Communication as alterity's ethics: explorations with Lévinas[1]

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Abstract

Ethics is a common subject in Communication Studies. However, the approaches frequently focus on professional and practical issues and draw arguments from normative or deontological theories. This paper, grounded on Lévinas' ethics of alterity, proposes that the concept of communication implies ethical concerns, insofar as its necessary addressing to others, having as its presupposition the openness and the possibility of accepting and hosting otherness. The argument develops threefold, as there are at least three main requisites to communication ethics: (a) openness and hospitality to the other; (b) the infinite responsibility towards otherness; (c) proximity and interpellation of the other's face as the starting point of communication. The idea is not to propose another "Ethics for Communication", but to understand Communication as an ethical action.

Keywords: Ethics. Communication. Alterity.

Introduction

At first glance, communication does not have a major place among the topics in the work of Emmanuel Lévinas. The subject appears obliquely in texts in which he focuses on dialogue and the dialogical relationship. Admittedly, in an interview, Lévinas (1995) defines his notion of communication as a "philosophy of dialogue", equating it with a "first philosophy": the aspect to be underlined is the relational aspect, of which dialogue is a constituent part, not a "means" to achieve alterity. But, even in this approach, his philosophy

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does not seem to be a 'philosophy of dialogue', as in Buber (2010), or of hermeneutics, as in Ricoeur (1978). His writings on language or the question of meaning also do not seem to be directed towards the configuration of a specific theory or concept, and we do not believe that there is any attempt to outline a concept of communication, let alone a "Theory of Communication." Although the theme of language and discourse does appear in his books, it would be difficult to even propose a "theory" about these subjects that would allow even a cross-sectional approach with communication.

The word "communication" rarely appears in his writings, and is usually close to its common usage, without further definition or pursuit of conceptual rigor that would give it a specific direction. Mentions of "media", as "press", are even rarer, and, in general, communication seems to be most evident when it comes to showing how the self is constituted by the Other in an original relationship between two totally separate interlocutors that do not communicate via discourse, but through respect and responsibility that the self assumes for the Other, the hospitality of the "Other in me".

This unrelated relationship, this contact not mediated by discursive exchange, could immediately evoke the question regarding the meaning or need for seeking an approximation between Lévinas and Communication. His main concepts, such as Face, Hospitality, Alterity and Ethics, among others, do not refer directly to a communicational relation, nor does this seem to be his intention when developing his philosophy. Such concepts question the fact that the discourse (rational and based on normative principles) has become "without interlocutors", since the impersonality of rational communicative exchange tends to suppress the alterity of the interlocutor and also of the speaking self, silencing their faces.

When, however, one observes the essentially relational quality of his concepts, deriving mainly from the phenomenological basis provided by Husserl's philosophy (2016), and above all his constant reference to otherness, one sees a possibility of approximation with Communication — or, more narrowly, to a specific conception of "communication" proposed by different authors at different times.

But, in the absence of direct references, how can communication be thought of in relation to Lévinas's thinking?

Two paths are discarded from start. It is not a question of thinking, on the one hand, "communication in Lévinas's work", as an exegetical work that perhaps belongs more to the domain of philosophy than communication. Likewise, it is not a matter of "deducing" or "constructing" a "communication theory" from Lévinas. The focus of this study is narrower.

We would like to propose a limited reading of the communication phenomenon grounded on some of the concepts of Lévinas that may contribute to a better understanding of communication. It is therefore a matter of thinking communication — in a strict sense, explained below — *with* Lévinas, not from him or in his work.

The perspective here is to build on the relationship between the notion of "ethics as a first philosophy" in Lévinas's work and a communication perspective as a relation,

developed over the last years by Ferrara (2012, 2013), Braga (2010, 2011), Marcondes Filho (2011, 2012), Wolton (2011), among others.

