

'TO ANTHROPOLOGY, FROM MEAT PRISON'¹

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Abstract

The present essay, begun just before and written during the 2020 UK lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, draws first on the philosophical anthropology of Plessner (1970, 2019) and Wentzer (2017), finding ground in the notion of responsiveness. Then, working in a broadly auto-phenomenological manner inspired by a mundane encounter with television news, the force of a televisual scream is used to explore anthropology of and as responsiveness, culminating in a critique of the anthropological theory of moralities put forward by Jarrett Zigon (2007). What results is an intentionally 'simplistic representation(s) of social reality' (Stoczkowski 2008: 351), certainly anthropology, but I argue that, at least minimally, a moralizing anthropology is required as a possibility within any anthropological theory of moralities.

Introduction

In a spirited article in this journal entitled 'The anthropological horizon: Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen and the idea of a philosophical anthropology' (1985), David J. Levy attempted to introduce a British social anthropological readership to a potted history and to the potential pitfalls and merits of attending to the Germanophone tradition of philosophical anthropology. This was surfacing at the time Levy wrote in the form of an interest in Heideggerian thought, which has not diminished to this day. Although I do not deal with the content of Levy's essay directly here, I make an attempt to carry on the conversation further, in the spirit rather than the letter, regarding this lineage of philosophical anthropology, until recently largely neglected by British social anthropologists. The present essay, begun just before and written during the 2020 UK lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, draws first on the philosophical anthropologies of Helmuth Plessner (1970, 2019) and Thomas Schwarz Wentzer (2017), finding ground in the notion of responsiveness. Then, inspired by a mundane encounter with television news, the force of a televisual scream is used to explore anthropology of and as responsiveness, resulting in the critique of the anthropological theory of moralities put forward by Zigon (2007). What results is an intentionally 'simplistic representation(s) of social reality' (Stoczkowski 2008: 351), but I contend that 'it corresponds to the nature of the case, makes us see other men in a true light and reminds us of what are

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the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which each of us therefore owes' (Schopenhauer 1970: 50).

Responsiveness

According to Plessner's philosophical anthropology, unlike inanimate beings, the living body is distinguished by the border between inner and outer. Plants have this border and are open to the world, but they do not have a relationship with the inner and outer aspects of their borders. Animals, however, have a closed but 'centric' positionality in a physical sense as an organism with a nervous system, with a psychic component that facilitates its awareness of its environment. Border crossings are mediated by this centre, and hence the animal not only has a body but inhabits its body. But 'the here/now does not become objective for the animal; it does not set itself apart from it' (Plessner 2019: 221); 'from its own perspective, it is pure me, not I' (ibid.: 251). As animals, humans have this centre, but unlike them, we take a position regarding it. We simultaneously experience ourselves as having a body, as in a body, one with access to our inner and outer worlds, and yet we are decentred from that position by being aware of it as though looking in from the outside. By being aware of our own centre and being able to reflect upon it as though from the outside in, we adopt an 'excentric positionality' (ibid.: 296). In this way, excentric positionality is virtual – not quite in a body or place, but 'a reflexive relationship the living body has to itself' (de Mul 2014: 464). Our excentric positionality leads to a deep sense of imbalance in human beings for Plessner, linking material culture to our 'homelessness' (2019: 297) in that, through artificial means, we must remedy being set adrift from ourselves and the world, anchoring ourselves in space to make our eccentricity bearable. Material culture, rather than being something alien imbricated in our projects, is considered an 'ontic necessity' (de Mul 2014: 28): we are 'by nature *artificial*' (Plessner 2019: 288, emphasis in the original).

In *Laughing and crying: a study of the limits of human behaviour* (1970), Plessner comes to see laughing and crying as universal involuntary responses to 'boundary situation(s)' (1970: 144), which reveal the limits of our capacity to respond appropriately, although he is careful to note that our motives for laughing and crying are likely to be historically determined by the boundaries set for us as social beings at some level (ibid.: 18). Consonant with the broader Germanophone tradition of philosophical anthropology, the primary interest in laughing and crying is rooted in their ostensibly being exclusively human behaviours. Plessner takes the position that crying is a type of expressive utterance without symbolic form, whether or not it is laden with meaning within the boundaries of human sociality

experienced from inside or outside the person. We cannot compare crying to a linguistic utterance, for that would presuppose control. Proper crying is a loss of self-control with the retention of acute self-awareness. Meeting with a boundary situation, in which his capacity to respond fails him, the excentricity of man's relation to himself and to the world is disorganized. Overcome by feeling in the loss of reference, confronted by impossibility and faced with the usually concealed 'clarity of Being' (ibid.: 144), man succumbs to centricity, animal positionality, 'to [letting] his body answer in his place' (ibid.).

Metaphorically extending Plessner's thoughts on crying and boundary situations to the nature of the anthropological paradox that runs from Socrates to the present (cf. Schües 2014) concerning the impossibility of definitive self-knowledge – which, for philosophical anthropology, is the boundary situation par excellence, and in fact, we may argue, the real problem that keeps any anthropology turning – 'crying' then becomes a placeholder signifying the universality of the encounter with the unknowable in the search for definitive self-understanding as human beings. Wedded to the unspeakable – speaking. Fused with the unthinkable – thinking. How do we salvage something from this boundary situation that appears to suggest a redundancy? According to Thomas Schwarz Wentzer (2017: 27), philosophical anthropology:

would then mean to reflect the indeterminacy of any discourse that tries to deal with the human, being aware of the ontological peculiarity of its subject. 'Philosophical anthropology' then would function as a formal indication of a certain way of questioning, not as a label referring to a well-established discipline or tradition.

In this 'non-existing discipline' (ibid.: 26), taking as our starting point the universally shared existential predicament in which 'every individual human being as well as every group, society or culture – has to explore its meaning anew' (ibid.: 3), it all hinges in the end on how we *respond* in action, or indeed reflection, to the irresistible challenge of the burden and interpret this paradox for ourselves. Either way: 'It would be absurd to wait until we know who we are, before we start living' (ibid.: 35). Human life barrels on regardless and in defiance of the circularity that is found at the core of anthropological self-interpretation. Moreover, we continually respond to the interminable otherness of the world itself: we have relations to the alien on both sides of our boundary. In this respect, Wentzer opines that philosophical anthropology thus described responds to the post-humanist challenge that would disallow recourse to any essentialist view of human nature. Instead our focus is aligned with attention to the ways in which humans 'perform their existence' (ibid.: 34).

