

To Lose or Not to Lose the Human Being

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Anthropology of the human being: a reversal operation

The idea of being-in-the-world—so deeply rooted in the philosophy of recent decades that it has permeated them considerably—sums up much of the thought in the social sciences, in its various expressions and tones: situated being, social being, relational being, being with. These expressions consume a lot of attention, thought and theory, because what seems most relevant in being-in-the-world is either the “in” or its variants (with), or the world, the environment, nature, other people, rather than the person who is there. It is as if he had been

sucked up, as if attention were directed, on the one hand, to his link, his attachment, his connection to the world, his actions in, his experiences of, his relations with, his subjectification by; and on the other hand, to the world itself, whether it be a situation, society or culture. In any case, he is lost as a unit or entity, as has frankly been the case since the human and social sciences came into existence.

My argument is in debate with the empirical tradition of anthropology, but not with its philosophical tradition. Throughout its history, empirical anthropology has kept repeating that it examines human beings, but at the same time it is ceaselessly turning away from them, directing its analysis at collective entities (culture, society, institutions, representations), or at human fragments (actions, experiences, relations, cognitions, etc.), which are apprehended together, usually from the perspective of their belonging to a culture or in specific social situations, or more rarely at a single human being, who is observed in order to better understand social or cultural phenomena. These are the various degrees to which the human being is diluted.

It seems to me that “existential anthropology” could be the ideal name to indicate the anthropological reversal that consists in regarding these various themes as secondary (including actions, relations and experiences) and focusing first and foremost on existing human beings, this or that one, in their “entirety”. The name would be all the more ideal if it were spelled “existantial anthropology”, to clearly indicate that it concerns existents and not



other things. It is much more than a new name because I intend for it to be the ambition of anthropology. In my view, it is possible and even essential to create an existential anthropology, without reference to Heidegger, Sartre or any other philosopher, and also without working on themes regarded as existential (time, suffering, death, critical situations) [1]. I see this existential anthropology as the aim of empirical anthropology: to escape its social and cultural tradition centered on social phenomena, to avoid observing only parts of the human being and to fulfill its ambition: the human being as scale of the anthropology, for himself and not to understand other things. It is the anthropological reversal.

Fulfilling anthropology's ambition means attempting an "absolute": human beings for their own sake, as humans.

On the French word "absolu", Lalande writes that it «comes from absolvere, in its two very distinct meanings: on the one hand to unbind, release, emancipate, and on the other hand to complete, to perfect. Absolutus always has the latter meaning» (Lalande 2009: 7). This is not quite accurate, because in Latin grammar, the ablative absolute designates a proposition detached from the sentence. It is a participial form detached from the syntax of the sentence, designating (usually in a condensed form) a circumstance of the principal idea expressed, declined in ablative, a case of the Latin declensions. In mathematics for example, the absolute value of a number is independent of the sign (positive or negative). Incidentally, both meanings are

interesting. Absolute anthropology detaches the human being, thus setting itself up as a discipline that is independent, distinct and radical in its aim to explore the human being as an entire, continuous volume. Perfect and complete it is not, but it would like to tend asymptotically towards the person it places before its eyes. In so doing, anthropology almost takes the human being outside of his relations and the representations that one can have, particularly those associated with that difference between the West and other places, which have guided the history of the anthropological tradition and most of its interpretation modalities. What was and still is the first principle of anthropology – cultural diversity – is thus replaced by the absolute constituted by the human being placed before the observer, whose presence is inseparable from a more or less diffuse, more or less felt, more or less explicit kind of consciousness of his continuous existence. Compared to other beings that have a presence in the social sciences (institutions, collective systems, cultures, gods, situations, actions, experiences), the human is a less "non-absolute" being, the one that all others depend on, if I may say so. It is almost comical to imagine an action without a complete volume performing it. In anthropology, the human being would be the nominative absolute, not detached from the rest of the sentence but extracted from it, while remaining connected to it by a thread.



What is a volume of being?

