fits well to designate the dual act of “se (re)poser”, of “poser” and of “poser à nouveau (re-poser)”. Reposity directly implies an economical way of being present in perception and thought.

Let me be more precise. I would say that there are four types of support and four types of repose. On the one hand, the supports primarily make it possible to define the action. On the other hand, the modes of repose make it possible to define the corresponding modes of presence. At the various points below, certain social science theories and conceptual relations can be recognized.

A situation is initially organized on the basis of a framework of interweaving norms, values and rules. These elements are often obvious and go without saying. The individuals do not set the rules of the round to be played in each situation. The situation is connected to organizational principles that are external to it, immediately arranging and structuring actions that quickly become habitual and regular. These lead to reciprocal expectations between individuals, enabling each of them to predict the behavior of the others and to behave in such a way that they do not depart from what others are expecting (for instance, Goffman, 1974). These supports do not necessarily impose a constraining or determining link upon the action. Between rules and actions there is a kind of immediate co-presence. In the succession of moments and situations, norms and rules are always there. But some can disappear while others are created or transformed. In this case, reposité can also mean the ability to install supports, and to install them again.

A second type of support is made up of elements that are immanent in the situation. They are objects or beings that constitute direct resources for action, or information that quite naturally entails various action consequences. In a situation, objects are supposed to organize space, informing its configuration as well as the immediate action to be performed; they are supposed to be directly manipulated and provoke a specific gesture. Even for seemingly complex activities, the flow of the action is thus simplified, reduced to well-coordinated manipulations and opportune glances. In a situation, people constitute not just a material resource but also an affective one, providing a combination of information, assistance, control or simply presence. In this way, they too are able to reduce the effort required for engagement, thought and deliberation. Conversely, for someone who is discovering the unfamiliarity of a new situation, automatic gestures

are replaced by the interpretation of instructions and guidance, followed by a set of trials and errors, until the actions eventually become routinized. In this way, the supports can disappear, reappear and be modified.

Networking or interconnection is the third support. Independently of the pace of sequential linking, a situation is also part of a network that connects it with other situations, according to more or less closely woven links contributing to its stability. In each configuration, traces and signs make this interconnection of situations visible and constitute an additional support without which the unfolding of the sequences of action would remain an impossible conquest. In this networking, there is the network of situations and at the same time the continuity of the elements, signs, objects and people that are present in it, incorporated into a past, practices, and decisions that have given them expression and stability. This point has been developed in the actor-network theory. In this case, breaks in the network can impact on what is going on in a situation.

Finally, there is sequential linking. It is the organization of everyday time, of the day punctuated by the hourly conventions and reference points that link one situation to the next without hesitation over the choice of subsequent actions. The paced navigation from one spatial configuration to another selects this or that action, in such a way that the individual already knows not only the order of most the situations making up his day, but also, within any given situation, the action sequences to complete.

It is on, with, and next to these various supports that a human being is present in a situation with four economical modes and their opposite.

- ❖ *Cognitive Economy* is the first. This presupposes routines and the automatic performance of sequences of actions without the need for deliberation and without reference to an instruction. Cognitive economy is also connected with the presence of mental patterns that enable the particular state of a situation to be assessed, thus generating appropriate actions almost automatically. This facility reflects the central role of material supports in the form of various signs (including writing and language) lightening the work involved in social negotiation, suspending—or in any case minimizing—the need to negotiate or create a new link. The opposites of cognitive economy would therefore be evaluation and decryption “work”, thought

and emotion in their various forms. Cognitive economy is lacking precisely when a novice is discovering a new situation, activity or object. But it is also lacking in anyone who brings into play, in a maximal, sometimes determined form, their ability to evaluate, judge, scheme and draw meaning.

