Chapter Two. The ethics of interculturalism

Introduction[1]

The task facing the intercultural researcher who sets out to eschew essentialism and simplified categorisation of the other is to conduct empirical research focusing on the 'inter' of intercultural interaction, with the intention of bringing to light the porous line between self and other, as well as the ability of the self to negotiate multiple cultural realities creatively. The acceptance of uncertainty in the form of responsible engagement with others in dialogue, represents an epistemological position that poses an ethical dilemma for the researcher: is the aim of dialogue a dialectical search for a final moment of reconciliation of differences, in which the other is framed within the confines of a universal ethics of tolerance? What happens if this dialogue is interrupted due to irreconcilable differences? Does intercultural dialogue take sufficient account of the possibility of violence, misunderstanding and refusal to engage with the other in the search for an idealised end of conflict in the luminous light of critical intercultural awareness? Or, in other words, is intercultural communication rooted in a promise of understanding? This chapter will attempt to unravel this dilemma applying Derrida's notion of the promise in order to examine critically the notion that knowledge and awareness of the other result in improved communication and harmonious interaction, and to identify the problematic consequences entailed in this simplified conceptualisation of human interaction.

The globalising tendencies of intercultural discourse result in the creation of a grand narrative (Lyotard, 1984; Vandenabeele, 2003) based on the universalised ideal of transparent and unambiguous information (Block and Cameron, 2002) and on the ideas of tolerance and understanding from the hegemonic perspective of a dominant cultural position (Holliday, 2010, 2011) underpinning the idea of intercultural competence. This grand narrative based on the value of efficiency in

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communicating interculturally appears in intercultural competence framework and intercultural training programs that focus on the acquisition of communicative skills to deal effectively with the other (Ferri, 2016). Furthermore, the ideas of cooperation, dialogue and transformation that characterise emancipatory formulations of intercultural communication, outline the promise of a final moment of understanding that leads intercultural communication towards a universalistic notion of final reconciliation of differences. This last aspect in particular leaves unresolved the issue of contrasting claims in multicultural societies, leading to an aporia between theory and praxis (O'Regan and MacDonald, 2007). According to this aporia, the promise of a final moment of understanding refers to the appeal to a transcendental signified, ''*an implied higher order of morality by which the differences that exist may be adjudicated and in some manner resolved*'' (MacDonald and O'Regan, 2012, p.4). This appeal to a higher order of morality leaves intercultural communication in a Kantian moral bind between universal claims to tolerance and the inability to provide ''*immanent—i.e. 'here and now' grounds for adjudicating between competing truth claims*''* (ibid. p.6). Indeed, the use of the terms culture, cultural other, cultural difference that accompanies discourses of tolerance and intercultural understanding is highly problematic, as illustrated in the debate on multiculturalism between liberal theorists and cultural relativists, in particular the dichotomy between the existence of separated group identities and the universalism of traditional citizenship theory (Squire, 2002). The liberal critique highlights the essentialist view of culture embodied in the multicultural ideals of tolerance and respect of cultural difference that leaves unresolved the issue of individual freedom against cultural claims and group belonging, in other words the reconciliation between equality and difference (Barry, 2001). In fact, the multicultural practice of ascribing cultural identities as a mark of difference generates a widespread fear of separateness that multicultural theorists address through the notion of integration intended in terms of a common form of citizenship (Taylor, 1994; Kelly, 2002; Phillips, 2007). Alternative perspectives attempt to move beyond both multicultural relativism and liberal abstract universalism, arguing instead for a *'pluralistically enlightened ethical universalism*' (Benhabib, 2002,

p.36), which establishes a moral community committed to dialogical imperatives in the resolution of conflicts. This moral community is founded on the model of rational communicative ethics (Habermas, 1984), in which equal protection under the law requires that individuals understand themselves as authors of the laws that bind society together through the creation of a public sphere (Critchley, 2006; Outhwaite, 2009). Similarly, Laclau proposes a relative universalization of values, meaning a universalism inscribed in a democratic dialogue between public spheres: *"the particular can only fully realize itself if it constantly keeps open, and constantly redefines, its relation to the universal"* (Laclau, 2007, p.65). The debate against particularism in the name of universal values is relevant not only in academic contexts, but has been increasingly prominent in the media and in political discourse. An exemplar instance being the speech of British prime minister David Cameron attacking multiculturalism in 2011, which followed similar attacks by the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy (Cameron: my war on multiculturalism, The Independent, 5th February 2011), all pointing at the failure of multicultural policies to promote individual freedom, fostering instead separateness and values that are irreconcilable with life in modern Western liberal societies. This tendency towards the refusal of the other and the desire for a return to a more conservative era of national values has been evident in the movement behind Brexit, and in the victory of the anti-immigration rhetoric at the heart of Donald Trump's victory in the US 2016 Presidential Elections. From this perspective, the main issue at stake in the debate refers to the type of communities that can be created and sustained in a pluralist society. Pluralism generates anxiety about the validity of universal perspectives and moral norms and, in this context, it is necessary to define a form of ethical understanding between people with different interpretations of the 'common good'. The claims of the politics of recognition have highlighted the misrecognition of minority identities perpetrated by hegemonic discourses that promote their own partial worldview to the level of universal validity (Taylor, 1994). However, Appiah (1994) warns against an unsophisticated understanding of collective identities that would replace the tyranny of hegemonic culture with the tyranny of a tightly

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scripted minority identity. Thus the dichotomy between the rights of the individual and the claims of collective identities represents an impasse that seems to characterise multicultural societies, and it generates the need to define a model of ethical choice that could satisfy the demands of universalism while simultaneously showing respect for particularism and individual autonomy. In the context of intercultural communication research, a more nuanced account of otherness is necessary in order to problematize the role of cultural difference in shaping the categories of self and other and complement both Laclau's and Benhabib's idea of a moral community, balancing the claims of both universalism and relativism.