The proposal, broadly speaking, is to think of ethics as the foundation of the communicational relation. It is assumed that communication, to be effective as a phenomenon of "sharing" beyond "transmission", requires the foundation of an ethics of alterity. The difficulty or refusal to accept the phenomenon of alterity prevents the constitution of a communication relation.

There is an ethical demand in this relationship. Not only a normative or deontological ethics, often focused on the delimitation of "right" and "wrong", especially in the professional field. The approximation between the ethics of Lévinas and the communication intended in this text does not think of communication as a phenomenon that can be reduced to codes of conduct or to a table of moral principles applicable to any situation: communication is understood as an act unintelligible in its entirety, but which can be approached from the constitution of an intersubjective link between ethical subjects linked at the moment of the communicational act.

The general objective here is to approach three ethical dimensions of the communicational relationship in Lévinas' philosophy, starting from the notions of proximity, responsibility and face. Our starting point is the way in which Lévinas treats the encounter with radical alterity, in a relationship in which the other constantly escapes us, but requires from us, never without traumatizing and frightening us, hospitality, donation and justice. It is not our intention to show here an empirical approach to the Levinasian notion of ethical encounter with alterity from the interpellation of the face, since this has already been done in other works (MARQUES; BIONDI, 2016, 2017; MARQUES; SOUZA, 2016, 2017; SOUZA; MARQUES, 2017; SOUZA; COELHO; MARQUES, 2016, 2017; MARQUES; MARQUES, 2017; MARQUES; MARTINO, 2018). Therefore, our methodological strategy is based on the critical systematization of the ethical dimensions that evolve the proximity, the approach and the communication with others in Lévinas's work.

This study outlines, therefore, some relations between certain aspects of Lévinas' philosophy (1980, 1995, 2007, 2010, 2016), in particular his concept of an ethic of alterity and a relational concept of communication. The goal is to think, from Lévinas, communication as an ethical phenomenon par excellence, as far as its necessary direction to others, having, as a presupposition, the openness and the possibility of accepting otherness. It is not intended here to discuss or make an exegesis of the concepts and categories of Lévinas, but to think, with these categories, the ethical implications of a concept of communication. Therefore, direct quotations to the author, as well as explanations of his concepts are reduced, preferring the tensioning of his assumptions with the conditions of the communication phenomenon.

We work with the idea that the communicational phenomenon has its specificity in the intersubjective action of sharing, not being confused with a perspective of information

transmission. This proposition is worked from three aspects of communication as ethics: (a) as a gesture of openness of self and hospitality to the other; (b) the responsibility towards the other, built in response to the questioning of their face; (c) as a presence space of the face as the starting point of communication. These three aspects are preceded by a contextual indication of the notion of "communication" being adopted here. The proposal of the text, based on Lévinas, is not to propose, in this or that way, the idea of an "ethics of Communication", but of Communication as Ethics.

From aesthetics to ethics of the communicational phenomenon

When it comes to seeking an approximation between the concept of "communication" and a particular author or author, in this case, Lévinas, language brings an initial trap: which concept of "communication" is being used? The examination of the propositions in circulation in the communicational field shows a considerable absence of any kind of consensus regarding what is meant by "communication" (MARTINO, 2009).

How would it be possible to think "the" communication with Lévinas without indicating an approximate understanding? Evidently, it is not the case of proposing a definition and, even less, adopting one in a closed way, but to indicate which outline of the concept of communication, elaborated in the previous dialogue between researchers in the area, is being used.

This first part of the text aims to situate the question of a concept of communication based on the relation with alterity, from which it is possible to think its ethical dimension.

Historically, the Communication studies seem to have devoted little attention to the very characteristics of what constitutes the communicational phenomenon, its central core (MARTINO, 2007a; MARTINO, 2004, 2008, 2009). The theoretical thinking of the Area, as it seems, is directed to the establishment of relationships between phenomena defined as "communication", without a greater concern to observe characteristics that allow to identify it beyond its use as a theoretical-methodological instrument to which some kind of specific reasoning would be added.