There are many conceptual possibilities available to someone attempting to understand the human being. It seems to me that the idea of a volume is powerful if the aim is to clarify this anthropological reversal and consider the human unit placed before the observer. In this idea, the reality-volume that a human being constitutes, and that could be identified by a specialist in geometry, stands alongside the concept-volume, that is to say a representation with a set of characteristics, as I have defined it in my discipline – anthropology. It is not a matter of considering whether or not the human feels like a volume. It is a primarily “etic” concept, as we say in anthropology. In every part of the world, all humans are of course volumes regardless of whether or not they are viewed by themselves or others as individuals or persons. My use of the word “volume” results from a mixture between what constitutes a volume in everyday language – the fact that a human being is really a volume – and its anthropological explanation. I mean to say that this representation of a human as a volume is not independent of what is implied in the commonly accepted notion of volume, but at the same time, this anthropological representation extracts characteristics that it considers central.



The volume is the unit that emerges against the backdrop of a context that has become secondary. It is he that I would like to set up as an object of observation, along with his components, always related to this unit. The human volume is thus the anthropologist's scale, through his more or less simultaneous components (for example, an emotion, moods, an action, a thought, a know-how, habits) and his details, each of which is only one element of the whole. Presenting the human being as a volume makes it possible to explore or interconnect various dimensions without undoing the volumic unit, some dimensions remaining implicit, others being the subjects of the fragmented analyses of certain disciplines, or also of the tradition of anthropology. This is one stake of the idea of volume: laying the foundations for a theoretical gesture capable of unifying the human being and, in so doing, specifying what I believe should be the anthropologist's work: human beings themselves. This term “volume”, applied to human beings and inviting consideration of its relevance, also indicates that it is not enough to say that there are individuals, and even less adequate to posit their irreducibility and transcendence in relation to social life.

The volume is not just a way of representing or conceptualizing the human being. Because, as I have said, the human being is a volume, everyone is one, a different one. Everyone is totally a volume, even though everyone is only partially consciousness, subjectivity, intention, relation, action. This is what the volume is intended to describe, encouraging us to always go beyond a perspective that is immediately too narrow. By choosing this or that axis, one does not see the elements that do not correspond with it, those which cannot be integrated into

the chosen point of view. There are always leftovers in the volume, leftovers from each of the axes, and even from various axes combined. These leftovers, and leftovers of leftovers, are central to the volume's presence and continuity.

Then what is a volume of being? The volume constituted by the human unit, by this or that individual, is a unified whole with consistency and a surface or envelope with all it contains. On this subject, the word "volume" presents a broad lexical field, which is interesting. A volume was originally a «set of manuscript sheets glued side-by-side and rolled around a rod». Other meanings were added: all of the notebooks joined by binding, the «quantity of material or text needed to constitute a volume»; a book, a written work. Roll, rolling, rod and binding indicate ways of holding the volume and giving it unity. The contents of the volume are sheets, rolls and texts. 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 can contain solids, liquids or gas, but what interests the anthropologist are other components. They are visible or invisible, acts, gestures, speeches, perceptions, thoughts, mental images, emotions, moods, desires, experiences, social or cultural habits, style, with different intensities. Thus, the observers focus on one volume, at a time, in the continuity of moments and situations. They focus not only on what appears at the surface of this volume, what is visible, but also what it contains, and they describe the successive combinations of these components in the volume. Insofar as he contains various visible, invisible, inner and outer elements, as he makes gestures and has thoughts, insofar as he moves around, the volume constitutes a singular perceptible unit, which it is possible to circumscribe, beyond his roles and activities, having a set of changes, without this empirical unit being called into question, without him ceasing to be recognized or experienced as such. I believe also 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 for instance by the notions of subject and person: being too often conceived in terms of social construction or cultural categorization.

Another point should be made. The volumic unit is a separate unit. 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. When faced with conjoined twins that came into being as a result of an accident in the embryonic process, the feeling of observing a curiosity, a deviation in relation to the internal cohesion of life reminds us that a common denominator of human beings and many other living beings is the separation of bodies. When detected, conjoined twins are often aborted, as if it were "quite natural" that human being should be units separate from one another.

Separation need not imply that the volume does not move towards others. It is even the separation itself that makes this movement possible. The volume is a separate entity but it is not a closed entity. However, the space that separation necessarily creates between volumes causes me to wonder about the relevance of thinking in terms of links, interactions and interconnecting lines. With the impossibility of merger or annexation between volumes separated by empty spaces, relations can only be attempts at contact. Do we need to speak of relations? In Latin, *relatum* is the past participle of two verbs. It is the first of the two 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.