Proposing a hermeneutics of existential responsiveness that locates the universal experience of the paradox of human self-understanding in the particular experience of the individual's life, Wentzer draws upon Bernard Waldenfels' four topoi of the logic of responsiveness in a phenomenology of otherness.³ Moving away from both the traditional vision of intentionality as the cardinal concept in phenomenology and intentionalist theories drawing from the speech acts of questioning and answering that presuppose normative commitments in terms of rules structuring a dialectic – wherein the question asked posits a missing piece of information in its content and the answer provides it – we take our point of departure as the existential space of the demand that 'remains alien or remote to the propositional act or dialogical content that it facilitates' (Wentzer 2017: 37) and the existential event of 'being asked' (ibid.) that is usually bracketed in a description of responsiveness that takes the speech acts of question and answer as its model. We are reoriented, now in the 'pre-normative obligation that opens the space of normative behaviour in the first place. It demonstrates an existential commitment that precedes intentionality and its accounts of intentional subjects' (ibid.: 38). On this account, every demand is experienced as a singular event to which we inevitably respond. There is a delay between demand and response otherwise called the 'responsive difference' (ibid.: 39). Finally there is an 'asymmetry' (ibid.) between demand from the world and our capacity for response because the world is infinitely larger in its capacity to demand a response from finite human respondents than the capacity those respondents have to match it. Thus our lives entail endless dynamics of demand and response in all aspects of our existence which we can never exhaust. Taking responsiveness as its basis, through its questioning, philosophical anthropology attends to the situation that we find ourselves in as already ongoing, and thus pays credence to the ways in which we respond to it while acknowledging 'its internal remoteness and intrinsic alterity' (ibid.: 39). By moving away from speech acts and linguistic communication, we are rested deeper in the corporeality of human being. And although the emphasis is placed on the individual's existential predicament, the dynamic of demand and response ensures that we remain tethered to our 'primordial intersubjective and social existence' (ibid. :42).

It is our responsibility, thrust upon us in the world we emerge from and into, to find responsive solutions to, and develop partial understandings of, the demands of life. The philosophical anthropology Wentzer proposes is a reflective inquiry into responses to these

³ Other scholars translate this latter term as 'alien' (see Friesen 2014).

demands, paying special attention to those that reveal the paradox(es) of self-understanding and our existential burden to make of it what we can, thus satisfying his own condition that it should be a formal manner of questioning, rather than a rigidly defined discipline.

Most of the time we do find a way to keep going. But inevitably, and at various junctures, in the asymmetry between demand from the world and our capacity to respond, we meet with our finitude: insufficiently equipped, overwhelmed. Our bodies answer for us (Plessner 1970).

Bad News (21/02/2020)

About half an hour to midnight, I sat down to watch some trashy 'news' with my tea. Seeing as I'd recently given in (or rather, been cajoled) to signing up for a 'free' ITV hub online account, just to watch a leader's debate during the filthy 2019 general election – and due to the fact that my generation are not the TV licence fee-paying type – what better source?⁴ Alas, it was not trash. Today was a bad news day on several fronts.

The first piece was a spotlight on Laos. Today, as a result of the actions of the United States military, who dropped two hundred and seventy million bombs on the country in a failed attempt to cut off supply routes used by the Vietcong, 45 years after the Vietnam war's official end, the humans of Laos are haunted in their every step by unexploded ordnance. Eighty million bombs remain unexploded. Life in Laos is pocked with the worst, most indiscriminate kinds of surprises. An old lady pokes her face out of the window of a house clad with waste metal from exploded ordnance and bits of jettisoned aircraft, both bearing the name of *Northrop Grumman*, a still extant US arms manufacturer.⁵

An unexploded bomb has been found on the edges of a school playground by the metal detectors. The children are waiting for it to be detonated by the disposal team. A little girl in a red shirt is surrounded by her friends in a continuous shot, hands over her ears, aware she is being watched by the cameraman. Just after the bomb is exploded, she lets slip across her face a glimmer of absolute helplessness that was hidden in the suspense, right before she finds her appropriate response, mimicking the sounds of the explosion while looking round to her friends, and trying desperately to laugh it off with them. In that moment, one now being smoothed over with laughter and mutually experienced with the others, she inhabits Earth

⁴ We pay in cookies etc.

⁵ '...we are present, not just in our singular bodies, but in everything in our surroundings which bears witness to our existence, our attributes, our agency.' (Gell 1998:103)

fearfully. The reporter finishes his segment by saying: 'I'm afraid it'll be hundreds of years before Laos is rid of this widespread menace.'

The second piece informs us that a racist, right-wing terrorist in Germany has shot and killed eight immigrants, including a pregnant mother of two, and wounded a number of others before killing his own mother and then himself. Merkel blames racism for the attacks. Following the previous report from Laos, my attention was drawn to the gun, without which this heinous massacre by one human being could not have occurred in the specific manner it did: 'violent extremists are at their most dangerous when they are able to accumulate weapons and get organised', says the commentator in the studio.⁶

The piece on Laos in particular was a distinct instance of television as a moral(izing) technology. We see living, wounded bodies, children afflicted by the spectral wounds of always potential horror, maiming and death lurking in every inch of their world, the present absence of the bomb part of their chthonic reality (cf. Dawney 2019). Television here functions as a device to remind us of, to update us on, our own cruelty, in doing so instilling within us at some level the notion that harming is morally wrong: in this case, specifically that weapon design, manufacture and use are morally wrong because they contribute to the construction of an unliveable public space. Designs, and as in Laos artefacts, outlive the conflicts that justified their coming into being (Forge 2019: 78). And so, here the televisual also reminds us that we must take our responsibility to living and future humans not yet born seriously (cf. Adam and Groves 2007). Given this directive, unquestionably worthy of airtime, it is surely not too much to ask to tug on our heart strings out of raw human (albeit non-humanly mediated) and largely autonomic mimesis in the mind's eyes and ears (Keyzers and Gazzola 2009: 10) in virtue of this magical machine (Taussig 1993). Although, regardless of moralizing optics, watching anybody on screen we experience contortions of the virtual body in the sympathetic violence of spectatorship, in and for ourselves, indexically we are related to the bodies we perceive (cf. MacDougall 2006).⁷

'(A) loud, unending scream piercing nature' and culture

In these scenes from Laos and Germany, inhumanity reigned supreme, if not because of, then intrinsically involving bombs and guns. However, the last few bad news items involved natural happenings: floods in northern England and the potentially uncontrollable outbreak of

⁶ As we saw above, this applies just as much to recognized states.