- ❖ *Docility*, the second form, corresponds to the possibility of reposing upon existing supports rather than changing them. It implies a kind of tranquility while the desire, will or need to change, to question (rules, human or material reference points) risks generating cognitive, emotional or moral tension. The act of changing a situation can bring about if not punishment, at least a reproach, in any case the serious need for a justification and the risk of disagreement or conflict. The enactor of the change will maybe answer to questions that could be asked by evaluators or various experts, by invoking a set of reasons and motivations that will make his action understandable from a semantic or moral perspective.
- ❖ *Fluidity* is the third form. It generates a kind of loosening and a certain tolerance of compromises, contradictions and inconsistencies. Fluidity also translates into various forms of making light of a situation, such as humor or irony. This looseness is not the game to be played with its rules, but the “slackening” of roles, creating another kind of play, like a machine with loose screws. Fluidity also corresponds to the possibility of easily shifting from one situation to another and effortlessly traversing activities that are sometimes very different, connected as they are with regulatory principles that would be incompatible in a situation of simultaneity. This shifting is made all the more possible insofar as within an activity, elements not relevant to it can arise in the form of details that enable it to be interwoven with previous or subsequent situations, and insofar as the person's aptitude for fluidity is supplemented by a particular ability to stay just below the level of consciousness, and also to forget his previous presences from one activity to another. Fluidity is directly connected to skills already acquired—the accumulated know-how that the person uses or effortlessly adapts to the situation. It is rigidity and inflexibility that are the opposite of fluidity. It is this fluidity that will make it possible to assume

attitudes of relaxation and distracted attention: not really listening, looking without seeing, talking without speaking, forgetting, turning a blind eye, deferring...

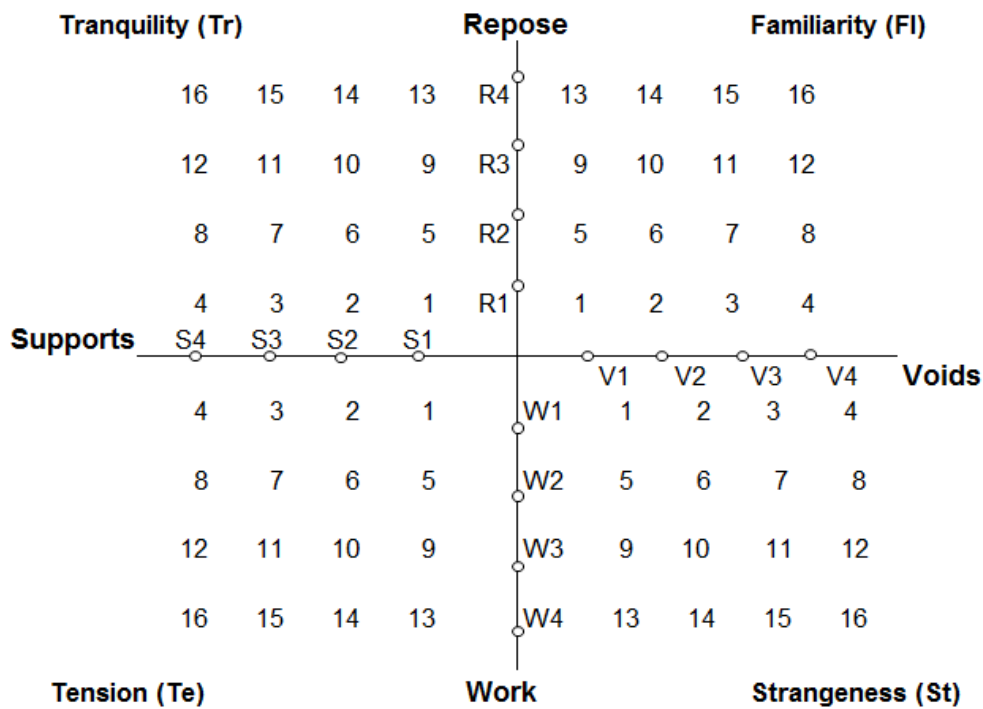
- ❖ *Distraction*, the fourth form, corresponds to this cognitive specificity to connect a distracting being, object or event with the status of a detail and thus avoid compromising the minimal attention the situation requires. It is only possible on a foundation of both repositivity and lightened presence through various supports. There are certainly different forms of distraction, such as detachment accompanied by an air of absence, or distraction provoked by external noise (sunshine or a stain on the wall), but distracting elements are only such because they do not constitute a sharable engagement model, as we have seen before. Since they are only tolerated, they cannot become behavior to imitate. The opposite of this light form of distraction is concentration.