The volume is thus the observational focus. A human being can be presented as a presence sending and receiving rays. 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. Actions are not independent of their carriers since it is they who perform them, but their concrete performance is not absolutely determined by the elements which are relevant in the situation. The 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. There is always a place for details, remainders. But importantly, these actions and their details are also characterized by other components of the volume, his dispositions, his habits and his own style. The fact remains that, in gestural acts and modalities, and also in the words and thoughts of a volume, the emergence of something “new” is not so obvious, given that the actions of the volume are most often adapted to the situation, and, in any case, depend on his other components, for example his social habits and personal style, which have accumulated over the course of time and are more or less stabilized.

The separate human volume has also the possibility to receive foreign elements. In the form of an emotion, disposition or thought, he integrates effects and traces of presences, gestures, words and events. It is an important point: the volume receives and integrates actions of others, but partially and obliquely. I like to recall Ralph Waldo Emerson’s

analogous thoughts in his essay “Experience” (1883). He writes that «the soul is not twinborn but the only begotten», «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».

In light of the focus on volume, relations all the more clearly appear to be something incomplete, certainly not a line that links and interconnects, since everyone is separate and also different. Therefore, from an anthropology centered on the human unit, what needs to be described is not the line or the “between”, but rather the moment of departure or arrival, as well as the ways in which what is sent and received is issued and integrated or 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 received in different ways by the volume. They might be immediately forgotten, or get buried in the volume, with the possibility of looming up later. They can also suddenly become an object of thought and rumination, or trigger an immediate act, gesture, or a verbal response; or they can generate a longer cycle of interconnecting thoughts or acts and maybe a new state with new rhythms and new habits. Something arises in a situation, and it can be taken up by the human volume 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. Observing a human volume therefore also means observing the presence of traces, which are “blunted” to varying degrees compared to the initial signs or events (sometimes repeated), and also observing their mixture with, and absorption into, other traces in this volume. This is how the separate, unclosed volumic unit fills with various layers.

The volume is not only a multiplicity of roles or actions but also a “coherent” continuity crossing and permeating these, based on a body, gestures and cognitive abilities that become stabilized in the course of existence. He is a unified whole with a consistency. 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. 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 his way of being tall or intelligent, 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.

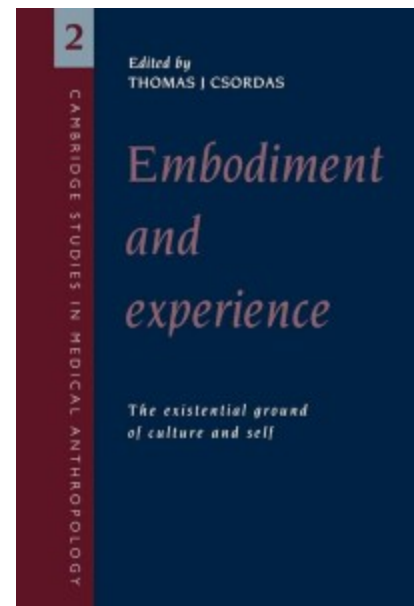
And when observing the qualities and acts of a volume of being in the process of moving from one place to another, it is also difficult to separate out the relevant, the necessary and the accidental. Let us take an example from Aristotle: «Example: someone is digging a trench for a plant and finds treasure. 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 and style 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 "potentialities", will also be at least in-formed by them. 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?

Ways of losing the human being

The presentation of the human being as a volume, as an entirety detached from his surrounding contextual backdrop, is useful precisely for understanding my discomfort with regard to certain anthropological interpretations, since it challenges analyses presented in terms of cultures, groups and representations, and focuses on subjectivities. Considering the individual as a volume has theoretical consequences that are not necessarily present in the sole notion of the individual or that of existence. I consider these consequences to be all the more important for associating anthropology with a specific object, the human entity. Focusing on the volume highlights the risk of excessive "openingization" and "relationization" of the individual, which would dilute him by presenting him as escaping from himself or in relation with his surroundings.

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, from the entity itself.

