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VOLUMOLOGY AS EXISTENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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As was said in the general introduction, the uniqueness of existents and their way of being in time are, almost by definition, points of reference and themes favoured by philosophies of existence. But from an empirical and methodological point of view, is it so obvious to observe and describe an individual in his details if he is also considered a "being-ahead-of-oneself-already-being-inthe-world" (Heidegger 2010, 192), sometimes a "non-being" (p. 176) in "a mode of groundless floating" (p. 177), or in his "subservience to others" (p. 126), especially if it is recommended not to look at "present 'attributes' of an objectively present being which has such and such an 'outward appearance" (p. 42)? Likewise, is there really an invitation to look at a human being when the existent is rejected as "a stable substance which rests in itself" and presented as "a perpetual disequilibrium, a wrenching away from itself with all its body" (Sartre 1963, 151), "always outside of himself [...] in projecting and losing himself beyond himself" (Sartre 2007, 52)? When Sartre adds that "my intimate discovery of myself is at the same time a revelation of the other as a freedom that confronts my own" and that this means we discover "a world that we may call 'intersubjectivity'" (pp. 41-42), are we also led to watch not only one human being in his radical singularity, but also at the same time those that surround him, that is to say relations in a situation and a historical context? Likewise, is it not difficult—maybe even illegitimate—to look at an individual who is not understood as a "real unity" but always "indivisibly demolished and remade by the course of time" (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 255), whose body "is not where it is, nor what it is" (p. 229)? Finally, is it relevant to observe and describe an individual when it is thought that seeing "a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin" is reductive and that "the best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes" (Levinas 1982, 85)? Starting from these ideas, there is a constant risk of bypassing the entity himself, which each existent constitutes, of not really looking at him, not wanting to look at him or looking at him alongside others, almost swallowed up by his contextual situation. Though one sometimes gets close to him, one immediately turns away.² For the social sciences, it was almost easy to retain this hesitation especially, to rush into it, finding themes that were intrinsic to them: for example, Sartrean intersubjectivity, Levinasian responsibility towards others or the Heideggerian dwelling.

It is to avoid these difficulties that I will view an individual as a distinct entity, with a clear, firm and constant edge.³ This is the point of departure of my reasoning, based on which I will offer a conceptual solution making possible a detailed look at each human being, without going

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beyond that individual. Such a way of looking could be a radical aim of existential anthropology that would be specific to it: the human existent, as a singular unity, in his structure as an entity, and not primarily as a being in the world with others. Such an anthropology would pursue its objective by positioning itself as a critic of, and alternative to, the social sciences and ethnographic methodology. The question of this chapter can be formulated in this way: how does a human being—who lives with others in an intersubjective world, in the process of projecting himself in time, who always seems to be overflowing himself, even wrenching away from himself—succeed in holding together, in maintaining himself, in being held together? There is no moral or anatomic connotation in these verbs. I posit them as a necessity of existence. The notion of the volume of being will serve as my guiding thread. It will be associated with a set of characteristics, which I will call "existentials".

Focus on the existent as a volume of being

With its lexical field, the notion of volume presents a set of important heuristic points.⁵ In geometry, "volume" designates a three-dimensional figure, with a container and contents, that is to say a depth and a certain consistency. Likewise, a human entity conceived as a volume of being presents himself with his boundary perceptible by others. That which is considered the volume of being is nevertheless not the living organism. Though rooted in the organism's boundaries, it does not include the lungs, heart or muscles, nor viruses or bacteria, but rather a set of components, those that are of interest to the human and social sciences: actions, gestures, words, emotions, moods, thoughts, sensations, memories, social roles, social or cultural markers and distinctive stylistic traits. These components constituting the volume of being have the possibility of different expressions and contents (for more details, Piette 2019).