This provides me—not just in terms of supports but also in terms of forms of repose—with four elements and their respective opposites. On the "supports" axis: norms (rules, conventions, etc.) versus rupture or change of norms (conflicts); reference points (clues) versus the loss or change of reference points; the networking of situations versus the rupture of links; pace of time (temporal rhythm) versus the rupture or change of rhythm (anxiety, worry...). On the "repose" axis: cognitive economy versus decryption (evaluation, judgment); docility versus the desire for change; fluidity versus rigidity; distraction versus concentration.

Supports and repose combine to generate various modes of presence. I will isolate four of them. Tranquility often develops from infra-perception of reference points and spatiotemporal signs, against a quite stable backdrop, sometimes experienced as such, with the possibility that unimportant details could emerge. In familiarity, some points of reference and signs are new, or at least different, and others are found to be lacking relative to previous situations, though the difference is still absorbed in the economical mode, against a backdrop that is still well-anchored. It is when the at least partial disintegration of this backdrop is sensed—with the imposed or created absence of certain supports—that strangeness arises and reduces the possibility of distractions. There follows an attentive or emotional tension of (re)construction, judgment and evaluation.

Then it is as if the backdrop were withdrawn, giving way to the nearly exclusive focus on an element. It appears to me that it is essential to perceive the constant, tangled play of these modes of presence in relation to the mobility of supports that either remain, go away or are recreated.

These different forms of support and repose, as well as their respective opposites, constitute a descriptive framework for understanding and representing the movement of the sequences of a human presence in successive situations, between repose and work, between strangeness and tranquility, between tension and familiarity. The forms of repose and work are placed on the following chart, the *Multiteity Chart*:



**REPOSE**

- R1 : cognitive economy
- R2 : docility
- R3 : fluidity
- R4 : distraction

**WORK**

- W1 : decrypting, assessing, judging
- W2 : questioning, challenging, changing
- W3 : rigidity, inflexibility
- W4 : concentration, loss of concentration

**SUPPORTS**

- S1 : norms, rules
- S2 : reference points, clues
- S3 : network of situations
- S4 : pace of time

**VOIDS**

- V1 : rupture/change of norms
- V2 : loss/change of reference points
- V3 : rupture of links
- V4 : rupture/change of rhythm

But what detailed observations reveal in one single situation (Piette 2015), even in one single moment (depending on the chosen scale) are interweaved presences, always with doses of tranquility (Tr), tension (Te), strangeness (St) and familiarity (Fl). The exclusively active form of being (which implies busyness, attention, concentration, will, intention, significance...) aiming to create new supports is extreme, as is the exclusively passive form of being which rests on things that exist in the situation.

The continuity of the moments is thus directly linked to the availability, alongside human presence, of practically inexhaustible revivifying supports. As I have pointed out, they consist of reference points, clues and rules. They are people or objects, spatiotemporal indicators in a situation's foreground and background. But most importantly they have the ability to reappear (and be perceived) in other forms after they disappear, to mitigate a tragic dominant characteristic, to qualify a cognitive, emotional tension, to lighten the work of grasping meaning. At the height of conflict, strangeness, anxiety or ruptures, people find forms of repose. Even though one or two supports are lacking, others remain. When cognitive economy gives way to the relentless search for meaning, and docility gives way to instability, and fluidity to inflexibility, and distraction to intransigence, strangeness can only be either very temporary, in which case it is quickly absorbed, or diffuse in which case it is still permeated in different doses by various rules, points of reference or clues supporting the situation. But all of these difficult events can have various impacts: from simple rumination to more or less serious consequences.

The principle of multiteity has theoretical consequences. It consists in an interpretation in terms not of action, but presence. On the chart, the strong points of various theoretical interpretations can be identified. They no longer designate action logics but rather forms of presence. On the vertical line, at the cognitive economy and docility dots, it would be Bourdieu's theory for example. It makes it possible to visualize the reduction (frequent in the social sciences) of the upper segment of the vertical line since fluidity and distraction are elements that are often eliminated from sociological analyzes. Presence in a situation presupposes not so much a "total and unconditional" adherence (according to Bourdieu's vocabulary centred on Tr 1-3 and 5-7), but also a way of being fluid, distracted and distant (Tr 9-16). Moreover, these analyzes risk confusing modes of presence with their supports, which are presented as



internalized. According to this type of interpretation, there would no longer be any objects or supports, and there would therefore no longer be any horizontal line.