The promise as deferred understanding

Derrida (1974, 1984, 1997) defines the tendency to fulfilment and completeness in Western philosophical thinking in terms of a 'metaphysics of presence', relating this disposition to the idea of promise. According to this metaphysics of presence, Western metaphysical tradition encloses truth within a system of binary oppositions which refer to an original signified. In this system of binary oppositions one term is identified with full presence -or truth, and the other term, the negative, with the loss of presence (Norris, 1982; Derrida, 1997; Bradley, 2008). This metaphysics of presence is reflected in the opposition between tolerance and intolerance: on the one side, the positive value of tolerance of the other, promoted by intercultural understanding; on the other, the opposed and the negative value of intolerance and refusal of the other and of the cultural practices attributed to the other (MacDonald and O'Regan, 2012, p.4). However, this dichotomy is unable to provide immanent reasons to resolve the conflicting claims of those who advocate tolerance and those who refuse it recalling visions of cultural purity which reassert nationalistic values and divisive arguments across ethnic, linguistic, cultural and historical lines, an example being the terroristic acts of the Norwegian white supremacist, Anders Behring Breivik, the Wisconsin Sikh Temple shootings in 2012 carried out by another white supremacist, Wade Michael Page, the murder of Dr George Tiller by anti-abortion terrorist Scott Roeder in 2009, the terrorist attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo by Saïd and Chérif Kouachi

in 2015, or the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 and in London in 2017, first in London Bridge and subsequently against Muslims outside a mosque in Finsbury Park. In these cases, the underlying concept refers to a 'metaphysics of presence' and the notion of a final moment in which competing claims will be resolved by defeating the 'false' or 'negative' opponent.

The idea of promise as deferred understanding recurs throughout Derrida's philosophical investigations and it is described in the notion of a 'disjointed' temporality that is irreducible to presence (Derrida, 1994; Wortham, 2010), meaning that there is an element that remains irreducible to the system of binary oppositions of Western metaphysics, which is the experience of an emancipatory promise described in terms of a messianism without religion. This notion of messianism is connected to the idea of justice in terms of a '*democracy to come'* (Derrida, 1994, p.74). According to the principle of disjointed temporality of this messianism without religion, the notion of a democracy to come does not represent an ideal future democracy, which is opposed to imperfect existing political systems. Instead, it embodies the irreducible element that eludes the system of oppositions established in the metaphysics of presence. This irreducible element is described in terms of a gap between ''*fact and ideal essence''* (Derrida, 1994, p.80), or between the reality of existing political systems and the utopian ideal of a future democracy. Furthermore, this notion applies not only to existing forms of imperfect democracy, but according to Derrida it constitutes the apriori structure of the essence of justice itself. According to this form of messianism without religion, democracy is

> a concept of a promise that can only arise in such a diastema (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being 'out of joint'). That is why we always propose to speak of a *future* democracy in the future present, not even of a regulating idea, in the Kantian sense, or of a utopia- at least to the extent that their inaccessibility would still retain the temporal form of a *future present,* and of a future modality of the *living present.* (Derrida, 1994, p.81).

This means that the ideas of democracy and justice cannot be established as full presence in a present or in a future time, because that would imply a return to the metaphysical binary opposition between a positive term that reflects truth and a term that negates this ideal. The idea of a democracy to come is

described as an '*experience of the impossible*' and a '*messianic opening to what is coming*' (Derrida, 1994, p.82), defining ethics in terms of infinite responsibility and hospitality without reserve. In this interpretation, the promise stops being such when it is fulfilled, and thus in order to retain its messianic character it has to remain open: ''*It is performative in as much as it entails a pledge, an affirmation or giving that is not simply identical or exhausted by its specific content*'' (Wortham, 2010, p.146). In other words, the promise does not produce the event of which it speaks (Derrida, 2001), maintaining the character of an unfulfilled promise that is constantly renewed in the tension between the act and its realisation. This tension is experienced in the aporia between existing political institutions operating within the framework of Western democratic liberalism, based on the notion of the nation-state, and the infinite ethical demand of unconditional hospitality that overflows the boundaries delimited by nation-states, and constitutes the regulating aspect of ethical responsibility. In an interview with Borradori, Derrida explains that:

> We are always led back to the same aporia: how to decide between, on the one hand, the positive and salutary role played by the ''state'' form (the sovereignty of the nation-state) and, thus, by democratic citizenship in providing protection against certain kinds of international violence (the market, the concentration of world capital, as well as ''terrorist'' violence and the proliferation of weapons) and, on the other hand, the negative or limiting effects of a state whose sovereignty remains a theological legacy, a state that closes its borders to noncitizens, monopolises violence, controls its borders, excludes or represses noncitizens, and so forth? (Borradori, 2003, p.126).