On the one hand, the idea of volume, thus conceived, helps focus attention directly on the empirical unit constituted by a human being in his entirety, separate and detached like a figure from its contextual background. And on the other hand, presenting and describing an individual as such a volume of being implies integrating, at every moment, these various components as interlinked, 6 without getting rid of the volumic entirety; some of them are often subjects of fragmented analyses according to various research themes. In that case, the existential argument for looking at a human entity is not just the fact that this entity is irreducible to society because of his freedom, subjectivity, interiority or moral autonomy. It is the entity in his volume that becomes primary, something that is not associated only with a role, activity, experience or emotion. It is a matter of favouring an existentism⁷ that specifically proposes to look at a human existent as a volume of being, frontally and without any detour. In anthropology, the phenomenological reduction primarily consists of a "practical relativism" (Jackson 1996, 10; Throop 2018), a kind of suspension of prejudices to better discover the wide range of social and cultural situations as they are experienced by individuals, giving a lot of weight to contexts of description and analysis. Conversely, the existential reduction consists in extricating the individual from all that surrounds him, that is to say from other people, from objects, from the situation in general.8 This situation becomes as if blurred, in order to favour a radical astonishment at the human entity in himself, and at what constitutes him.

It then becomes almost astonishing to (re)discover a human existent as a unity with a certain continuity and with his decipherable singularity. That entity imposes himself on the observer who stands before him and is independent of him. This is not to say that a human being is a thing. He not only moves (this is obvious) but also has a certain constancy, and this movement, as we will see, is not a movement outside of the entity. The question outlined above becomes more

specific: how can a human entity, who is an open, evolving system, remain this volume of being? I do not tautologically answer that he is in relation, in intersubjectivity, in excess or in separation, but I wonder how such a "problematic" being manages to retain a certain singularity and continue. What are the conditions—not biological or organic, but existential—of this singularity and this stability, without which a human being would not exist? They answer Blumenberg's question: "how is man only able to exist?" (Blumenberg (2011, 214).

Existentials as a way of structuring the volume of being

I would say that these conditions are "existentials". An "existential" is here freely defined as a characteristic intrinsic to each human existent. Each existential corresponds to a specific type of structuring of the volume of being, and with a mode of articulation between his components. It is possible to say that through their reciprocal dynamic, these existentials form an "existential system"—even if this expression might appear paradoxical. It is indeed together that they enable the entity that the volume constitutes to maintain himself as such in his social life. It is also together that their heuristic force must be considered, with the aim of urging the eyes to stop on one human being, to follow him in the course of moments, to describe him in his detail, based on the most precise methods possible. With a view to clarity, I am choosing to focus my presentation on these conceptual tools, 11 and to occasionally refer to endnotes.

The first existential is "relateity", posited in contrast with relation. I link it to relatum, the supine of the Latin verb referre, which means returning towards oneself, carrying a thing to the point from which it departed. While the notion of relation conceives actions with and towards other individuals, relateity specifically attempts to conceive what it means to "hold together" as an entity, with the elements that constitute it, when it is also "in relation". Contrary to biological and anatomical parts that can be removed, exchanged or given, the components in question here are not themselves separable from the volume, neither as container (the capacity for memory, action or emotion), nor as contents (memories, types of actions, of emotions). Depending on the situation, they are of course activated or not, able to remain either in a potential state or buried. What may seem obvious deserves to be thought through firmly, with its consequences. No one can observe an action, emotion or gesture circulating outside of its entity. Each of these is of its volume, is attached to it, and stays there, no matter what echoes or traces an act allows and leaves in other volumes. A volume of being is also different from social systems. Because unlike the parts of these (individuals, various objects), which are mobile and separable from the social system, an action, gesture or emotion, as components of the volume, have no objective autonomy. The volume of being is therefore a structure—let us say a universal one—that does not allow his components to leave (they are retained in it), but only to express themselves and to succeed one another. Thus, a volume cannot literally exchange an emotion with another volume.12

Therefore, when a volume of being does, feels or says, he also shows that his actions, feelings or words are attached to himself, as if retained by the entity. This applies just as much, and according to the same principle, to the selfish, timorous or modest as to the altruistic, powerful or open to change, influences and emotions. This is why in a certain way, relateity tightens the volume, since as soon as he does, feels or says, the acts are retained, not escaping him. In short, it is difficult to separate actions, experiences and emotions from the volumes of being that carry them, with their other characteristics. Making them come out of the volume—"dividualising" them, as often happens in descriptions that aim at an element in particular by extracting it from the entity—means placing or re-placing the entity itself in the background.¹³