On the vertical line, there are also theories of action: Weber, interactionism and ethnomethodology, as well as pragmatic sociology. The thematic and analytical focus of the two lower squares (tension and strangeness), which can particularly be perceived in the researches of various sociologies of action, favor themes explicitly connected with challenges or interpretations related to work and tension in situations that do not necessarily require these. Of course, it could be said that such or such theory of social sciences is more accurate than others, according to certain moments and situations, or that all theories can be right, but each at different moments of an individual's day. Yet, this is only valid if one nuances every time the logic of action, which is favored by the theory. (Piette, 2015: 55-58). Indeed, even in a situation of crisis, individuals are less productive of meaning, consciousness, rationality, strategies and justifications than is willing to be acknowledged by the whole range of sociologies of the subject and sociologies of action.

On the horizontal line representing supports, there would be the actor-network theory. We would see then another asymmetry: it consists in presenting supports as the only working entities and attributing cognitive information-storage and information-processing operations to objects and the environment, but at the risk of not considering human modes of presence. In such a case, the vertical line would no longer exist! This is also the risk that the distributed cognition theory might focus on cognition as if it were shared in a situation by objects and various other resources and might omit the presence of people, or in any case reduce them to the only attention and coordination activity.

The multiteity is important, but the continuity also. Stressing the multiteity of the volume of presence should not cause one to forget its continuity. The principle of continuity concerns that which is continuous in the volume, that which is not interrupted. It designates, on the one hand, the succession of the volume's acts and forms of presence, and, on the other hand, a constancy of and in the volume. Much of the anthropological work focused on this volume consists in describing human beings who are concerned by time, intensely concerned, because they are the only living beings to know about it and be conscious of it in their own way. Observing the

volume means observing it as a being in time. To consider this volume from birth and then from day to day: ideally, this is the exercise that should be undertaken by the anthropologist as an observer of existence. Thus anthropological science will make special use of the continuous filming of existence, but will also ask people to take notes themselves, describing their acts, feelings, and explaining how they are affected by what happens. This kind of observation reveals another continuity, that of the volume, which changes while staying the same.

A unique volume of being is initially a single cell, one that is unique, at least in terms of its genome. Having resulted from what may have started as an embrace, it is immediately more than the sum of the two. In utero, it develops and modifies itself from received genetic potential and according to the diverse information this volume of being integrates from its immediate environment. Before dividing, this unique cell lives between twelve and twenty-four hours. Here we have a “substance”—inseparable matter and form, one never being without the other—according to Aristotelian vocabulary. It is the volume of being. This does not rule out incorporating contemporary biological advances, which allow the genome itself to be partially and differentially modified (depending on the cells) at any point in its existence, according to the individual’s own experiences or in a radically random way, and with more or less significant impacts. This volume of being will then develop physiologically, neurologically, cognitively, emotionally, socially, culturally, from its first moments, and will thus continue its development, or what we could call its existence, until it dies, integrating different relations.

If we consider the volume’s singularity, various forms appear:

- ❖ The singularity of separation. Originating in a single cell, it consists of the existence of the numerical unit as separate from others, as not being any of the others, as linked to the physical fact of not being anything else. The language, continuity of existence and memory accentuate this separation, by enabling to represent oneself as oneself and to feel like oneself.
- ❖ The singularity of combinations. It is linked to the sum of social trajectories, relations experienced in the course of existence. The infinite combinations of these relations generate a virtually zero probability of being reproduced.

- ❖ The singularity of details. They cannot be reduced to social combinations. They emerge in one situation and are repeated from time to time, several times. They can then be recognized as characterizing an individual.
- ❖ The singularity of continuity. This constitutes a kind of core, some parts of which are actualized in a situation, others remaining on stand-by in the succession of moments. Parts of the core go through the roles fulfilled by the individual. This core forms in and through relations, but also in and with the contingency of details.