Derrida's definition of the idea of tolerance, understood in terms of '*condescending concession*', and '*a form of charity*' (p.127), contrasts with the idea of unconditional hospitality. In particular, Derrida's notion of hostipitality (2006) exposes the inherent contradiction of tolerance through the analysis of the word hospitality. In Derrida's deconstruction, the words hospitality and hostility carry the binary oppositions friend/enemy, hospitality/hostility between host, intended as the welcomed guest, or the stranger treated as friend or ally, and the stranger treated with hostility as an enemy (Derrida, 2006, p.210). According to this reading of the word, because the welcome conferred upon a guest is dependent on the goodwill of the host, that same welcome can be withdrawn, turning into hostility, if the rules of

the household are not observed. Therefore, the exercise of tolerance is dependent on a conditional welcome, and this welcome can be withdrawn to exclude the other at any time. On the one hand, unconditional hospitality represents an impossible ideal, on the other, it provides an idea of perfectibility guiding the rules governing conditional hospitality. This idea of perfectibility exposes Derrida's reluctance to enclose the practice of dialogue and the exercise of political deliberation within a totalising dimension that would lead to closure. An example of closure and of totalising tendencies in dialogue can be illustrated by the debates regarding universalism and particularism in multicultural societies, which are framed in dichotomous terms between tolerance of the cultural practices of the other and equality. In this sense, the notion of a democracy to come complements the necessity to reach a form of rational consensus implicit in the model of discursive democracy (Habermas, 1984) but leaving open the possibility for further dialogue. Matuŝtík (2006, p.280) describes this idea of perfectibility inherent in democracy itself in terms of an *"exiled otherness"* that reminds participants in a community of communication of the perils of the search for a totalising closure to the detriment of engagement in open ended dialogue. Assuming perfectibility as a characteristic of engagement in dialogue, Derrida's deconstruction of the word hospitality resonates with the distinction proposed here in relation to intercultural communication between two forms of a promise of understanding, one intended in terms of final reconciliation and universal tolerance, and the other in terms of deferred understanding. This distinction addresses the problematic nature of the notion of tolerance of cultural practices employed in intercultural communication, which leaves the conceptualisation of the relationship self/other open to this internal contradiction highlighted by Derrida. In other words, tolerance generates an internal aporia between the acceptance of the cultural other as different, and the claim of a universal resolution of those same differences in a final ideal of unity (MacDonald and O'Regan, 2012). This aporia can be traced to Kantian ethics and its ideal of a universality of reason.

Kantian autonomy and the Levinasian other

Kantian ethics emerged in the context of the Enlightenment, with the attempt to define the separate domains of reason and religious obedience. In other words, the notion of morality as obedience to religious precepts was contested in the name of the human ability to direct actions conforming to the dictates of reason. Kant is responsible for the formulation of the conception of morality as autonomy and the subsequent redefinition of the relationship between individuals and society in terms of self-governance of the individual, guiding the change towards the establishment of Western liberal societies (Atwell, 1986; Schneewind, 1998). Kant (1979) divides philosophy into theoretical and practical, the first concerning knowledge and the other concerning the conduct of beings possessed of free will. In the latter application of philosophical reflection, ethics is a ' *theory of virtue* ' that studies the ' *intrinsic quality of actions*' (p.71) meaning to determine whether an action is not simply the result of compliance with the law, but of the correct moral disposition, in terms of strength in self-control and self-mastery. This correct moral disposition obeys the categorical imperatives guiding practical reason, and determines the free will and autonomy of all rational beings (Kant, 2004). A crucial aspect of Kantian autonomy is that, as part of the noumenal realm (i.e. the realm of the thing-in-itself, unknowable to human experience), freedom is intended in transcendental terms: moral action is not the result of natural causation, but follows instead the categorical imperative, a categorical obligation not influenced by the pull of desires and interferences from the sensible world. Here resides the core of Kantian orthodoxy (Johnson, 2007), the fact that authority originates in our individual reason, so we act freely only when we reject sensory interferences and place our actions under the scrutiny of a universal law. In fact, moral agents act either in heteronomous terms (Homo Phaenomenon), meaning that the moral law generates from the phenomenal world, or as autonomous agents according to the noumenal world (Homo Noumenon), when the action originates in the self-determining, rational and autonomous individual (Atwell, 1986). Thus, ethics is a theory of virtue and a philosophy of action based on the strength of self-mastery in respect to the moral disposition, and it ' *provides rules for the*

proper use of our freedom, irrespective of particular applications of it'' (Kant, 1979, p.2). The moral imperative corresponds to three separate conceptions of the ''good'', of which the third represents the ideal of autonomy,

> ***Bonitas problematica*** - when the action is determined by the achievement of an end.
> ***Bonitas pragmatica*** - the action is determined by prudence and as means to happiness.
> ***Bonitas moralis*** - the action is determined by the goodness of an action in and for itself, representing a free act, determined only by the strength of reason and by its universal validity (Kant, 1979).