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Thus conceived, relateity is a form of intrinsic attenuation of relational movements between volumes of being. But this does not imply that there is not a kind of permeability between them and with what is happening. In fact, words and actions, even if they do not escape the volume of being, are not without effects on himself or others. This is where lessereity, as capacity for detachment, enables new adjustments.¹⁴ Linked with relateity, it is the second existential. It is a diffuse detachment, not an intentional or deliberate one, as in Goffman's interactionism, according to which distance from a role remains a role that either is addressed to others or-if it causes embarrassment—needs to be managed in interactions (Goffman 1974, Chapters 7 and 10). Based on the particularities of the volume of being, with variable intensities and impacts, lessereity makes it possible to filter, to forget, to not (or no longer) think about something, to not be conscious or lucid, to be present with a certain absence, to habituate oneself and thus to soften the impact of these traces. With its various expressions—which, at almost every moment, are possible to observe (but cannot be further explored here)—lessereity regulates the impacts of actions, emotions or thoughts. Lessereity can be understood as an operational principle of the entity himself, because he is an entity, a separate unity, and cannot be otherwise, no matter what he does and thinks. This being the case, lessereity is an existential that protects the volume of being and his singularity.¹⁵ It is not a way of closing the volume in the strict sense, but to contain his components in the face of what happens.

A new question follows: below the inescapability of the entity's components and their regulation by lessereity, how are they linked within him? An answer can be found in density and consistency. Both are characterised by specific modes of articulations between components. The density of a volume of being—the third existential—operates according to two registers: on the one hand according to the degrees of intensity and weight of his components, regulated by lessereity and generating a volume-filling effect that varies in strength; on the other hand according to the number of components, with their links in the volume of being, when they are used simultaneously at a given moment of presence (an action, thought, mood, emotion, word, social role, sociocultural markers etc.). The components of the volume of being thus find themselves in different, more or less "tightening" forms of connection. This is particularly the case when a given component has another component for "direction": for example, thought, speech, emotions and feelings are directed at the action in progress; consciousness takes as its explicit object a particular gesture, role, social determinant or emotion; likewise, it is possible and also very characteristic that thoughts are embedded in one another, something that is particularly specific to human beings (Dehaene 2014). Whereas an intensely sharp consciousness of an unfolding action can complicate its development, consciousness and language explicitly directed at the entity himself enable a certain sentiment of self and continuity, with various feelings and at different intensities.¹⁶ In that case, it is a kind of looping thought within the volume himself about himself. Consciousness then contributes to a potential "tightening" effect in the volume of being, rather than to a form of "decompression" as Sartre would say (1956, 112). When the volume of being is frequently without any consciousness or thought of his action, connections between his components break up, but the volume has his own way of relaxing with his own distinctive stylistic traits—what tightens him in reality, as will be shown below. For the observer, this presupposes entering into the details of what he sees and what is experienced.

Between the components, a connection of generation is particularly clear when a desire or thought triggers an action that itself creates an emotion and so on. Whereas wandering thoughts can lighten an action, parallel memories or emotions can intensify and disrupt its development, creating tensions that are felt to varying degrees. It is these cushions, tensions and feelings that maintain connections within the volume of being. Contradictory contents of certain

components, for example between values, a new role and a habit, can also generate experiences and feelings in the mode of division or contradiction. As a result, the volume of being is not necessarily a unit of coherence, but typically, this does not prevent tense links between his components. Between these, there is also the possibility of a relationship of actualisation when a certain action, statement or gesture actualises (uses or expresses) knowledge, know-how or a role—these being able to give a foundation or particular strength to the entire presence of the individual concerned.

It is therefore important to look closely at these different forms of connection accumulating in the volume himself at moment t, and at the same time to follow the variable hierarchisation of the components, with their intensity, in the course of moments, without immediately giving theoretical weight to this or that component or systematic connection. In any case, density implies a strong descriptive requirement: not reducing to one component or another (for example, experiences, action, cognition and the social); for each moment t, always adding other components that are activated, or in any case perceptible, and thus obtaining details on nuances of presence in order not to lose the thickness of the moment.