Some anthropologists might indeed raise the objection that they no longer examine cultures, that they work on action, activity, experience, subjectivity, etc. But from there, I think it is ultimately social facts and collective phenomena that interest them. Various areas of research—I am thinking for example of phenomenological anthropology or existential anthropology—are marked by these focuses. But, in my view, they ultimately lost the human volume, in different ways, which can add up. First, the volume can be lost in his unity, in favour of certain parts or fragments, such as the body, subjectivity, perception, the capacity to act, the experience of something in particular (illness for example). In this case, the volume is most often studied in light of not social and cultural determinations in the strict sense, but social situations and specific contexts. The volume can also be lost by analyses focusing on his relations to others and to the world in general (symptomatic of this is the notion of being-in-the-world) and in these descriptions, he is often grouped with other volumes. There is also the risk of absorbing the volume into the emphasis on the researcher's relationships and experiences with the observed people. Finally, there is the risk of losing the human volume because the descriptive objective and the level of detail are sometimes questionable, not really "holding" the volume himself. Thus, their way of understanding reflects the history of social and cultural anthropology, giving precedence to intersubjectivities, interactions, language, narratives and cultural models, that is to say social phenomena (see a recent overview: Ram and Houston, 2015; and less recently: Csordas, 1997). What almost naturally follows are focuses on more or less psychological parts of humans, related and grouped into cultural contexts. For example, 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). Husserl viewed anthropology as a "philosophical underestimation", and believed that «philosophy and phenomenology can achieve more» (Blumemberg 2011: 46). Is it not the case that much of phenomenology examines "essences" based on examples detached from contingent details and concrete situations? Moreover, Husserl tends to purify his examples, in accordance with a procedure that is not empirical but "eidetic", favoring intuitive data, and also including imagined cases, with the goal of removing the vagueness, impurity or factual contingencies of examples from life (Vermersch 1999). When drawing inspiration from the



phenomenological tradition, it is difficult for anthropology, even empirical, to completely free itself of this kind of positioning on the status of human beings and details. In any case, the debate can be launched.

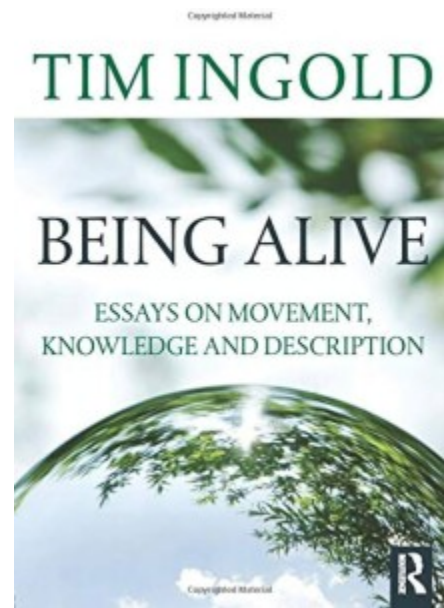
I would thus more generally extend my criticism of anthropology inspired by phenomenology to works of phenomenological psychiatry, sometimes associated with daseinanalysis, also known as existential anthropology (in the tradition of Binswanger), which is presented «as anthropology and not as psychology precisely because it explores the human being in his totality and not only the human psyche» (Cargnello 2016: 148). Often structured around first-person data, the study of individual cases is still quite dependent on the priority given to the intersubjective being in his openness to the world and his projection of himself into this, and does not really get beyond its focus on the patient's psychological experience. In contrast, the idea of the volume encourages a focus on the material reality of the human being, and then an inclusion (as complete as possible) of the variety of outer and inner "sheets" that he manifests and contains, with the goal of making comparisons and ultimately reflecting on anthropological difference.



Observation of the volume in his entirety confronts many leftovers that lessen or nuance what would be considered a mode, a modality, a logic. This does not accord with the thought of Binswanger, who aims to study the "man-being" "without leftovers", based on a specific mode of existence that he considers relevant (Binswanger 2000: 311). As I have said, there are always leftovers, even after adding different modes of action, presence or existence. Before the observer, the circumscribed reality of the existing, continuing volume never stops recalling the infinite number of these leftovers, and that strictly speaking, experience is always "more" and "less", and – as we will see later – especially "less" than a mode (or a logic of action). All of this reinforces my idea that this anthropology of volumes is more clearly and unambiguously identified if it is presented not only as an existential (even with an "a") anthropology, but also as a radical existantism, which I prefer writing with an "a" to establish the clarification I have in mind.