The influence of Kantian ethics has been most evident in the development of the concept of autonomy in moral philosophy. The idea of autonomy is characterised by an internal tension between the two words 'auto' and 'nomos', meaning respectively the will of a rational being, and the law objectively binding on that same will (Wood, 2008). According to Kant in Metaphysics of Morals (1983), the 'nomos' is grounded on objective reasons valid for all rational beings who recognise the principles of the law as universally valid and objectively binding. According to the concept of autonomy, rational beings must be viewed under the two attributes of Homo Noumenon, the intelligible self imposing the duty of respect to the law, and Homo Phaenomenon, the empirical self who is subject to the law. This split self is regulated conscience, which Kant describes as an internal court presiding over the self. According to the modalities of this internal court, which operates under the faculty of judgement, the self is at the same time the accuser and the accused:

> Every man has a conscience and finds himself observed by an internal judge, who threatens him and keeps him in awe (respect combined with fear). This authority watching over the laws within him is not something which he himself (arbitrarily) creates, but is incorporated in his being. If he tries to run away, his conscience follows him like a shadow (Kant, 1983, p.101).

From this description of the internal judge presiding over the free, self-determining moral being in the form of the Homo Noumenon, in contrast to the heteronomy of the Homo Phaenomenon, whose conduct is generated by stimuli coming from the sensible world, it is clear that the notion of autonomy represents the pivotal feature of Kant's entire moral philosophy (Atwell, 1986). Recent interest in

autonomy emphasises an individualistic interpretation of the concept. This focus on individualism begins in the 1970s (*see* Neely 1974; Norris, 1982; Dworkin, 1988; Frankfurt, 1988), with the development of hierarchical accounts of personal autonomy in which the content of the moral law is considered neutral, and autonomy depends on the ability to endorse or repudiate desires that move individuals to action (Taylor, 2005). More recently, the concept of autonomy has acquired relevance in the context of the relationship between agency (the capacity for intentional actions), and liberty (independence from controlling influences), in reference to applied ethics and the notion of accountability of morally responsible agency (Arpaly, 2005; Beauchamp, 2005; Haji, 2005). However, the aspect most relevant in the context of this research is that concerning the debate between a liberal conception of individual autonomy (Rawls, 1999; Barry, 2001) and multicultural claims to group identity, particularly Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition and the formulation of a multiculturalism framed within liberal-democratic values (Appiah, 2005; Kymlicka, 2007). The relevance of Kantian ethics in this debate resides in the historical context in which the concept autonomy of the individual was originally elaborated, guiding social change from pre-Enlightenment morality to modern liberal societies, and subsequently entering in conflict with claims of group recognition in multiculturalism. In conclusion, the most significant aspect of Kantian autonomy is that the self is able to act responsibly, becoming accountable for his/her own actions, only as an autonomous and self-regulating rational being, the Homo Noumenon. Adorno and Horkheimer in the Frankfurt School (1997, 2010) began the systematic critique of the idea of reason inherited from the Enlightenment, and the associated notion of a transcendental subject and instrumental reason. The Enlightenment project was revalued by Habermas (1987), who revalued reason in relation to its various social and embodied incarnations. This situated nature of reason is particularly evident, according to Habermas, in everyday communicative practices underpinned by a drive to mutual understanding. The post-modern turn is associated with a critique of reason in favour of 'the other', meaning the excluded from uniformity and from the self-transparency of the transcendental subject (Poster, 1989; Lyotard, 1984, 1988; Honneth, 1995; Derrida,

2001). In post-modern ethics, the notion of asymmetrical obligation introduces a reversal of the Kantian perspective of equal treatment and autonomy underpinned by the categorical imperative.

Levinas's notion of the asymmetrical relation with the other signifies this reversal introducing the distinction between moral, or the abstract code of conduct of the moral imperative, and ethics, or the encounter with the other person in her embodied corporality.

> Ethics: a comportment in which the other, who is strange and indifferent to you, who belongs neither to the order of your interest nor to your affections, at the same time matters to you. A relation of another order than that of knowledge, in which the object is given value by knowing it, which passes for the only relations with beings. Can one be for an I without being reduced to an object of pure knowledge? Placed in an ethical relation, the other man remains other (Levinas, 2001, p.48).