⁷ What these images carrying the 'charge' of human spirits want above all is 'acknowledgement' (Taussig 2009: 274).

COVID-19 in China, then teetering on pandemic status. Immersed momentarily in this iota of televisual media, these 'natural'⁸ happenings only served to demonstrate how, in the grand scheme of things, there is enough suffering in the world without weapons (and the necessary means of delivery, of course.).

The screams of a doctor in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (ostensibly the initial epicentre of the COVID-19 epidemic) chasing after the vehicle carrying her husband's corpse, now contaminated with the disease, away from the hospital building, tore through my midriff, roaring into an all-enveloping shudder, an immediate sympathy. Anyone who has known the immediacy of unexpected death – a loved one suddenly, irretrievably gone – will know something of the shock she was in. But this, in the midst of a disease outbreak, that she and her husband had been trying so hard to help contain and treat victims of.... Her body responds for her. Surrounded by her colleagues, all in masks, no facial expressions, inhumanity permeates the scene. Yet, one colleague responded in kind to her screams by doing what he or she could to address her suffering – small though it was – hugging her from behind (presumably to avoid droplet transmission) and attempting to comfort her while restraining her from following the car further.

How, as finite human beings, do we respond to the infinite demands of being alive? We are infinitely outnumbered (Wentzer 2017). Most of the time we find our appropriate response, but sometimes we simply cannot. Overcome by feeling, we let our bodies answer for us (Plessner 1970) – screams, sobs, little flashes of helplessness across the face, eruptions of visceral knowledge, involuntary expressions of the voluntarily inexpressible and overwhelming. These gratuitous (re-)acts of the body (cf. Rapport 2008) reach into the depths of everyone, in each case expressing something at once particular and universal, pertaining to human existence. Through the televisual, we meet each other's corporeal images in active spectation (Taussig 1993, MacDougall 2006). Here, there is a searing reality to the signals. No translation, or interpretation, no critique or contemplation is required. There are non-arbitrary signficatory links between the event and its image/sound (cf. Taussig 2009: 264), captured in the televisual fragment indexing it, transported, encountered and felt by this spectator, evoked here in writing, finally translated as – just maybe – mental imagery with affective resonances: in and for you, dear reader.

⁸ Here, although COVID-19 is in an important respect a natural happening (although in another respect it is only significant to us in its nature-cultural emergence, and the human-virus hybridity that becomes, I use the word 'natural' with some reservations in light of another word: 'preventable'. This tiny replicator has highlighted sinews and fractures in the socio-political, moral entanglement of the entire planet.

Screams

The facial expression of the little girl in Laos and the scream of the doctor in Wuhan rest us bodily in the space of pre-normative obligation Wentzer speaks of, not simply to existence itself but, if we are reasonable, by extrapolation, to the other. It is the scream, now, that I want to focus on, contained within reportage that is less explicitly moralizing than in the piece on Laos but, as we will shortly discuss, the scream as a response itself, which, while demanding an ethical response from whoever hears it, is non-moral. Might the scream here figure as a 'distress signal' (Taussig 2009: 273) with import for a moral anthropology?

In the images from Wuhan, with everyone in full body containment suits and face masks, which obscures much of the detail one would usually rely upon visually, it is particularly due to the sonic dimension of the filmic that meaning⁹ stays with them in this realist transmission. Although they are non-communicational, screams mean. We know what they mean (screams are strange like this), even without the image, and without deixis. Quite simply, 'the "what" that is going on' (Massumi 2014: 77) is suffering. You don't think through these screams, as I have done here, you feel them in the act of hearing them: 'Corporeal understanding: you don't so much see as be hit' (Taussig 1993: 23).

In his article 'Phenomenology of the Scream' (2014), Peter Schwenger, drawing sustenance from Emmanuel Levinas's earliest published work, *Existence and existents* (2014 [1978]), also understands screams – real screams, that is – as non-communicational, involuntary responses; but here, expressing the desire for non-existence in this moment, exposed to the ferocious inhumanity that perturbs and inhabits each of us and in which we only 'participate' (Schwenger 2014: 389) as existents. Notably, Levinas, who conceived of *Existence and existents* while in a prisoner-of-war camp, reveals in this work an intimacy with a truly universal predicament that could only have been gotten from the inside, specifically in continued exposure to brutalized conditions perpetrated by other humans, which in turn accentuated his awareness of the corporeal punishment of raw existence. What Levinas calls the '*there is*' (2014: 52) describes an unrelenting horror found in existence itself, which Schwenger finds peculiar to the real scream. What we will struggle to talk about is an unspeakable primitivism found in the subject's encounter with brutal materiality and their being a body-part of 'it', an imprisonment that pervades our very being, the rendering impersonal of consciousness as possessed by an individuated human life, 'condensed to the

⁹ Perhaps also spirit or charge (cf. Taussig 2009).

point of suffocation' (Levinas 2014: 56).¹⁰ Here 'horror is somehow a movement' (ibid.: 55) in which the subject is dissolved before its own eyes, plunged into and submerged by the impersonality it rides with, ever lurking, but following Schwenger, acutely catalysed by suffering and the appearance of death.¹¹ The scream is a 'force' expressing a horrific sense of spatiotemporal 'situatedness' (Schwenger 2014: 393) specific to the body, both the bitter affirmation of, and the doomed flight from, 'that meat insisting that we inhabit a certain position in space' (ibid.: 389).¹² Schwenger finds in screams a piercing clarity that does not simply reveal inhumanity at work (whether humanly or non-humanly perpetrated, so to speak) and is not simply a response to it, but is the inhuman in us:

There is then a final irony in the scream: if it is forced from us as a response to the horror of pure existence, to being trapped by existence, it belongs itself to the order of things that are wiped clean of personal being. Essentially, every scream is like every other; and no scream can reconstitute the I that emits it. And so the redoubling of the scream is not an acoustic cloning of our personal selves; what it redoubles is the horror of existence at degree zero. (ibid.: 395)

How do we usually respond when we hear screams, not through television but in close proximity to ourselves? In folk terms, the only appropriate response I can think of, one that nearly anyone would feel demanded of them by the scream, without having to stretch our imaginations too far, is: *if we can, to do what we can, to address their suffering*,¹³ however small.

All this may seem strange. The answer to the previous question may (or, indeed, may not) seem obvious. Yet there is, I believe, something to be learned in theoretical, methodological and subsequently 'ethnographic' terms for contemporary anthropology from the scream as response, and this idealistic speculation regarding a generic folk response to it. In order to elucidate a proto-argument in this respect, I now turn to an anthropological theory of moralities, put forward by the philosophical anthropologist Jarret Zigon, that is centred on

¹⁰ '11.2. Got up with a bad headache. Lay in euthanasian concentration on the ship. Loss of subjectivism and deprivation of the will (blood flowing away from the brain?), living only by the five senses and the body (through impressions) causes direct merging with surroundings. Had the feeling that the rattling of the ship's engine was myself; felt the motions of the ship as my own – it was *I* who was bumping against the waves and cutting through them' (Malinowski 1989: 33-4). 'Tuesday, 4.17 [*sic*] ... feeling of permanently being exposed in an uncomf. position to the eyes of a crowded thoroughfare: an incapacity to achieve inner privacy' (ibid.: 253).

¹¹ There are, then, interesting contrasts with Levinas's account, which cannot be followed up here, in his insistence contra Heidegger on 'the fear of being not fear for being' (Levinas 2014: 58) as revealed in the encounter with the *there is*.

¹² I do not mean to exclude many other reactions from the figural category of the scream, as long as they are autonomic expressions of suffering, and/or in the face of death. The flash of helplessness across the little girl's face in Laos was a scream by other means.

¹³ A moralizing claim that underpins what I go on to write (see note 30).

a dynamic of demand and response and which I address critically both on its own terms and through the scream.

An Anthropological Theory of Moralities¹⁴

Jarrett Zigon proposes a phenomenologically influenced 'anthropological theory of moralities' (2007: 148) for an 'anthropology of moralities' (ibid.: 132) that would delineate a subdiscipline, just as there is an anthropology of art, of religion etc.¹⁵ He is keen to overcome the Durkheimian subsumption of Kantian moral philosophy – the latter being deontological and concerned with moral norms (rules), and relying upon a conception of an autonomous, rational individual to make choices according to their knowledge of what is considered good and bad – with the concept of society or culture. This then becomes for Durkheim the relative arbiter of an individual's understanding of morality, as well as the principal determining factor of choices regarding moral action. With this Durkheimian inheritance pervading the works of contemporary anthropologists, as is evident in their belief that they have always been studying morals and moralities (Zigon 2007: 132; cf. Parkin 1985), Zigon thinks it is difficult to demarcate a proper anthropology of moralities.

More importantly, Zigon presents his theory in reference to the vexing problem of moralism in anthropology (2007: 231), namely that of the anthropologist's own morality becoming the centrepiece of the study, rather than the local moralities he or she is supposed to be documenting, instead moralizing about situations and actions they may find irksome, even abhorrent, during the course of fieldwork or otherwise.¹⁶ To combat this, Zigon proposes an entirely descriptive approach (cf. Stade 2018: 120).¹⁷

Behind Zigon's rejection of a moral(izing) anthropology is the belief that social-science knowledge is not attained through the passions of the anthropologist. As is traditional, anthropologists must do their best not to be ethnocentric in their presuppositions and analyses – or worse, given these risks, intervene 'morally' in the field. Here, aside from a glib mention

¹⁴ Zigon expands upon and tries out variations of this foundational theory of moral breakdown and ethical response at several junctures (2009, 2009, 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2018). However, the kernel developed in 2007 remains in these later works, so while not entirely ignoring the latter, and also due to spatial constraints, I focus on his original articulation.

¹⁵ Zigon mistakenly believes that anthropologists have not been studying morality 'all along' (2007: 132), but this is not of great importance here.

¹⁶ More broadly, this is not a new 'problem', and as Stoczkowski (2008) notes, various key figures, such as Tylor, Delafosse and Levi-Strauss, considered moral(izing) elements to be essential parts of their own projects, in their own ways. Even Durkheim considered the final step in the study of primitives to involve utilizing insights gained to improve western society, not least morally.

¹⁷ This is itself something inherited from the origins of sociology in Durkheim, or perhaps rather, and in light of the previous note, Max Weber (cf. Fassin 2012: 2).

in the abstract to the problem of moralism in anthropology generally, which nevertheless demonstrates the foundational premise of the work, Zigon makes reference to James Laidlaw and Joel Robbins, among others, paying attention to the different philosophically influenced approaches to local moralities they employ in their ethnographies. In the present essay, however, taking the broader implications at work in the avoidance of moralism in anthropology that is at the root of Zigon's work, and following D'Andrade (1995) and Fassin (2008), we may imagine Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) and other concerned thinkers (cf. MacClancy ed. 2002) who argue for compassionate, even radical activist engagement in the situations they may witness – for instance, unnecessary human suffering perpetuated via abuses of power or neglect, considering this a meaningful part, verging on the obligatory, of the human science they practice – as the straw figure(s) of the moral(izing) anthropologist.¹⁸ Notably, Stoczkowski launches a scathing critique of uncritically lavished compassion's threat to the epistemological integrity of anthropology, denouncing moral(izing) anthropology as superficial 'Pietist ethics' (2008: 349). The 'fourth aim of anthropology', to engage in social transformation beyond just 'describe – understand – explain' (2008: 351), is but another social-science soteriology doomed to failure (ibid.). Instead, Stoczkowski, following Fassin (2008; see also Fassin 2012), extols a descriptive and self-reflexive/critical (cf. Caduff 2011) approach to the anthropological study of morals. Subsequently, Zigon joins the 'potlach among the chiefs' (Kalb 2018: 67), firmly aligning himself with Fassin's and Stoczkowski's displacement of moralism (Zigon 2010: 4).