This is to stress the fact that the volume is not only a multiplicity of roles or selves but also, in every part of the world, a “coherence”, a “consistency” crossing and permeating these, based on a body, gestures and cognitive abilities that become stabilized in the course of existence. As the poet expresses well: “everything in Nature grows and defends itself in its own way and is characteristically and spontaneously itself, seeks at all costs to be so and against all opposition” (Rilke, 1962: 53). Thus, at one and the same time, the volume holds itself together and something holds it together, and this is of course never fixed, but it undergoes only superficial and fragmentary changes at each moment. This “something” can be viewed as a kind of “kernel”, as long as this does not designate a substantial dimension that would only be discovered once the “layers”—i.e. the various roles—have been removed, according to Peer Gynt’s famous tirade (Ibsen, 2009), but instead refers to identical characteristics that run across these layers and roles.

From this perspective, it is important to view the volume as an observation reference point when following its continuous movements, revealing its gradual variations, but also to observe elements that indicate a style of existence, which can be found from role to role, from layer to layer, in gestures, words, or better yet in the modalities of performing certain acts, of speaking certain words, in the succession of moments and situations. It is as if temporally continuous observation also showed continuity in a volume, a continuous singularity. Does it need to be pointed out that without ever being totally fixed, some “potentialities” that pass through the layers are all the more stable in that they were constituted at the beginning of the volume’s existence?

How does one distinguish between what stays the same and what has changed? Today's black hair will be white in fifty years, or could be red in ten minutes after being dyed. An individual that is now kind can become wicked a short time later. A person can go from single to married. He can change profession. But, in all of these cases, he remains tall or short, intelligent or a simpleton, with a way of being kind and wicked, a way that more or less belongs to him. He moves to a different place, but continues to be this or that, to be like this and like that. Since it is not easy to distinguish a medium from its attributes, it is all the more useful to think in terms of a volume of being, a concrete being with various characteristics, with its surface and everything it contains.

And when observing the qualities and acts of a volume of being in the process of moving from one place to another, it is also difficult to separate out the relevant, the necessary and the accidental. Let us take an example from Aristotle: "Example: someone is digging a trench for a plant and finds treasure. This finding of the treasure is an accident for the man who digs the trench. It is not the case that finding treasure necessarily comes from or after digging a trench, nor would one for the most part in doing some planting find treasure" (Aristotle, 2004: 1025a). Because of this accident, this individual became rich, began new activities and acquired new characteristics that now defined him. Any insignificant gesture can of course have a considerable consequence, and this we only know after the fact. But with regard to the singularity of the continuing volume, one must not forget that what it integrates in the course of moments and situations, even in an unexpected way, possibly nuancing its style (with its "potentialities"), will also be at least "informed" by it. The one who discovers a treasure certainly has his own way of finding it, losing it, enjoying it and changing his life after becoming rich. And the anthropologist asks: At moment  $t$ , how did the volume's potentialities absorb and integrate what happened? With how much strength? To what degree? And also: What escapes these various potentialities at this same moment  $t$ , and what will rebound on them, changing them even a little bit? And what will have no impact on these?

Aristotle wondered, "who, except the philosopher, is going to ask whether Socrates risen and Socrates seated is the same thing?" (Aristotle, 2004: 1004b). It is up to the anthropologist to do this. He therefore sets about observing the volume with its modalizing and modulating aptitudes, pinpointing what changes and what stays the

same in relations, affections, spatiotemporal positions and traces of events.

### *REMAINDRITY-LESSEREITY*

The principle of *remaindrity* concerns “remainders”, that is to say “a part, number, or quantity that is left over” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*)—I would say parts that have already been analyzed and clarified. Remainders are surplus or, put differently, the element that is left after subtraction or division. As for the verb “to remain”, the *Oxford Dictionary* says: “to continue to exist, especially after other similar people or things have ceased to do so”, as if remainders, that which is still and always present beyond that which has been removed, were always that which continues and also that which keeps the volume going.

What do we observe when an individual is with others in a so-called collective action? He is there, doing what is necessary, without much mental or physical effort, very often out of habit, with economical perception, varying according to the situation of course. Most human actions develop in a situation without requiring more than this from the people who are there: only the minimal integration behavior, I would say. It consists of expected actions that often reflect not so much their ongoing performance but rather the earlier intention or decision to perform them. At the same time, this intention or decision is self-evident, reflecting prior situations, as we have just seen. Very visible externally, the stratum of minimal integration behavior often intrudes little upon the immediate presence experienced by the person. These minimal behaviors are executed all the more lightly insofar as they are routines, linked to known rules or co-present objects and supports.