The fourth existential corresponds to another particular form of connection between components of a volume of being. I call it "consistency" because it is the strong marker of singularity. A moment of presence is made up of actions, gestures, emotions and thoughts, but their emergence, realisation, expression, density and effect of lessereity are marked and permeated by stylistic traits that singularise them.¹⁷ They are specific forms proper to an individual, and are involuntary, durable, more or less easily pinpointable, and are not the result of social class membership or cultural codes.¹⁸ These stylistic traits concern different registers: gestural, linguistic or cognitive modalities, mimicking, corporeal and psychological expressions ("character" and "temperament", to which can belong, for example, desires, wishes, ways of feeling, of being moved).¹⁹ In what constitutes "style", one can add habits that are proper to a volume (like doing something at a certain time) and his ways of performing them, as well as memory and recollections since they are proper to each individual. Relateity, as a movement of attachment of the components to the volume, has thus its own modalities and that reinforces it. For the observer, not "seeing", not "wanting to see" these stylistic determinants can be an effect of lessereity, as well as increase the importance of contexts.

In this whole, all of whose traits of course do not actualise at the same time, there are "localised" stylistic traits like the form of a smile or of the performance of a certain gesture, and there are also transversal traits like those of temperament or character, which run through several components of the volume of being: actions, thoughts, moods, emotions. It is not a matter of pinpointing—as is often the case in many psychological theories of the personality, based on standardised observation protocols—predefined traits and establishing "types", but rather seeing, in the lives of existence, how modes of being, "tendencies", are expressed and re-expressed in relatively stabilised ways, without being fixed, and especially with singular expressions, specific to each individual. It is not just saying that this or that person seems ill-tempered or cheerful, it is saying, when he is so, that he is ill-tempered or cheerful with his own ways of being. It is all of these stylistic traits—which are not solely psychological—with their permeation modes, that I link to a form of consistency. It is a way of "maintaining" the volume by linking the manifestation of his acts with certain recurrent forms. Out of all of that, emerge gradients in the singular dimension of the style of a volume: habits, desires, wishes, temperaments or characters, recollections, right down to the specific forms of deployment of these elements.

Therefore, describing a volume of being is not solely to consider separate and differentiated beings. It is necessarily to give ourselves the means to pinpoint, at every moment, the details of

the stylistic traits infiltrating actions, gestures and emotions. Thus, it implies pushing the case study to the extreme, since it is a matter of observing and describing X as X, in the continuity of moments, and not as an example or representative of an activity, experience, group or event. Very often, in ethnographic descriptions, including portraits, there is, with a few exceptions, an almost natural erasing of singularising stylistic details that imply a precise level of detail. These are what make X non-interchangeable with Y. One thus understands that it is not enough to supplement social roles with emotions and moods that can be just as typical and general as roles, nor therefore is it enough to take a volume of being in the "singular", alone, separately. One must also look into the details of his entirety so that he appears "singular", this time in the sense of non-interchangeable, ²² at every instant in the course of moments, with the details that make up his exclusivity, in the activation of what is permanent or almost permanent in him.

The volume of being changes, is exposed to punctual perceptions and impacts, to various external events and to emotions with medium and long-term effects of varying strength.²³ He is influenced, he imitates. What I mean to say is that these external elements, their traces, even if they are lessened—but not removed—generate changes that are, however, also more or less covered, integrated, by the continuity of the volume. This is the fifth existential. Several points can be raised starting from a focus on the microtemporality of an existent, that is to say on following his moments.²⁴ First, from one moment to another, alterations of certain elements of a volume of being do not necessarily entail the alteration of all other parts. A human being does this, then does that, shifts from a concentrated attitude to a distracted mode, from acceptance of what is happening to a decision to change, from one emotion to another and so on. But it is not the whole volume of being that is concerned every time. Other aspects of him are not affected by these "shifts", which are furthermore reversible. Superficial changes, on the face for example, with traits that are mobile and others that are less so, seem to constantly rebalance. The observer can therefore look at which components are changing, either returning or not returning to their previous state, and which of them are not changing, seeming to remain constant, from moment to moment. From one movement to another, there is also something like a transition leaving a trace of the presence of the previous action and anticipating the next one. These binding details can be not only gestures but also thoughts, memories, states of mind from other moments, even a vague feeling of existing or being "oneself", maintaining a sort of thread with a style specific to each individual.²⁵ In the course of moments, there is an overlapping of parts that remain the same, as if holding or retaining the volume during his shifts.