In the context of Communication Theories, as Martino (2007a) warns, there is a "belief" in the fact that there are theorizations about the phenomenon that do not always define it — hence his proposition, in a previous moment, to ask ourselves often if "there are communication theories". Thus, in the face of plurality — welcome, no doubt, as a sign of the vitality of the Area — it is important to define which definition of communication is being spoken of.

The concept of communication triggered in this text is not intended to be unique nor necessarily more correct in relation to others circulating in the Area. However, it is a matter of emphasizing an eminently relational point of view of communication that dialogues with the properly "mediatic" elements most circulating in the field, without reducing them or making them a necessary condition. Communication, here, is seen as an aesthetic process of

relation with alterity, understanding "aesthetics" not only in the sense of a "perception", but also in its dimension as the moment of production of this relationship.

There is no pretense of originality in relation to this concept, since indications in this sense have been elaborated, among others, by Ferrara (2012, 2013), Braga (2011, 2012), Marcondes Filho (2011, 2012), Wolton (2008, 2011) and Martino (2007b, 2016), without the idea of exhausting or reducing the theme.

A commonality between these propositions seems to be the perspective of understanding communication as a relational process, regardless of the presence of a technical intermediation — since the "media", as an element of a contact "medium", seems to figure as a logical assumption in any relationship — responsible for defining its effectiveness. These authors seem to seek, in close but never identical ways, the delineation of a communicational phenomenon in which the establishment of the relation with alterity finds a founding and fundamental space.

These authors, in their diversity, seem to direct communication research towards the construction of a look at the conditions of this relation with the other, different from the perspective of the "social relation", proper to the Sociological view, in favor of a closer communicational relation development of the phenomenon — without, of course, constituting, from this, an ontological or essentialist conception of communication, easily transformed into a univocal, closed and somewhat contradictory concept in itself.

On the contrary, some of the categorizations pointed by these authors to think what is communicational are characterized by the opening of the proceduralities in a relation of hospitality, donation and responsibility with the other. The elements close to communicational openness seem to be present, for example, when Ferrara (2013) differentiates "communication" as a noun and, therefore, as a "something", and "to communicate", an indicator verb of an action, establishing a component dynamic to the phenomenon. The perspective of a dynamic opening also seems to be present in the notion of communication as "attempt", proposed by Braga (2010), or as "event", defined by Marcondes Filho (2014), or even as existence in the "difference" indicated by Wolton (2011).

The principle of communication as a foundation, an integral part of this "ethics as a first philosophy", is highlighted by Marcos (2010, p. 244), who states that "the relational, tensional, symbolic and mediated dimension of experience gives Communication a place of principle." In this sense, Guimarães and Lima (2013, p. 87) indicate that "with Lévinas, it is communication that allows the constitution of the common, which, however, does not mean that the common arises in the unfolding or conclusion of this process." The act of communicating is also thought by Marcondes Filho (2007, p. 59) as something that "does not refer to the contents that are inscribed in the said — that form that is stabilized by the logic of a logical-syntactic — that count less than the own saying."

If there is, in this aspect, what appears to be an aesthetic principle of communicational dynamics, based largely on the relationship with the other, it is necessary to question the extent to which this does not imply immediately the presence of an alterity with which

this relationship is constituted — and, therefore, this is constituted as an observation of ethical thinking. In other words, to delineate the spaces of ethical foundation of an aesthetic of communication.

Evidently, we are not arguing for the location of similarities between all these conceptions, each of them the result of very different formulations, with different assumptions and scope. However, it seems that they all seem to ground communication as a relationship towards an otherness. It is from this premise, without going into the details of the conception of communication of each quoted author or author, that one can question the place of the ethical foundation of the communicational relationship - and think it with Lévinas.