Not unconnected with phenomenology and the notion of being-in-the-world, Tim Ingold's explorations bring the dilution of the human unit to a certain climax, through a quite marked relationist anchoring, which the theory of the volume is partly intended to resist. In reality, added to the problem of the phenomenological option is the ecological perspective and the very definition of ecology as the science of organisms' relations with the outer world. 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

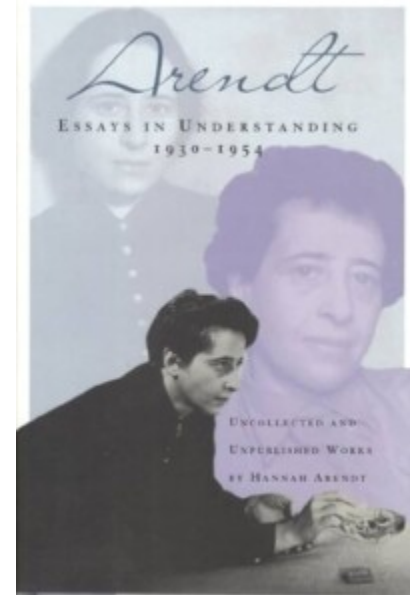
not live inside their bodies, but are in a «continuous exchange of materials through layers of constantly extending and mutating skin» (ibid.: 10). There are not individuals on the one hand and an environment external to them on the other, but «an indivisible totality» (ibid.: 28) and an uninterrupted 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). 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). I would say that on the contrary, volumes are well “defined”. Each one is even a unified “block”.



One could also object that individuals are sometimes chosen as direct themes of observation and analysis in social anthropology. I am thinking for instance – I could cite many examples – about research by Biehl (2005) on Catarina, by Crapanzano (1980) on Tuhami, by Wikan (1990) on Suriati or about a set of works claiming a person-centered perspective. However, as Jan Patrick Heiss has explained very well (2015 : 241-251), when one individual is chosen as the unit of research, it is not to examine the unit itself, but rather to understand a psychological state, an experience, a collective situation, a social becoming (for example based on long-term comparisons), modes of subjectification, or also the specificity of the ordinary, and even a society or a culture, that is to say social or cultural phenomena that he exemplifies (see also 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. Similarly, it seems to me that the life story method, often practiced in social anthropology, does not provide the heuristic shift of a focused observation of one individual, particularly given that it is used in pursuit of objectives other than the human being himself: a way of life, a social transformation, a cultural practice.

For the anthropologist, it is a very important matter of thinking about and basing one's thought on the individual (for example, Rapport 2003 and 2015), but with a requirement that is implied by the focus on the human volume: not only to radicalize this gesture, take it as far

as it can go, avoid diluting it through shifts of scale, but also not to insert it into one ideological or philosophical point of view (of one particular author rather than another) that would guide it too strongly, thus restricting the observation and analysis. Whether the chosen author be Sartre, Levinas, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard or someone else, and whatever the asserted starting lines, the volume, who continuously moves from one situation to another, encourages one to complete, nuance, add and subtract. Reading Hannah Arendt's (1954) reflections on the philosophies of existence can convince one to focus on existence (and therefore on the individual), but also to adapt the anthropologies underlying the work of the philosophers I have mentioned (or others) as combinable tools that can be used to describe successive and even simultaneous modes of individual presence. Existence is that of an individual as an empirical unit, whose various moments and situations justify not soliciting restrictive definitions of existence. This is a criticism I would direct at anthropologies presenting individuals in only Nietzschean, only Sartrean, or only Levinassian terms, at a level that is less micrological than the one I wish to emphasize. When indeed are individuals really Levinassian, Sartrean or Nietzschean in the course of their activities? A few minutes a day, I might say?