But precisely in addition to this stratum, the human presence also includes remainders, the volume of remainders. In fact, a close look at the minimal integration behavior in a single situation reveals that no two behaviors are really alike. There are of course different styles and social tendencies surrounding one same gesture, but more importantly, in parallel with the execution of the gesture there are remainders that are thus characterized because they do not jeopardize the minimum integration behavior (Piette, 2015 and 2016). These are gestures peripheral to the expected action and thoughts heterogeneous to it. They are also personalized, sometimes emotional evocations, stemming from what is being done or said, the

occasional feeling that an experience is unfulfilling, or even an impression of constraint, or a brief critical doubt about what is happening. The minimal integration behavior is highly visible to everyone, whereas remainders are often invisible to other individuals. Expected behaviors can be (though they are not always) less present in inner experiences than remainders, which are sometimes strongly self-perceived and felt (at least some of them) in the course of the action, though not enough to jeopardize the successful development of the situation. It means that the internal elements of the volume can emerge on the “face” to be saved and on the surface of the expected role.

The principle of *lessereity* specifies the “remainders” that reduce importance, relevance and stakes. These have the effect of diminishing the volume in the volume. Not all of the remainders in this volume can be easily distinguished as such. There are also a vagueness and incompleteness that insert themselves into the presence. In that case, lessereity concerns not only secondary layers of presence, but the whole presence in the action, of which slight distraction is only one element. This could be called minimal presence, indicating why the insertion behavior is said to be minimal. It is not knowing, not wanting to know. It is being docile even while leading a political revolution. It is not drawing conclusions, not imagining the implications of one’s actions, not accepting and even killing, suffering and continuing. One could say this is the everyday way of being, not only penetrated by things other than those that the situation concerns, but also consisting in not looking things straight in the face, minimizing them. To understand presence in an action, it is important not to separate activity and passivity. And we once again find the multiteity chart with the cognitive economy, docility, fluidity and distraction mentioned above.

I would also add forms of lessening of “logics of action”, making it so that actions said to be rational, communicational, practical, constraining (and others) do not really and completely have these qualities. Thus, a presence is more or less marked by this or that action logic and by forms of lessening. These are found: in implicitness or relegation to the background, where one stores, for example, the “social”, reasons for acting (Weber) and constraints (Durkheim); in fragmentation, that of the “social”, which does not manifest itself entirely or all at once; in what is unfelt or unperceived in the social; in the infiltration of remainders, such that

an interaction logic is never exclusive; and in the flaws in communication logic (for example, the limitation of rays). Let us call all of this lessereity: a backdrop with beings and objects peripheral to the principal action; distracting objects and beings perceived in the state of a detail; the unconscious part of the individual performing the action; wandering thoughts infiltrating the mind; a wavering attitude; hypolucidity in the face of what exists and what is happening; implicitness, fragmentation and incompleteness. This is analogous to the “reversibility” Hannah Arendt spoke of about forgiveness as a limitation on the principle of action consequences in *The Human Condition*. It would instead be a diffuse, provisional reversibility interfering with aspects of responsibility, coherence or motivation, and always enabling words or acts to be deferred, displaced, postponed, unclosed. It is a way of “unbinding oneself”, not thinking of the possible burdens that could be brought by action consequences, which are sometimes indefinite, sometimes infinite. Negation, the “not really”, lies at the heart of human presence and action. I think it is impossible to find humans without this “less”. It is like the very sign that there is a human in the situation or group, that there are individuals, that there are separate “each ones”. Because this is also what is meant by “the less”: that they are separate from one another, from the situation, that they are also turned in upon themselves, that they become withdrawn within themselves, in different ways.