Openness and hospitality: from transmitting to sharing

In a text written in the early 1980s, Lima (1983), taking a distinction from Williams (1974), proposes a distinction between the "transmit" and "share" poles present in the notion of "communication."

While the first aspect emphasizes the unidirectionality of the phenomenon, understood as the vertical relationship, sharing presupposes a relationship based on horizontality. Immediately we could problematize, from Lévinas (2015), that horizontality does not necessarily mean "equality" among participants — equality in terms of speech possibilities, certainly in the sense used by Couldry (2006) — but not equality as necessity: the presence of the same at this point becomes an impediment to the establishment of communication. Regarding this difference and necessary asymmetry between the Other and me, Liesen (2012, p. 86 – Our translation) argues that

> The distance between me and the Other is infinite, even more so is the very presence of infinity. Presence precedes all significance. Face to face is access to man in his strangeness, by word. The Other questions, speaks, speaks to me. In the world of the same, man would lose his language and face, for they would be unnecessary.

Sharing finds, in the difference with alterity, its possibility of existence: the moment it is directed to another different from itself, the possibility of communication opens up. The process, however, is far from simple: the existence of difference does not, in itself, presuppose the notion of a communication process. An act of informing, which is common in everyday experience, may occur, exchanging summarized data on the indifferent absorption of alterity into the weak experience of the individual who is entreated in his own ipseity distant from the other.

Alves and Ghiggi (2012, p. 586) argue that, unlike this reductionism, this "neutralization and assimilation in which the Same has the power and freedom to measure

everything by its categories, including the relationship with the Other man, Lévinas describes a Pedagogy, an Encounter with the Other from an ethical perspective."

The meaning of communication, in this particular case, begins at the moment when the individual opens to the phenomenon of alterity. The condition of possibility of the communicational act, in this aspect, is initially delimited by the intentionality of a consciousness willing to dislocation caused by the presence of the other that interferes with its flow — and again Lévinas's phenomenological basis meets this perspective.

Marcos (2010, p. 242) recalls that, for Lévinas, "I am a *human being* as I can leave my *being* to become *human* in the hospitality and welcoming of others."

Openness to receive the other translates into the notion of hospitality: communication, in this sense, is not only an act of giving, but also, in complementary terms, of receiving the other in me. Not the reception of the message in the sense given by the so-called "reception studies", but the reception of alterity as part of the communicational act. Without receiving alterity, you do not receive your message: openness is also hospitality to receive the other.

Serra (undated, p. 9) highlights the validity of small gestures revealing an ethic of respect for alterity: "It is true that, not being the rule, 'communication before communication' is present in small everyday gestures, some of which are described superiorly by Lévinas himself: the hand reaching out to greet the other, the smile towards the unknown, the 'good mornings' given to the passerby."

There is an important differentiation in the sense of separating the act of "informing", constituted by the transmission of coded messages, and of "communicating", closer to the pole of a "sharing". This difference, if not necessarily a dichotomy in that information and communication are part of a continuum, on the other hand, is important to remember that not every exchange of information constitutes a communicational act. On the contrary, information usually circulates in relatively closed systems, even in network architectures, while the communicational phenomenon presents itself as something larger, involving cognitive, emotional and social aspects of those involved — and, therefore, an opening to be affected by the phenomenon of the other's face.

One of Lévinas's perspectives is to place ethics as the first foundation of the whole philosophy, even prior to the cognitive act. The establishment of the ethical relationship occurs, the philosopher recalls, even before any kind of knowledge, in so far as it already presents itself as an alterity. Lévinas's ethical imperative, in this sense, differs from the ethics proposed before him, such as Aristotle's, Kant's and Hegel's, because of its character not necessarily normative or deontological, but as a starting point of the relationship — alterity in this case begins with one's own knowledge by presenting oneself as another different from the one they know.