But there is more than an overlapping. From moment to moment, continuity manifests itself in the form of permanences, as shown above. It then becomes apparent that although the volume is not simply a juxtaposition of his components, neither is he simply a succession of moments of presence with successive roles and identities, made up of their different components and their different kinds of expressiveness. He is precisely a volume with his continuity designating not solely an uninterrupted duration, but precisely a certain constancy. In the course of moments, even if the volume of being also receives impacts and reverberations from what he sees, hears and feels, many elements remain unaffected, like character traits, traits of corporeal style, as well as most knowledge, specific ways of interpreting or making sense, skills and values. Not only do these elements, creating a kind of consistency, infuse the act of the moment, its performance and reception, but they also infiltrate, absorb or determine the traces of what happens, in particular according to the specificity of temperament and character traits. Usually, the trace buries itself in the content of this or that component, which will barely be altered. Installed changes sometimes become perceptible after a long time. Furthermore, some components, like knowledge or memories, are more variable than others, whose stock increases or diminishes, alters on the

surface, but in a whole specific to each individual, more or less buried and ready to be partially revived. This results in few alterations relative to what the volume of being is confronted with at every moment: this is the whole process of lessereity and of specific appropriation in a volume of being.

But for all that, in the volume of being, as I have said, stylistic traits that are actualised and manifested, that thus continue, are not always the same ones in all moments, even when they are indicating a certain temperament. One could ask oneself: which ones, at which moments, with which components and in what combinations? The constancy of these traits is not "perfect", leaving an uncertainty—though limited—in their expression. From moment to moment, the continuity of the style is not an uninterrupted monocontinuity or simply a homogeneity. A trait can be interrupted, or return later, followed in the meantime by other traits that are just as unique. In reality, it is a polyconstancy. It should also be noted that the possible contradictions between the contents and components of a volume of being, or the inconsistencies between moments of presence, can be accompanied by the same stylistic traits and thus be determined by characters or temperaments. This does not preclude an existent from no longer recognising himself or perceiving himself in discontinuity with himself. Is this not part of his character, his mode of being, which, moreover, permeates his way of no longer recognising himself? In this case, in fact, stylistic elements as an existential are not only a way to link components of a volume of being at moment t. They are also a way to link a volume's moments, showing his attachment to himself from one moment to another.

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A volume of being who retains himself, who is retained in his existence: is this not a line of thought that Levinas pursued, but did not continue, preferring to be concerned, in his ethical aim, by the other, by his "mystery" and his "excess?" He had furthermore used a very specific lexicon, describing a form of enclosing of the existent, which "gathers itself together", "with a base" (Levinas 1978, 71), which "cannot detach itself from itself", in "an enchainment to itself" (Levinas 1987, 55), no matter what it does. This gathering of the human subject "riveted" to himself is "the indissoluble unity between the existent and its work of existing" (p. 43). And Levinas adds: "My being doubles with a having; I am encumbered by myself" (p. 56). This is what this chapter aimed to translate, by providing a conceptual clarification and an empirical possibility. These reflections by Levinas show that in the philosophies of existence, one can find propositions that have an affinity with the volume of being, including with his closing, but they do not pursue the possible heuristicity of these, as if at a certain point they let go of the entity himself and the possibility of looking at him or describing him, reinserting the world and other people, making him withdraw to the background.

It is probably not insignificant to consider that "theorising" and "looking at" a human being, going as far as possible into the details, implies empirically rediscovering the relevance of the lexicon of unity, consistency and continuity, which much of existentialism and anthropology have set aside. The work of existential anthropology is to multiply these observations that can enable comparisons that explore both structuring modalities and the combinations of components in different volumes of being in the course of moments. It cannot be separated from the question that should motivate all of anthropology: "What is a human being?". Such is the clear niche of an existential anthropology, with an object and a specific method. In many American universities, anthropology includes four main fields determining research and teaching: archaeology, linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, and social or cultural anthropology. From the perspective developed here, existential anthropology would be a fifth field.