Levinas displaces the traditional language of metaphysics and operates a semantic transformation of its terminology. In the history of metaphysical inquiry the principal preoccupation has been the rational apprehension of reality through concepts such as being, universals or first causes and the definition of the unchanging elements that constitute the essence of morals or free will. Levinas dispenses with these preoccupations regarding ontology and defines ethics in terms of responsibility to the singular other through a radical move from the Kantian ideal of autonomy to the notion of passivity of the self exposed to the other. This displacement of the traditional concerns of metaphysical thought translates into a movement of positive desire towards alterity- the 'otherness' of the other (Critchley, 1999; Derrida, 2010). In this regard, Levinasian ethics represents a reversal of the tradition of the *cogito*- the *I think* of Descartes. Levinas describes the solitude of the self in its ontological state, as riveted to the materiality of the body and subject to its needs and demands. Only the ethical relation awakens the self from this state, when it is exposed to the other. The crucial difference with Kantian ethics arises at this point, in the determination of the motivation to act according to ethical principles. In the Kantian tradition of autonomy, the ethical act stems from an abstract moral imperative to which the self abides in accordance to the dictates of transcendental reason. In heteronomous Levinasian terms, however, the ethical act originates from the other, from the ethical demand that the other imposes

upon me. In this sense, the human acquires its significance only in relation to the other, and not prior to that, when the self is singled out by the other who imposes an ethical demand. This theme of ethical responsibility originates from the immanent *here and now,* which is conceptualised in a series of oppositions: accusativity vs subjectivity; asymmetry vs symmetry; heteronomy vs autonomy and proximity vs distance.

Accusativity vs Subjectivity

The self experiences and relates to the world according to two modalities, an ontological relation and an ethical relation (Levinas, 2006b). In the first instance, subjectivity organises experience through knowledge, according to the transcendental apperception of the Cogito or of the Kantian I think. Thus, on the one side, subjectivity opens to the world as intentionality of consciousness, through knowledge. On the other, the self experiences the world in a modality that is not related to ontological knowledge (the knowledge of being), but is elicited by the existential and corporeal discovery of vulnerability. This experience of the self opening to the world as an embodied being represents a traumatic experience, which is likened to a *"stripping of the skin exposed to wound and outrage"* (Levinas, 2006b, p.63). This state is brought about by the experience of sensibility, lived first in terms of enjoyment and then in what Levinas defines in terms of '*exposedness to the other*' (1998, p.75). This means that, if enjoyment represents the culmination of the ego, the '*singularisation of the ego in its coiling back upon itself*' (p.73), the encounter with the other is lived as an experience that exceeds the categories of representation and apperception of the rational mind, and that is likened to the experience of a trauma. In this mode, the self becomes the locus of an encounter with the other. Here, subjectivity is lived in a modality that is defined as 'accusativity', meaning that it is the other who calls the self to action:

> At least no escape is possible with impunity. The other calls upon that sensibility with a vocation that wounds, calls upon an irrevocable responsibility, and thus the very identity of a subject (Levinas, 1998, p.77).

This notion of subjectivity lived in the modality of accusativity, is not reducible to the categories of the mind, because it pertains to the sphere of the corporeal and of embodiment. In Levinas's words, the experience of meeting the other in this modality is '*independent of the adventure of cognition*' because in this instance the '*corporeality of the subject is not separable from its subjectivity*' (p.78). Thus, accusativity represents the ethical subject as 'flesh and blood', whereas rational subjectivity is identified with the abstract 'I think', the cogito, separated from the body. This opposing relationship is reflected in the encounter with the other, depending on whether the encounter happens in the modality of the cogito or in that of accusativity. As cogito, the self categorises the other into the categories of the known, or the categories of the same and of identity in Levinasian terms, operating autonomously and according to abstract principles. As accusativity, however, the relation with the other is invested with responsibility.

In the context of intercultural communication, the notion of the face of the other emphasises the materiality of the embodied other facing the self (Sparrow, 2013), which is expressed in communication through the notions of the *saying* and the *said,* meaning respectively the event of speech and the content of speech. As an illustration of this reading of the face of the other, in the following quote Levinas explains that, as opposed to ontological knowledge of the other, the ethical relation is established in the presence of self and other in their materiality, as embodied beings,

> I do not know if one can speak of a 'phenomenology' of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears. So, too, I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes! When one observes the colour of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that (Levinas, 1985, pp.85-86).

Understood in this way, '*the whole human body is in this sense more or less face*' (Levinas, 1985, p.99). The notion of the face of the other illustrates the difference between Kantian autonomy and Levinasian

heteronomy. Furthermore, in the context of intercultural communication an understanding of the role of the other in shaping interaction is a crucial determinant in the task of redefining an idea of ethical responsibility that is based on the interdependence of self and other, and that emphasises the inter-of the intercultural, meaning its processual and embodied aspects. From this perspective, the notion of the face conveys the ethical effect of an encounter in which embodiment and corporeality reveal mortality and the vulnerability of existence, designating the other in his/her corporeality and indicating the proximity of the other person facing the self. Thus, obligation towards the other is not the result of a formal or procedural universalization of maxims, because ethics is lived in the corporeal obligation that originates from the immanent, here and now, meeting with the other (Critchley, 1999). In the presence of another being we are compelled to respond, although in relation to the phrase '*straightaway ethical'* it does not imply necessarily a conception of '*goodness*' as it is commonly used in reference to a moral judgment, rather it expresses the practical engagement established with an other in the praxis of everydayness and communication, which also harbours the possibility of hostility, fear, violence and even murderous intention. Indeed, Levinas articulates an ethical ambivalence inherent in the encounter with the other that includes the possibility of violence, *"a desire to kill, an ethical necessity not to kill"* (Butler, 2010, p.173). For Levinas this desire to kill, this violence, represents a modality of engagement in which the self dominates the other, encountered in the vulnerability of embodiment, as face. It is precisely this murderous impulse that defines the ethical dimension of alterity, since the face of the other poses the ethical challenge of resisting violence (*''the Other is the only being I can wish to kill''* , Levinas,1969, p.198). According to Levinas (1985), an expression of this ethical ambivalence is found in the biblical moral imperative *Thou shalt not kill*: on the one side, because of its vulnerability, the face can generate a murderous impulse, on the other the face reminds the self of the interdiction to kill. In this sense, ethical engagement assumes a different connotation due to the acknowledgment of the possibility of miscommunication, misunderstanding and failure to establish dialogue, which is entailed in a conception of intercultural communication that recognises the dimension of risk taking and open