In the context of the relation with alterity in its human aspect, this knowledge on the other establishes a necessary relationship of openness of oneself to be experienced in

the relationship with the other. The act of communicating is shown, at this moment, as an ethical action, since there is no communication without the presupposition of an alterity with which one contacts the difference, being affected by it. Communication, therefore, is based on the ethics of an experience of alterity constituted in all its moments and formal configurations — hence, the act of communicating does not depend on the specificity of the *medium* to establish itself. Hence, this relationship with alterity does not depend on the "physical" presence of the other to happen, but can be established in any kind of mediated relationship in which this openness to alterity exists.

Note that the reference here is to communication as ethics, but not of information as such. Information, as the initial data, the "bit", is nonetheless provided with ethical implications, but in a sense other than that explored here. Santos (2004, p. 98 – Our translation) highlights the impossibility of understanding the exchange of information as "communication" when thinking about Lévinas:

> Hence, the possibility of a simultaneous, reciprocal mirror relationship is excluded, where the self and the other enjoy the same status and where communication can occur in terms of information exchange, comings and goings of various meanings, or where – in a pragmatic perspective – consensus could be established.

Openness does not exist in the sense of projection, identification or empathy, but in the sense of making room for the aesthetic experience of the other. This, of course, requires time for experience rarely found in the speed of everyday actions — not by chance, speed is a fundamental aspect of information but not communication — conditions of this are addressed in Trivinho (2011). Opening to the other is a process inscribed in a specific time of acknowledgment of the presence of alterity before me, and at that moment, communication is established.

Opening yourself to another is at the foundation of communication as an ethical phenomenon. And it is instituted from the recognition of the other as someone with whom one is in relation from the moment one is in the presence of one's face: at this point, an ethic of responsibility with the one with whom one communicates is affirmed.

Communication as responsibility

Communication begins with an experience of responsibility towards each other. The act of communicating is in the responsibility of sharing with the other, understood in its necessary difference — without which there is no interval or space for the act of communication — with which one can "share-together", "share" a certain aspect of the existence or experience that is intended to be shared.

Some etymological features may further delimit the issue. The word "responsibility" is related to "response" and "respect". The Latin "*respondere*" is the basis of the three and, as the particle "re" suggests, there is a sense of reciprocity implied in the expressions. Responsibility, respect and response are shown as parts of a whole in the constitution of the communicational process with alterity. Communication is linked to the sense of responsibility for a respectful alterity and this is materialized in the response to others.

The establishment of a responsibility towards the other, fundamental in the communicational process, also unfolds as an initial respect for the other in their condition of alterity that must be maintained and preserved as a condition of communication. From these two gestures, responsibility and respect, the response to alterity is indicated: not, of course, the relatively simple act of answering any question quickly and hastily, but the act of responding to disruptive injunctions provoked by the presence of the other's face.

"The face looks at me, calls out to me. It claims me" (LÉVINAS, 1995, p. 163). It requires an answer. It is not reduced to its physical manifestation, but refers to transcendence, because it continues to escape us regardless of how conceptualized or interpreted it is. Such freedom does not refer to an autonomous agent in the liberal sense of the term, but to the ethical relation of consideration and listening, generating the possibility of acceptance. For Lévinas (2007, 2016) we find our freedom by serving the other, offering them hospitality.

> His presence [other's face] consists in divesting himself of the form that nevertheless already manifested him. His manifestation is a surplus on the inevitable paralysis of manifestation. This is what we describe with the words: the face speaks. The manifestation of the face is the first discourse. Speaking is first and foremost this way of coming from behind one's appearance, behind one's form; an opening in the opening (LÉVINAS, 1995, p. 59 – Our translation).

The act of becoming responsible begins in this response to the questioning of the face — and the response to the other, within a relation of identity and difference —, defines the aspect of the communicational process involved in the relationship — and even, to some extent, its existence. It is possible to respond without responsibility, but this is not in itself a communicational process in so far as alterity was not counted as a space of difference, but of in-differentiation in its reduction to the ipseity of the informed person, even if seeking an answer — the mechanic act of information that does not depend on the effective qualities of those who constitute alterity.