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Notes

- 1 Even if intersubjectivity is always complicated in the Sartrean discourse (see Introduction to the "Section 2").
- 2 This point is emphasised in Catherine Beaugrand's chapter, commenting on Sartre's existential biographies.
- 3 "Entity" is defined as "a thing with distinct and independent existence" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2011). It is therefore a matter of viewing an individual in his objective reality, without dissolving him in the cultural representations that can disqualify the human being as an entity. They constitute only one component of the entity among others.
- 4 Michael Jackson advocates a more moderate conception of existential anthropology, which he presents as "an anthropology whose object is to understand [...] the eventualities, exigencies and experiences of social Being" (Jackson 2005, xxviii). Michael Lambek sees it as a "frame" that is not exclusive of others, and not a distinct field (Lambek 2015, 72). See also Poletti ("Section 2"). Basically, despite nuancing the sociological weight, the relational and intersubjective are kept at the centre of their focus.
- 5 At the same time, it avoids the confusion that Spiro, and later Bloch, noted particularly in the anthropologists' lexicon, using various terms: me, self, person, agent etc. (Spiro 1987; Bloch 2012).
- 6 Heiss has proposed the potentially similar notion of "gestalt" (this section). There exist various meanings of the idea of the human being as a totality (including those of Plessner, Mauss and Sartre). See a critique in Piette (2019).
- 7 This is the word I have chosen, as if one were lacking to designate this focus on the existent, just as Markus Gabriel uses "neo-existentialism" to reflect on the body-mind relationship avoided by the existentialist tradition (Gabriel 2018, 69).
- 8 Note that in this debate, Merleau-Ponty did not consider suspending "intentional threads which attach us to the world", but rather bringing them to "our notice" (Merleau-Ponty 2005, XV). On Husserl's thought linked with these empirical consequences (Piette 2019, 81–92).
- 9 I am thinking of the critique of the notion of the system, which pervades the work of Kierkegaard (2009, 100–106).
- 10 See Gwendoline Torterat's chapter on filmed following, and on interviews clarifying mental states. Life stories—far from the literal continuity of situations—cannot be a sufficient methodology to obtain the details sought in this volumographic perspective. See also Kneubühler and Piette (2019). On explicitation interview methods, see for example Petitmengin (2006).
- 11 The conceptualisation of these existentials results from earlier gradual observations (Piette 2017).
- 12 See Hollan's reference to the Jamesian idea of "absolute insulation" (this volume, "Section 3").
- 13 The lexicon of the "outside of" or "beyond" oneself is very present in the thought of both Sartre and Deleuze. In anthropology, the thought behind the theory of dividuals typically concerns the separability of components and their exiting outside the human entity.
- 14 For many years, I have been stressing this point, which is entirely unconsidered in descriptions and theories (Piette 1992). See more recent works: Harrison (2008), Candea *et al.* (2015), Piette (2015), O'Neill (2017).
- 15 Lessereity is not something to be overcome so that an individual can appropriate himself in a more "authentic" way or realise the possibility of being "himself", to use Heidegger's words (Heidegger 2010, 126 ff.).
- 16 It is particularly on the basis of this part of the volume that one can understand the "existential narratives" analysed at a more macrological level by Poletti ("Section 2").
- 17 On this point, it is possible to draw a parallel with the definition of the individual as a "symbolic bubble", proposed by Rapport (2003, 131–152).
- 18 Owing to lack of space, this chapter does not concern sociocultural markers and those of social roles, which are also present in a volume of being, among the other components. On the former, see the critiques by Faubion (2018) and Wardle (2018).
- 19 Anthropologists obviously recognise the particularities of each individual, particularly psychological ones, but usually posit them in relation to a broader scale, that of the cultural microcosm whose impact is sought—something that dilutes the objective of detailed description of the singularity, as understood here. For example, according to different modalities and different moments in the history of anthropology: Sapir (1949, 140–171), Nadel (1951, 93–95), Levy and Hollan (1998).
- 20 On this discussion, see for example Shweder (2005).

- 21 This stabilisation is of course more or less firm depending on age, and this is the whole issue of observations of continuities.
- 22 On this subject, see the chapter by Marine Kneubühler.
- 23 This point is essential in the anthropology of M. Jackson enlisting Arendt against the possibility of speaking of stable essences (Jackson 2005, XIV).
- 24 The chapter by Catherine Beaugrand shows that Sartre did not favour a "continuist" conception of time, which is that of instants or moments following each other.
- 25 On this subject in particular, see the synthetical and critical article of Fuchs (2016).
- 26 On the importance of Levinas in anthropology, see Rapport (2015).

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