According to Holbraad, the strategy that Zigon uses to begin his anthropological theory of moralities¹⁹ is that of downward analytical displacement of the problem of moralism in anthropology, 'in as much as the idea is to go underneath moral and ethical concerns to find a deeper level of inquiry at which such phenomena can be framed in terms that are themselves not moral or ethical' (2018: 38). This strategy fails, presupposing what Holbraad takes to be a moral position – that as an anthropologist of moralities, one's theoretical understanding of morality and/or ethics must be worked out programmatically 'before' (ibid.: 43) setting out on one's exploration. Although this strategy risks muddying perceptions of 'the field', the notion is not without merit. I run with it in my critical analysis.

Zigon takes Martin Heidegger's *Being and time* (1967) as the keystone of his own framework, which was not an 'ethical' work per se, but apparently holds out promise for

¹⁸ '...moral advocacy (I know what is right and the world should change to conform to my vision of what is right)' (D'Andrade 2000: 226).

¹⁹ And thus, in his own 'ethics', so to speak. I return to this later.

being such. Three Heideggerian concepts, 'being-in-the-world, being-with, and breakdown' (Zigon 2007: 134), become foundational to an anthropological theory of moralities. 'Being-in-the-world', as Zigon presents it, refers to the familiar, largely unreflective state we find ourselves in most of the time – dwelling in the world through our involvement with it, an existence that is both 'openly shared and deeply personal' (ibid.: 135). 'Being-with', by which Zigon means with 'persons' (ibid.), is implied by 'being-in-the-world', becoming the guarantor of a non-solipsistic existence, meaning we are always with others, 'even in their absence' (ibid.: 136). In introducing the concepts of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being with', Zigon is providing ontological support for a model that challenges the entire determination of an individual's morality by the prescriptions of their familiar culture (cf. Rapport 1997) while simultaneously ensuring a conception of relationality between individuals. We shall return to the third Heideggerian concept of 'breakdown' shortly.

After situating the anthropology of moralities in the ontology of Heidegger, Zigon brings a moral/ethical twist to the philosophical anthropology of responsiveness we first met in Wentzer (2017), resting his theory in part, and at an essential juncture, on an existential dynamic of demand and response drawn from the Scandinavian philosopher Logstrup, whose work, as Zigon notes, is '(v)ery similar to the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas' (Zigon 2007: 138), in that responsibility for the other is taken to be the foundational notion of ethics. From Logstrup, and building on Heidegger's 'being-with', Zigon takes for his own theory (only) the idea that 'ethics is a socially constituted ethics' (ibid.). He concludes that 'the ethical demand (of the moral breakdown) ... is a product of the particular situation and the individuals involved' (ibid.). Yet, unsurprisingly,²⁰ while each is capable of acting freely to some degree in each unique situation, even if this means simply choosing from 'a range of possibilities' (cf. Zigon 2009), one of which includes walking away from the demand of the other (2007: 138), these individuals, it seems, are still in large part constrained by the contingencies of society/culture, and thus history, in their responses. Finally, Zigon draws on Badiou (Badiou and Hallward 2001; Zigon 2007: 139), from whom he takes the notion that ethics is about keeping going.²¹

The kernel of Zigon's anthropological theory of moralities, then, is to be found in his distinction between 'morality' and 'ethics'. Humans usually exist unreflectively in the 'moral dispositions of everyday life' (2007: 135) – until, that is, a problematic situation or event

²⁰ This has implications for our conception of the individual in a Durkheimian vein, which can result in an 'impersonalization' (Rapport 1997: 7; Durkheim 2008: 571- 4).

²¹ Rather than responsibility.

causes a 'moral breakdown' (ibid.: 137), when these usually unconsidered moralities suddenly move into the focal point of experience. An ethical demand is thus placed upon the individual 'to return to the unreflective moral dispositions of everydayness' (ibid.: 139). In order to complete this return to the familiar – which has a paradoxical element, thinks Zigon, in that one might never be quite the same as one was before the breakdown – 'one must perform ethics' (ibid.: 137), doing what it takes to get back to normal and keep going. '(E)thics are a tactic' (ibid.) developed reflectively as a response to the ethical demand of the moral breakdown in being made to 'step-away and figure out' (ibid.). These tactics are subsequently acted out in the interests of achieving the return to unreflective everyday morality. A distinct temporality, then, is established by the model, a process beginning from unreflective, moral being-in-the-world, interrupted by the event of moral breakdown which forces reflection upon morality, precipitating the return to unreflective being-in-the-world via the performance of ethics. There is a sort of cyclicity at work, but as noted, neither the individual nor the world is ever quite the same afterwards. And so (recalling Wentzer, and our televisual foray), Zigon argues that it is here, in this dynamic of moral breakdown and ethical response, that anthropologists of moralities should dwell to gain insights into the ways in which morality and ethics are unreflectively held and consciously made manifest.²²

However, and I take this to be crucial, according to Zigon, 'being in the world should not be thought of as bodily' (2007: 135). He thus distinguishes unreflective moral being-in-the-world from *habitus*,²³ with which it might sound as though the unreflective moral dispositions to which Zigon alludes are akin (ibid.). Instead, it is this both 'deeply personal' and relationally constituted familiarity in an ontological sense, rather than a corporeal one – the latter being an epiphenomenal, largely unconscious manifestation of the former – that underpins the scene:

²² I address Zigon in somewhat of a vacuum here in relation to broader debates in the anthropology of morality. Beldo (2014) offers an insightful critique for interested readers. In his focus on problematization in the moral breakdown, and later on self-improvement, Zigon reifies a Foucauldian notion of ethics and applies it across the board. The theory of moral breakdown is indeed one manner in which morality and ethics is made manifest for humans and thus for the anthropology of moralities, but it is not an 'exhaustive description' (Beldo 2014: 270). Indeed, 'anyone living a self-examined life' (ibid.: 271) may desire to be constantly reflective about their moral being-in-the-world rather than always seeking a return to the unreflective. Likewise, it is not necessarily the case that all people of all cultures reflect solipsistically in the breakdown, nor, even if they do consciously reflect upon moralities, seek a return to existential comfort simply for themselves: rather, they look to the social chains of obligation they are enmeshed in and that inform their being-in-the-world.