In the objective of the anthropological science, it can be useful to list and define the different forms of lessereity:

*Absence-presence.* This designates a way of being present in a situation, while being elsewhere in a lesser way, through thoughts, looks or gestures, distracted by external things. One can distinguish occasional distraction, stimulated by contingent things, the borderline-distraction by which an individual presents himself in a situation as if he were still in previous situations or in other situations that will follow, or even the detachment that keeps us from really being into the situation, with an air of absence, a blank look in the eye. It is often these particularities that are designated by the idea of the minor mode.

- ❖ *Buffer.* This characterizes an action facilitated by the backdrop, which is made up of a set of objects and people, as well as other entities like animals or gods that are in a situation directly, or through various traces. They form a presence, which is not

that of the reference points or clues informing an action and certain gestures. They are there, peripheral to the main action, almost gratuitously, without making demands, constituting a kind of buffer between the act performed with the required attention and the situation.

- ❖ *Incompletion.* This can be found in acts and especially words that are not taken all the way in terms of their completion, their scope, their intrinsic nature. They stop, as if doing a U-turn, not completing, sometimes postponing. They do not conclude, they are not brought to a close. It is as if there were a pawl activating a reverse march, in any case a halt before the act or words continue.
- ❖ *Hesitation.* Whereas incompleteness designates an action that is not followed through, hesitation concerns an act or statement that hardly begins. There is a beginning, a hesitation, a kind of stammering. As if doubt had infiltrated at the beginning of the execution. As if the thought were having some trouble being expressed, or dared not be expressed, dwindling in its attempt at expression. The one who acts withdraws into himself, through his hesitant words or also through an excess of sometimes clumsy gestures without direct meaning.
- ❖ *Repetition.* The repetition of words or gestures, and their amplification at the same time, creates a kind of rhetoric enabling meanings and information to be set aside, as if the signifiers were more important and suspended a possible challenge. It creates a gap between the possible force of what is happening, of what is to be said, and the rhetoric that surrounds it and thus shifts the relevance of the message or act.
- ❖ *Suspension/interruption.* This arises when the action or statement, once completed, remains without consequences, does not have the effect that its contents or meaning would imply, as if a cut-off were created beyond a situation, as if, carried away by the fluidity of succeeding moments, what is said or done remained isolated at the moment of its execution, without any link to the acts that follow and continue.



- ❖ *Fluidity*. This indicates everyone's ability to continue from one situation to another, to switch from one action to another, including between situations regulated by different, even contradictory principles. This implies, from moment to moment, withdrawing almost naturally, even just a little, from what is happening, from one's role, and this without any critical intention. Not really being, independently of infiltrations by other things: the presence is thus immediately held back, de-intensified. This self-control of the human facilitates the movement between situations. It also enables a kind of diffuse tolerance of what is out of harmony within a situation.
- ❖ *Play*. In this case, humans introduce an explicit distance into their role, into the action they are performing, as if they did not want their identity to coincide with the gesture or statement. Like a child who pretends to be a cowboy, everyone can take a more or less pronounced distance of dis-identity in relation to the expected role. It is in this distance that we find humor, irony, certain forms of duplicity and sometimes an excess that itself indicates a distance. These forms of performance are numerous throughout the various moments of the day.
- ❖ *Hypolucidity*. This is the term that I have used to designate the human way of being in a state of non-consciousness, or at least keeping below the minimal level of lucidity, a way of shutting one's eyes and not seeing, not knowing, not wanting to know, being indifferent, not examining the challenges and consequences of what is happening. Lucidity, knowledge, consciousness and sensitivity are as if prevented from being sharpened and focusing on a thing, an element, an event.
- ❖ *Implicitation*. This consists in making things implicit, placing them in the background. They are still there, hinted at, holding, solidifying, structuring the action in progress in a way that is not made explicit, but they are capable of springing up if a problem arises. Usually rules, codes, constraints, reasons for acting are in an implicit state, but are nevertheless operational.

- ❖ *Oblivion.* Time, with its succession of instants, moments and situations is an ineluctable fact that one cannot escape. It is almost natural the way time generates oblivion, causing one to forget things—those which would not have been forgotten immediately –, the way it attenuates impacts—those of emotions that would not have been quickly tempered.
- ❖ *Habit.* This is another effect of time, turning concentrations of first times into routines, automatic gestures that do not require attention, mastery or vigilance, that allow one not to think, not to verify everything, to trust and rely on the situation's various supports, to thus create a flexible rhythm in the succession of actions and thoughts.
- ❖ *Docility.* This indicates acceptance of what is found or what happens in a situation, without there being any desire for change. Docility is associated with parsimonious use of energy, with a minimal perception of things, also with a routinized, implicit use of various rules, reference points and signs, which can facilitate a withdrawal of attention.