ended engagement between self and other and, indeed, to recall Phipps, the fact that there are no 'quick fixes' to the endeavour of human understanding.

In this regard, the notion of sensibility, indicating the corporeal aspect of subjectivity from which the self encounters the other (Levinas, 2008) replaces the notions of awareness and sensitivity that are commonly used in intercultural communication. Intercultural awareness describes a process of enlightenment that allows the self to uncover a higher truth that resolves all conflicting claims in the name of universal tolerance of the cultural other. Similarly, intercultural sensitivity indicates the ability to discriminate levels of cultural difference in order to interact effectively with others. Through the six stages of development of intercultural sensitivity- denial, defense reversal, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration (Bennett, 1993), the individual becomes progressively accustomed to cultural difference, thus adjusting his/her perceptions and experiencing a reduction of uncertainty (Wiseman, 2003; Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). Both notions of awareness and sensitivity follow the pattern of ethical autonomy delineated in reference to Kant, and depend on the idea of cultural difference as the principal obstacle to clear and unambiguous communication. With the notion of sensibility, Levinasian ethics suggests an alternative conceptualisation of the relation with the other, based on the perception of the embodied self in the ethical encounter. Whereas awareness and sensitivity develop in the ontological dimension of the self, sensibility represents the bodily aspect of experience and indicates a pre-reflective engagement with the other, meaning being affected by the presence of another. In this sense, the self as a sentient being is affected by the presence of the embodied other. This fact creates the preconditions for the development of an ethical concern for the other stemming from the '*here and now',* meaning the immediacy of lived experience. The ethical, in other words, is embedded in the materiality with which the self is engaged in everyday existence,

> We live from 'good soup', air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc…These
> are not objects of representations. We live from them (Levinas, 2008, p.110).

Taking this materiality in consideration, it is important to highlight how this understanding of the ethical does not necessarily entail that engagement with the other is devoid of difficulties. On the contrary, it implies a traumatic element of discovery of the self as a sentient being who is faced with the ethical choice to respond to the presence of an other. This response, however, can assume the aspect of refusal of engagement, of fear or of misunderstanding. The crucial aspect is that this material presence of the other will pose ethical demands and ethical challenges, which the self is called to acknowledge.

Asymmetry vs Symmetry

In the ethical relation described by Levinas (1985, 1998), the relation to the other lived as pure exteriority and obligation is devoid of any form of intentionality, for the self previously enclosed in the solitude of egoism and self-preservation is exposed to the other in an asymmetrical relation. Therefore, the self does not absorb and determine the meaning of the other, because the other escapes the play of the same, or the dialectic process through which the self reaffirms its own identity after representing and enveloping the other into a theme, or categories of knowledge, recreating a totality. Although ontological thinking predominates in the tradition of Western philosophy, Levinas finds in the ethical relation with the other an originary form of thinking that '*overflows the capacity of thought*' (1969, p.49), adopting the idea of infinity that Descartes described in the Third Meditation. The argument of that meditation, aimed at establishing the existence of god by the fact that the idea of the infinite cannot have been generated by a finite being, is turned by Levinas to designate the encounter with the other in the form of irreducible alterity, "*the relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority to him who thinks it*" (1969, p.50). Thus, the ethical relation assumes the character of responsibility when the self abdicates her/his sovereignty as thinking subject and answers to the other, meaning entering in a relation in which the self is not the master. In order to illustrate this asymmetrical relation, ethical responsibility is defined as a state of '*insomnia or wakefulness*', a '*perpetual state of vigilance and effort which can never slumber*' (Levinas, 1969, p.66) rather than an act proceeding from a fully

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bounded, rational, autonomous self. This state of vigilance described by Levinas is reminiscent of the messianism without religion of Derrida (1994) and the materialistic messianism of Benjamin (1999), in which the anticipation of an eschatological finality of messianic religions is abandoned in favour of a conception of temporality that contracts time in the *here and now,* in the immediacy of contact with the other. In the ethical relation described by Levinas, the self is not in control of the interaction, rather the interaction proceeds in an open-ended and unpredictable manner.