²³ Zigon (2010: 8) prefers Mauss's version of *habitus* to Bourdieu's because it 'emphasises the conscious and intentional work necessary to acquire a particular kind of habitus' (cf. 2009: 260), thus equating habitus with 'ethics'. As already noted, he leaves the unreflective moral dispositions with Heideggerian 'being-in-the-world'.

Because being in the world, then, is a relationship of being-with and not embodied – although it is made manifest in bodily dispositions or comportments – it is a mode of being that is always open to the world and never statically and permanently encapsulated, as one reading of Bourdieu's habitus suggests. (Zigon 2007: 136)

Meat and Time

First, I want to insert the scream as a response to a moral breakdown, which is constitutive of a duration in lived time, into the temporality of Zigon's theoretical framework. As a catalyst, we may then find this insightful in terms of the understanding the appropriate response *to* the scream, while at the same time turning the framework back on itself.

Zigon claims that '(t)he (ethical) demand, because of the very fact that it occurs within the moment of moral breakdown, is unconventional' (2007: 139), precisely because it is a forced problematization of unreflective moral everydayness. However, at the same time, people may conceive of the moral breakdown as 'immoral' (ibid.). Thus, contra Zigon's rally against Durkheim, in the moral breakdown the influence of culture/society as social convention is found no less in the negative: every system of morality needs structural opposites of good and bad (Olsen and Csordas 2019 :9). But we cannot say the same for the scream as response. In its pure form it is both a-social and pan-cultural: '...the scream is not a conscious call for help to another but an unconscious reflex, one that would have taken place whether or not there was anybody there to hear it' (Schwenger 2014: 383). The scream is unconventional: it is non-moral and pre-ethical, not least in terms of the temporality of Zigon's theory. With the scream we approach a moment in which culture (embodied or otherwise) dissolves, and society momentarily becomes a whisper in the distance: structures of ordinary consciousness and actual bodily comportment are disrupted. Zigon considers only that the performer of ethics reflects upon the breakdown: he does not contend with the fact that sometimes it is our body that answers for us first. The scream as a device here enacts a downward displacement that, following Holbraad's (2018) analysis of Zigon's strategy, properly meets the criteria of going beneath (or rather between) morality and ethics, and in fact, culture – if only for a moment, cutting through the 'desert of relativism' (Stade 2018: 129) and the proposal of a purely descriptive model. Following Levinas and Schwenger, we cannot understand the scream as a response occupying a duration of lived time without (being) the meat that insists we exist. We scream between the onset of moral breakdown and the beginning of an ethical process which hopes to return us to normal, unreflective moralities of the everyday. Contra Zigon, in this moment between morality and ethics now occupied by the scream, we do not step away – in fact, we are rooted to the spot. We do not reflect but are

revealed to ourselves as prisoners of our bodies and the suffering we undergo as patients of Existence, as well as at the hands of each other.²⁴ Our being-in-the-world is resolutely located in the body. In extreme cases, to 'keep going' comes after the fact of having lived in horror, which demands of, provokes from, a body a thoughtless, autonomic, non-moral, temporally pre-ethical response to the impossibility of any other 'appropriate' response – following Plessner, in the breakdown of ordinary existential relations, overwhelmed in the act of 'being asked' (Wentzer 2017: 37). Omitting this eventuality, Zigon (2007) fails to consider the meaty time between the moral breakdown and beginning the ethical process, which occurs in the pre-normative space of obligation to existence itself. This, as I will now discuss, problematizes the ethics that his theory performs as a response to a/the moral breakdown in anthropology, and in turn, the way the model *prescribes* the relevant response of future anthropologists to the ethical demand of the other. 'There is always a risk in performing ethics. But one must act' (Zigon 2007: 139).

'Defective Presentness'

...(S)ilence can't exist in a literal sense as the experience of an audience. It would mean that the spectator was aware of no stimulus or that he was unable to make a response. But this can't happen or be induced programmatically. The non-awareness of any stimulus, the inability to make a response, can result only from a defective presentness on the part of the spectator, or a misunderstanding of his own reactions (misled by restrictive ideas about what would be a 'relevant' response). But so far as any audience consists of sentient beings in a situation, there can be no such thing as having no response at all. (Sontag 1967)

When Zigon's theory is turned back upon itself, it seems there is little (meta)recognition that the attempted displacement of moralism underpinning his descriptive programme is itself an ethical response to a perceived moral breakdown in anthropology, represented by the 'blended model(s)' (D'Andrade 1995: 405) where the objective and the subjective collide, and the (im)possibility of (self-) critical, anthropologically informed activism looms on the horizon of human science.