We see how lessereity not only concerns the distracted attention and absence-presence of humans. It expresses the particularity and singularity of each one of them, irreducible to the collective, shared concern of the situation. But it also expresses incompleteness and withdrawal consubstantial with the separation of bodies: a form of renouncement (one renounces because one knows one cannot get to the end of the space that separates), a form of distance (in relation to the others, who do not really listen to one, or in order to protect oneself from absorption), a form of indifference (to the failure of the incomplete link, in order to soften it). I think that it is impossible to thoroughly detail these “lesses” if one looks at a whole, a group, an interaction.

These remarks suggesting a strong demand for description imply a critical point of view with regard to certain anthropologies. I am thinking, among others, of those of Tim Ingold (specifically his work of the past few years) and also of Michael Jackson (for instance, 2016). They are very characteristic of an oscillatory thought and writing. I do not believe that thought and writing which insist on oscillations between polarities and dichotomies, for example between individual and society, subjective and objective,

singular and plural (or others), can express the complexity of a volume. Not only because the poles of a single opposition do not necessarily have the same ontological status, but also, by claiming, through these oscillatory plays, to show a kind of empathetic respect for encountered experiences and for various forms of relation, one no longer says much about units. I therefore prefer additive writing and thought that, beginning with one pole—the human volume—consists in adding, qualifying and modalizing, with an infinite number of clarifications and details.

#### *CONCLUSION: ANTHROPO-ANALYSIS*

Several years ago, I attributed the term “phenomenography” to the empirical approach that aims to observe and describe individual humans, because I saw “ethnography” as designating the search for the “shared” or the “inter”, of people themselves but also of the observer with them. The meaning I give to “phenomenography” is twofold: it is a written description of an existence as it appears, and a written description of an existence as it is lived, a “graphic inscription of phenomena”, to use the words of Robert Desjarlais (2015: 199), which can be possible with filmed or photographed images, but also with the precision of detailed writing. And this can be done without necessarily emphasizing the intersubjective component of the research, as this is often denoted in anthropology. On the one hand, it is an observation in the strict sense, but focused on one individual (at a time) in his succession of moments, ideally in the context of a preliminary analysis, with the goal of exhausting reality (even if this is of course impossible). On the other hand, since a human volume is not an atom or a stone, the observation should be supplemented by in-depth analyzes of moments, with a view to describing the states of mind, the feelings, the moods, the desires that predispose to certain actions, the thoughts and also the peripheral mental images. In this way, the external observation is supplemented by the individuals’ own detailed description of their action. The researcher can use the method of explicitation (Vermersch, 1999). It assumes that the person can access a “concrete memory”, not as a result of a conscious, considered effort, but almost involuntarily so that they can then describe actions, gestures and perceptions—those directly relevant to the situation as well as other subsidiary perceptions. It is up to the phenomenographer to solicit this description, to ask questions and trigger memories, for example

through photo or film images, which constitute an exceptional resource that helps make people aware that they were not aware. Of course, no account is complete, but the aim is to learn “things” about how individuals are present and absent when they are with others.

The anthropologist watches, dissecting voluntary rays and involuntary signs that are hardly perceived, inner states, feelings. One speaks of “being analyzed, being in analysis” to describe the work of psychoanalysis. One could speak of “being anthropologized” in reference to anthropologists of existence, who could be asked to conduct an anthropo-analysis. The anthropologist wants to lose as little as possible of his observation subject’s singularity, and is prepared to test all possible methodologies. Furthermore, writing and describing each subject’s details satisfies an ethical requirement, that of an ethics of volume: it expresses itself in how one sees, in how one take notes and writes, in the details. This requires learning forms of detachment and withdrawal. It is also at this price—that there should be note-takers—that an anthropological science, a science of humans, becomes possible.

### *Notes*

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