Heteronomy vs. Autonomy

In contrast to the idea of autonomy, the concept of heteronomy places subjectivity outside of the disembodied realm of the Cartesian ego into the phenomenal world, where it interacts with other selves to become an ethical being. In this context, ethical choices are made in relation to others, and not prior to the intersubjective relation. Thus, in contrast to the concept of autonomy, heteronomy indicates the central idea in Levinasian ethics that the self is not self-legislating, but is determined by the call of the other. In other words, the self acquires meaning through the intersubjective relations established with other selves, rather than through abstract notions related to transcendental conceptions of subjectivity. The principal issue in the opposition between the two concepts of heteronomy and autonomy is to establish whether ethical actions are determined by abstract universal rules, or whether they arise from immanent relations with others. This means that the self is either a product of moral norms that belong to it transcendentally and that pre-exist its constitution as a subject, or that the self becomes an ethical being only in relation to others. In this last sense, the attention towards the immanent and the contingent that is behind the notion of the heteronomy of the self, leaves open the question of establishing a ground for moral accountability and moral agency that is universal and not tied to the particular (Butler, 2005). The answer provided by Levinasian ethics is that the self acquires ethical significance only in relation to the other; prior to that the self exists in an ontological sense, as a being concerned primarily with its own perseverance in being, or *conatus essendi.* The ethical, in this context, originates outside of ontology and is *otherwise than being* (Levinas, 1998). All questions relating to the social and the

political, in short the aforementioned problem of universalism vs particularism, stem from the original relation to alterity, meaning the otherness of the other, that interrupts the solitude of the self and the disembodied, abstract *I think*.

This difference can be further illustrated in reference to the use of the term *intercultural* in intercultural communication. The contrast between heteronomy and autonomy becomes evident whether the emphasis is placed on the 'inter' or on the 'cultural': when the emphasis is placed on the 'inter', meaning processuality, interaction cannot be determined in advance, because it represents the result of the process itself, which is always in the *immanent here and now*. In the second instance, the focus on culture means that communication can be guided through the acquisition of competences, which determine the outcome of interaction. In this sense, the first relation is ethical, relational, open ended and heteronomous, whereas the second relation is ontological, autonomous and guided by the necessity of the self to determine outcomes through the use of cultural categorisation of the other. The metaphysics of presence manifested in the opposition between tolerance and intolerance appears in this conception of the self as the autonomous and self-governing individual of the Western liberal tradition. It is this autonomous self who exercises tolerance in welcoming the other conditionally, while retaining the right to withdraw the welcome accorded to the other. The conception of tolerance envisioned from the perspective of the autonomous self excludes the role of the other in interaction, positing subjectivity as independent from the influence of the external world. This reliance on the idea of tolerance leaves intercultural communication in an ethical conundrum in relation to the ability to engage dialogically with differing cultural and ethical frameworks. The complexity of intercultural communication surfaces when the ideals of autonomy and self-sufficiency of the self are destabilised by the material and embodied presence of the other. In this situation, understanding is deferred in the praxis of engagement between self and other. In this sense, the practice of deferred understanding addresses this conflict inherent in the notion of hostipitality between tolerance and intolerance.

Proximity vs. Distance

Levinas subverts the traditional correlation between knowledge and being, dispossessing the ego of its privileged position as *res cogitans,* a thing that thinks. In his interpretation, knowledge appropriates and grasps otherness, reducing it to sameness through the act of transcendental apperception. He writes: *'Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension, refers back to an act of grasping'* (in Kearney and Rainwater, 1996, p.124). In this activity of appropriation of the known and reduction of alterity to sameness, the ego lives in the solitude of a 'happy conscience', disinterested and self-sufficient in its solipsism, leading to

> full self-consciousness affirming itself as absolute being, and confirming itself as an I that, through all possible 'differences', is identified as master of its own nature as well as of the universe and able to illuminate the darkest recesses of resistance to its powers (Levinas,1996,p.127).

However, next to the transcendental ego of pure consciousness, Levinas distinguishes a non-intentional consciousness, or pre-intentional consciousness, which he describes using the words '*stranger*', '*countryless*' and '*homeless*' (p.129) to indicate a dimension of the self that does not reside under the bright light of intentional consciousness. In this realm of pre-intentional consciousness, ethics begins with the appearance of the face, in relation to otherness, which opens the possibility of conceiving a *'freedom exterior to one's own'* (Levinas, 2006a, p.14). This ego stripped of its transcendental sovereignty is defined by Levinas (1996) as *mauvaise conscience*, i.e. bad conscience, when the self discovers the guilt of the affirming subject and the need to answer for its right to be. This experience introduces the idea of responsibility and justice:

> The human is the return to the interiority of nonintentional consciousness, to bad conscience, to its possibility of fearing injustice more than death, of preferring injustice undergone to injustice committed, and what justifies being to what guarantees it (Levinas, 2006a, p.128).

This means that the encounter with the other generates the fear of violence and usurpation that the individual risks committing in his/her striving for self-preservation. Thus, the notion of proximity

describes the conception of sociality that underpins the idea of the other, where proximity represents the modality that confers an ethical, and therefore 'human', status to the self. Once the basic relationship self-other has been established as the origin of the ethical mode of existence, Levinas introduces the notion of the third person, which enters and mediates the relationship between the individual and the other:

> But we are never, me and the other, alone in the world. There is always a third: the men who surround me. And this third is also my neighbour. Who is the nearest to me? Inevitable question of justice which arises from the depth of responsibility for the unique, in which ethics begins in the face of that which is incomparable. Here is the necessity of comparing what is incomparable- of knowing men. First violence, violence of judgment, transformation of faces into objective and plastic forms, into figures which are visible but de-faced; the appearing of men: of individuals, who are certainly unique, but restituted to their genera (Levinas, 2001, pp.115-116).