As already noted, the last philosopher Zigon draws upon is Alan Badiou (Badiou and Hallward 2001), who finds the maxim 'keep going', which we also find a version of in Wentzer (2017), at the root of several philosophical ethical traditions, and whose involvement

²⁴ Notably, in relation to his studies of drug rehabilitants also suffering from structural oppression forestalling the progress of their life projects, Zigon discusses the notion of 'being trapped in a world' (2014b: 757) which contrasts with the fluidity afforded by the dynamics of moral breakdown and ethical response (in his sense), and thus approaching the territory of the 'there is' and the scream. However, he does not use this opportunity to explore the avenues thrown up in the present essay.

in the text marks a turning point in the anthropological theory of moralities. This is where, for instance, Scheper-Hughes (1995) interprets the kind of ethical philosophy that posits a total responsibility to the other – which she finds in the later Levinas²⁵ and which Zigon draws from Logstrup – in order to lend credence to the claim that anthropologists can and in fact ought in special cases be moralizing, ethical and thus possibly activist if they witness suffering that their critical analytical skills can help both identify and, in some cases, potentially alleviate. However, given his original displacement of moralism, Zigon mentions but then skates over the central insight of Logstrup regarding responsibility to the other within his own theory. He retains only the dynamic of demand and response before taking a final turn at Badiou that not only imports 'keep going' into the kernel of his theory as the capstone of 'ethics'. And yet, the mention of Badiou also represents the moment at which another choice is made to keep going by Zigon himself by sideswiping the responsibility to others found in Logstrup in accordance with a hidden moralizing proposition.

The house built on the expunging of the social scientist's moral passions, as much as the house built upon their explicit inclusion, still embodies a moral position (Stoczkowski 2008: 353; Scheper-Hughes 1995: 419). In his fervour to avoid the sin of moralism, Zigon begins his endeavour with a moralizing proposition between the lines,²⁶ which, if it were made explicit, would read something like: 'Moralism in anthropology is bad, and anthropologists (of moralities), while they may well be morally positioned beings, ought not to be moralizing'. Thus, Zigon's own performance of 'ethics' – all of which follow from this initial response, and which, by referring to his own framework, are 'socially constituted ethics' – risk 'defective presentness' (Sontag 1967) in the face of the other's ethical demand by displacing moralism at the outset rather than interrogating the possibilities of a blended model.²⁷ The anthropology of moralities as an ethical response which aims to prescribe future ethical responses by anthropologists to the same problem, and thus also to other humans, builds on the presupposition that anthropologists themselves are, as social 'scientists', exempt from responsibility to the other. Taken seriously, it builds in the possibility of contrived silence in response to the ethical demand of the other, found most acutely in the scream, by setting apart the anthropologist as a 'fearless spectator' (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 419) in name

²⁵ 'Though I veer dangerously toward what some might construe as a latent sociobiology, I cannot escape the following observation: that we are thrown into existence at all presupposes a given, implicit moral relationship to an original (m)other and she to me.' (Scheper-Hughes 1995:419).

²⁶ Preceding that identified by Holbraad earlier.

²⁷ Thus, also quite contrary to spirit of responsibility to the other found in the philosophy of Logstrup.

of science.²⁸ This is despite the fact that anthropology as science is often positioned like few other disciplines to map out situations beyond its inhabitants' own comprehension and thus potentially alleviate suffering thoughtfully. Zigon has been 'misled by restrictive ideas about what would be a 'relevant' response' (Sontag 1967). Inserted into the temporality of Zigon's theory of moralities, the scream as response, while simultaneously turning the theory back upon itself, raises doubts as to the fitness of the project on the grounds of anthropological responsiveness to the scream, thus encouraging a revision of its foundational movement of displacement, if only minimally.

My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature.

(Munch in Heller 1973 in Schwenger 2014: 391)

'To Anthropology, from Meat Prison'

Just as silence sharpens the intellect and senses, allowing oneself to be in a sympathetic relation with the televisual is to attune to one's locus-ness, being hit by and becoming other with images of Earthlings. Anthropology's and ethnography's proclaimed penchant for the mundane only affirms further this call to attunement, in this case, to the extreme mundane. Even the smallest fragments of everyday perception can become portals into the human condition. As should be clear, in the end it isn't the anthropology of moralities that is at issue, unless by that we mean the anthropology of the moralities of anthropologists, the morality and ethics of anthropology (cf. Caduff 2011) and the possibility of anthropology not only of and by, but *for* humanity – a prospect Didier Fassin, wearing his science hat as opposed to his activist one, graciously concedes 'would not be shameful' (2008: 334). The ethical demand of the scream, as presenting itself to the anthropologist – and I write here of the scream both as literally and as figurally as one can without turning into dust – cannot simply be 'studied' forever: it meets us in the same visceral register whence it came.

In Zigon's anthropological theory of moralities, not only is the scream as a non-reflective, autonomic, pre-ethical, bodily response to the moral breakdown ignored, but there exists a hardwired quietism toward the suffering of the other. The scream may be non-communicational in the way we mean it, and yet, on hearing it from the other, touched by the primarily non-conceptual *demand* that the scream provokes in the depths of human being, the

²⁸ A great deal hinges upon the interpretation of and role given to ethical philosophies positing total responsibility to the Other, pivotally that of Levinas's later works, in the broader debate around moral anthropology.

fact remains that we are still 'being asked' (Wentzer 2017: 139). And this is why, in this case, it is anthropology itself that needs to be understood through and as responsiveness, particularly in 'moral' terms.

The discussion of the 'there is' and Schwenger's connecting it to the scream draws upon a foundational aspect of Levinas's philosophy in which the ethics of responsibility to the other are underdeveloped – and yet, when the scream is brought into play, we needn't strain ourselves with any philosophical ethics.²⁹ When watching bodies on screen and hearing screams through speakers, one cannot help but feel for the other, even if only autonomically. However, I argue that hearing screams in our organic proximity but failing to respond ethically to the demand of the other would mean manifesting a defective presentness and thus enacting a moral breakdown for anyone and anthropology alike. Furthermore, the fragment of thought from *Existence and existents* I draw on with and through Schwenger, like the scream, is not moral or intentionally moralizing. However, anthropologically speaking, even though the scream is non-moral and non-communicative, in an 'excessively simplistic' (Stoczkowski 2008: 351), even primitive manner, I take the ethical responsibility to the other to follow quite ordinarily from the demand of the scream. The scream may not in fact be a coded or even an intentional message, but it is a 'distress signal' (Taussig 2009: 273), to which it is, speculatively, and in generic folk terms at least, rude not to respond in kind. So, having found a real downward displacement – and perhaps it is actually Zigon's theory, as well as (momentarily) morality, ethics and culture, that disappears with the scream – ironically, the appropriate ethical response to the latter reappears to problematize the very foundation of the theory viewed through its own programme for study, found in the attempted displacement of moralism. As Schwenger observes, with the real scream 'we have no time to be weary, to consider the interesting philosophical conclusions that can be drawn from such a state. We instinctively want to escape from the trap of our own existence – which we suddenly sense is not our own, never was our own.' (2008: 394). This is something that is forgotten in Zigon's