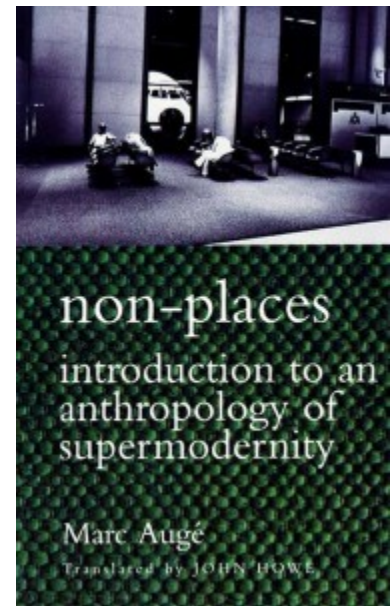


One could of course raise another objection, that social anthropologists are in the habit of emphasizing individuals at the methodological level. This is a key point often mentioned as a characteristic of ethnographic expertise, one that is a feature of other disciplines. I would say that in this form of methodological relationism, individuals are methodological people (Piette, 2016: 37-38). It is as if in this case, the relation with a certain person, or with people in general, were an important point for knowledge and understanding, but it is the knowledge and understanding of sociocultural phenomena (see also Heiss & Piette 2015).

Fundamentally, I cannot bring myself to subscribe to the fairly widespread idea, described by Marc Augé, that «the concrete in anthropology is the opposite of the definition of the concrete accepted by certain schools of sociological thought: something to be seen in terms of orders of magnitude from which all individual variables are eliminated» (Augé 2009: 20). I am well aware that many anthropologists have strongly criticized what I have called cultural ethnography – many more in the US than in France. Lila Abu-Lughod goes as far as to write that an ethnography of individuals «would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness» (Abu-Lughod 1991: 154). Of course, but what is practiced instead? Usually an interactional ethnography. What does one see? Abu-Lughod says that: «individuals are confronted with choices, struggle with others, make conflicting statements, argue about points of view on the same events, undergo ups and downs in various relationships [...]» (ibid.). And the same goes for actions,

interactions and social life. This cannot help but to radically unseat anthropology from its foundation, «the historically constructed divide between the West and the non- West», as she herself wrote. There is indeed a maximum ambition asserted by anthropology that tends towards the individual and the human being, but anthropology has never really dared to reach it except through various which often lose him or dilute him: homogenisation, fragmentation, filtering, circumventing, and methodologisation.

For me, the aim of existential anthropology could be to preserve the human being from the beginning to the end of the research process, without getting lost in the various ways of observing him with others, in connection with others, in interpretations that emphasize his relational and intersubjective composition, in explanations that involve jumping to a different scale, for example those of social sciences which want to understand social phenomena. The issue is simple: there is a gulf separating, on the one hand, the observation and knowledge of individuals taken separately in the continuity of their existence and, on the other hand, the observation and knowledge of individuals taken together and fragmented. It is in this gulf that anthropology would need to root itself. The human volume is the anthropological scale.



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[*] Abstract

Albert Piette nota in questo scritto – che è il testo di una conferenza tenuta al simposio “Human assistance as fieldwork” presso l’Università degli Studi di Palermo (6-7 dicembre 2017) – che l’essere umano come entità singolare si perde o si diluisce nell’antropologia, la cui tradizione storica si concentra sullo studio delle relazioni sociali. Questo è anche il caso degli approcci fenomenologici o centrati sulla persona. L’autore propone la nozione di ‘volume’ dell’essere per avvicinarsi il più possibile alla singolarità di ogni essere. Piette ha continuato a sviluppare questa nozione. Più precisamente, in connessione con la geometria, il volume designa una figura tridimensionale, con una superficie, il suo involucro e un interno, il suo contenuto, i suoi componenti. L’idea di volume indica l’unità empirica che costituisce l’essere umano nella sua totalità separata, con il suo bordo liberato da un contesto divenuto secondario. Comprendere un individuo come volume dell’essere implica integrare in ogni momento le sue diverse componenti come interconnesse, senza frammentare l’intero volume. Quindi il volume dell’essere è il volume dell’essere, di un essere, con il suo bordo costante, ed è anche un volume dell’essere, con i dettagli, la consistenza, la mobilità e la stabilità di ciò che lo costituisce.

Note

[1] In French, I would say: «les thématiques considérées comme existentielles».

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