The entrance of this third person signifies the institution of laws and political systems that guarantee the rights of each individual, effacing the dyadic relation self-other. In this sense, the relationship between self and the other undergoes a transformation with the appearance of this third person, because the ethical relationship becomes political in the need to reconcile conflicting claims (Kearney, 1984; Levinas, 2006). To this end, ethics '*hardens its skin*' (Kearney, 1984, p.65) upon entering the political world of this impersonal third. Nevertheless, the ethical vocation of the self does not disappear in the formalisation of justice into a legal system, because '*justice only has meaning if it retains the spirit of dis-interestedness which animates the idea of responsibility for the other man*' (Levinas, 1985, p.99). Consequently, a political order can be challenged in the name of this ethical responsibility towards the other. This introduction of symmetry in the relation with others through the notion of the third person becomes poignant in order to fully understand the concrete implications of ethical responsibility. The notion of individual responsibility should not be mistaken with a naïve negation of institutions and the state in favour of a form of voluntarism that relies on the goodwill of individuals. In fact, Levinas affirms the necessity to live in a world of citizens and not only in '*the order of the Face to Face'* (Levinas, 2006a, p.90), but it is essential to highlight the fact that individuals cannot abdicate entirely

to the State their own duties of responsibility towards the other. In this context, the notion of responsibility expresses the ethical character of the infinite debt towards each singularity, or individual others, which Derrida (1988) defines undecidability, the fact that each decision represents a leap of faith made in relation to the singularity of a context (Critchley, 1999). If the categorical imperative of Kantian moral law requires to measure a decision against a universal maxim, the idea of infinite responsibility arises from the context of a singular experience and acquires a universal character in the notion of the other's infinite demand made on the individual. The passage from the solitude of the thinking self to the sociality that is established with the other encountered in her/his singularity is constituted through language, from the dimension of the *said* to that of the *saying.*

Conclusion. Interculturality and the distinction between the *saying* and the *said*.

The two linguistic dimensions of the *saying* and the *said* coincide with two temporalities, the diachronic and the synchronic. The diachronic relates to the organization of perceptions and of experiences in a coherent temporal flow. In this temporality, language fixes the perceptions received from the external world into meaningful notions. The *said,* in other words, shapes and organises experiences into the know categories handed to the individual by the cultural milieu in which s/he is situated. Cultural traditions belong to this dimension of language, as available categories that allow consciousness to make sense of reality. In the diachronic dimension of temporality, the flow of time is interrupted by the other, of the embodied presence of the other person. If the *said* fixes meaning, the *saying* expresses another dimension of human expression, which is pre-linguistic. Rather than being opposed, the two linguistic dimensions are complementary: the event of the *saying* needs available categories in order to be processed by consciousness. However, the *saying* is never completely exhausted or grasped by the *said.* The *saying* represents an irreducible remainder of difference between the content of the *said* and what defies categorisation:

> It is only in the said that, in the epos of saying, the diachrony of time is synchronised into a time that is recallable, and becomes a theme. (…) But the signification of saying goes beyond the said. (Levinas, 1998, p.37).

The presence of the *saying* underlying the *said* challenges the idea of the transparency of language, or the perfect correspondence between word and meaning (Ferri, 2014). This interplay between the two modalities of language, which represents Levinas's 'linguistic turn' in this ethical philosophy, offers an interesting perspective for intercultural communication. One the one hand, meaning is fixed, resulting in essentialist categorising of the other; on the other, the ethical relation with the other is opened in open-ended dialogue. The latter modality of communication, however, requires that the self is prepared to renounce the tendency to establish an outcome to the encounter. The *saying*, in other words, is the meeting between self and other in speech, accepting the open-ended nature of the interaction, counter to the tendency in much intercultural communication research to fix meaning under the pre-established script of communicative competence and the effective transmission of content described in intercultural training. The unfolding of the *saying* in dialogue puts into question assumptions made in relation to the other, foregrounding reciprocal interaction between others. This ethical aspect of language, based on embodiment and presence to one another, throws the self in a situation which subverts pre-established categories and places communication in the realm of everyday contact and concern for the other, which Levinas illustrates in the most basic acts of politeness between two interlocutors:

> In discourse I have always distinguished, in fact, between the *saying* and the *said*. That the *saying* must bear a *said* is a necessity of the same order as that which imposes a society with laws, institutions and social relations. But the *saying* is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The *saying* is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him. It is difficult to be silent in someone's presence; this difficulty has its ultimate foundation in this signification proper to the saying, whatever is the said. It is necessary to speak of something, of the rain and fine weather, no matter what, but to speak, to respond to him and already to answer for him (Levinas, 1985, p.88).

Interaction between embodied subjects is thus characterised by an ethical character that surfaces in communication, when concerns with reliability, effectiveness and performance are set aside in favour of concern for the other qua other.

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