²⁹ A decade later, Zigon (2018: 140-5) offered a critique of Levinas's ethics of responsibility with particular reference to Barad's involvement of the former in her intra-active ontology of agential realism. It transpires that Zigon may not be bothered by my critique regarding responsibility to the other because he finds this notion to be an overhang of metaphysical humanism that merely reproduces individualism and human exceptionalism, leaving the individual as a prisoner of the ethical demand of the other, which Zigon finds untenable. Where Zigon founds his philosophically legitimate objection to the notion of responsibility to the other on metaphysical and ontological grounds, instead conducting anthropology in a sophisticated realist mode, rather than conceiving of ourselves as metaphysical prisoner of the other, we might prefer to 'bootstrap' (Zeitlyn 2009: 209), referring to our own practical, non-metaphysical understanding of what it is to be a meat prisoner, common to all selves. Transposed from a rather different discussion concerning the adequacy of anthropological understanding, we might ask, with reference to the objections put forward in the present essay, 'If it works on the street why not in the academe?' (Zeitlyn 2009: 214).

framework, but that we should keep in mind when think-feeling through what a moral(izing) anthropology taking responsibility as its basis might be. The scream as response, which we cannot understand without a conception of the lived body as perturbed meat, disrupts the temporality of Zigon's theory, and subsequently, on the grounds of basic human responsibility, also prompts a re-examination of the basic and inadvertently moralizing premise underpinning it. Behind Zigon's theory we find the detached observer, or, in Scheper-Hughes' words, the 'fearless spectator' (1995: 419). In the latter, however, we find a 'witness' (ibid.) accountable to the other, history and thus ultimately the future. Both are ways of seeing, of exploring the world. Clearly, no moral(izing) anthropology, or anthropology of moralities, is sufficient without the other. Inspired by televisual images and the sound of a scream, if we were to follow Zigon's approach, which is principally a prefabrication of a theory of moralities, then surely the last thing we would want to do is to omit this basic responsibility from what amounts to a methodology, nor, deeper than that, a moral and ethical stance toward the world and others. Stepping away from screams, whether in the present from the past and the present, or from the future in the present, is still a moral choice. It is not one we would colour favourably, especially between friends, but nor between 'faceless passer(s)-by' (Taussig 2009: 274). Sometimes our bodies answer for us to the demand of the moral breakdown, and this rarer but nevertheless vital species of response should not be deleted in advance from any anthropological theory of moralities. Given the phenomenology of the scream, at the very least, we ought not to risk defective presentness if we hear it.³⁰ Why and why not, how and how not to engage in social transformation is

³⁰ Adjusting the bootstraps, as a 'hypothetical imperative' (Kant in Beldo 2014: 267), the principle of responsiveness – that is, that even in a scientific capacity 'one ought to respond in kind if one hears a scream' – may only be compelling if the reader is already attuned to this response as a relevant, positively morally valued choice. Yet, notwithstanding inevitable fringe cases (which is why I do not go as far as to espouse this as an unconditional 'ought'), aiming to uphold a minimal standard of decency between individual human beings seems a 'good' enough reason to provisionally accept it. However, as Beldo writes, 'we must recognise that any ought can be embodied, habitual and non-reflective just as easily as it can be explicitly stated, codified, or formally advanced' (2014: 268-9). Perhaps what I have done in part is work from what Parisi, following Whitehead, terms 'propositional feelings' (Parisi 2012: 238) to their crude articulation as a quasi-normative moral 'ought'. Is a usually unreflexive embodied morality being elaborated here, reflected in the claim that it is unusual, and by implication possibly morally wrong, to manifest a defective presentness at the sound of the scream? The sense of morality and/or ethics aligned with in this analysis, grounded in the notion of responsiveness, is couched in the notion of responsibility to the Other. Thus, it is in one sense an ethnocentric notion steeped in a Judeo-Christian ethic and metaphysical humanism. Nevertheless, here, in my view, it matters more that morality/ethics (both to some degree within and beyond Zigon's articulation of these terms), including with reference to the responsibility of anthropology itself, are conceived primarily as social–, in other words, the manner in which feelings, ideas, values and situations coalesce to inform the way we respond in action, to the ethical demand of the Other, with particular reference to our actual or potential role in their well-being. Rather than a recapitulation of individualism, then, there is an 'ethic of community... (situating) the self as a constituent piece of a social network or "office holder" and priz(ing) duty and interpersonal responsibility' (Beldo 2014: 273) is expressed by the 'ought'.

something for another time: no claims are made to this vexed territory at present.³¹ I hope only to have problematized Zigon's original anthropological theory of moralities in order to provoke a visceral re-evaluation of whether, in such framework, the possibility of a moral(izing) anthropology is minimally required, albeit perhaps reserved for extremes.

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³¹ Interestingly, in 2018, now turning away from metaphysical speculations following his critique of responsibility, and inspired by his ethnographic study of drug rehabilitation in Vancouver's Downtown East side, Zigon proposed as part of an 'anthropology of potentiality' (2018: 19) an 'ethics of dwelling and a politics of worldbuilding...not concerned with survival in this world of war...but rather ... focused on building new worlds in which that war no longer exists'(2018: 150). This is admirable, even necessary. Zigon's anthropology of potentiality looking to envision alternative futures emerging from conditions in which the world becomes 'unbearable' (2018: 7) summons (largely implicit) new horizons into view, in and for itself. In light of this more recent offering, I ask that we re-consider the temporality and thus the foundational displacement of Zigon's original theory (which remains a key component of this later work) on the grounds mentioned above, then considering how, as one such alternative possibility in an anthropology of potentiality, and given the inherent ethicality of futures, a collaborative politics of world building might by definition involve a (minimally) moral anthropology.

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