The voluntary absence of response reduces the other to silence. It causes strangeness and reminds the other of his status as a stranger in relation to the same; the absence of dialogue defines the subject in his/her responsibility for the other that summons him/her to the responsibility towards himself/herself: artificial event, but common in everyday life.

It is perfectly possible to exchange information with a person without communicating with them: it is, however, the violence of reducing the other to a "there is", pure presence as suggested by Lévinas (2015), who does not constitute the other — simply because there is no room for communication. A "space of silence" is created (MARTINO, 2007a, 2007b), in which the alterity of the other is registered as a simple presence or data, and communication becomes impossible because it is unwanted in the absence of responsibility towards the other.

Menezes (2008, p. 30) points out that "the question of the Other arises, in Lévinas's text, through the description of the subject, the Self, identity in its movement and that suddenly perceives itself as broken by the appearance of the Other". In the same sense, Alves (2012, p. 55) points out that "the proximity of the neighbor interrupts the stages of consciousness, because the meaning is attributed to the significance itself, that is, to the language prior to the speech. Contact itself is communication without sentences and without words": a relationship without relation.

What Lévinas calls the "relationship without relation" is the original, warm and asymmetrical interaction between two totally separate interlocutors, who do not communicate via discourse, but through reciprocal subordination that gives rise to a transitive relationship in which the other is always escaping us. The ethical encounter that configures this "relationship without relation" is not based on conflicting contact, argumentative and rational dispute, the struggle for mutual recognition or even the attempt to symmetrically reach an understanding of something that presents itself as a collective problem (LIESEN, 2012; ZIELINSKI, 2004). The original discourse "is not established between equals, but between unequals, because it derives from an infinitely complex situation, a meeting from different and irreducible positions (SOUZA, 2000, p. 37). The ethics of this traumatic encounter, the wordless discourse that pulls us from ourselves, needs the radical asymmetry of the interlocutors and not their reciprocal decoding or mutual control.

In this ethical encounter, the other is not named, controlled, or reduced to a concept, but rather invoked, called, compelled to respond to an undeniable demand. According to Lévinas (1987), the representation and apprehension of alterity by the concept are violent forms of relationship, immobilizing it and transforming it into the "same". Thus, all contact that comes down to seeing, apprehending, knowing, recognizing and understanding is guided by the need for adequacy and complexity reduction, to transform the stranger into a familiar person.

The primordial relationship with another, however, aims at accessing the other in its strangeness: it is made in language, because it requires a response to the other before their clamor, their undeniable demand (ROLANDO, 2001). But this listening and response are not organized through a model of conversation or dialogue based on symmetry, consensus or mutual recognition of the status of speakers. Far from being an interaction anchored in

language exchange translated into signs and discourses crossed by power lines, hegemony and asymmetry, this transitive relationship is organized in the form of a conversation established before the sign. In an interview with Poirié (2007, p. 84), Lévinas asks the following:

> 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. Here it is precisely the strangeness of the other and, if one can say so, his "stranger-ness" which links him to you ethically. It is a banality, but one has to be surprised by it.

In the "relationship without relation", the other remains absolutely other, foreign, because our "human" dimension requires the preservation of uniqueness in the distance of contemplation and foresight: without this preservation, ethical communication loses its capacity to serve the other and the situational particularity of their suffering, that is, their face (BURNS, 2008). The astonishment at the alterity needs to be preserved to signal that, before the other, we never find what is already familiar, but always someone who deprives us of our certainties, in an exercise of dispossession and deterritorialization.

Thus, the relationship with the face is not through knowledge or through representation, but through sociability, through social communication that occurs in a temporality established in the reception, listening and response. The communication relationship, as a response to an incessantly altering alterity, is also respect for the other's face. In a way, in the face, not necessarily in discourse, begins the fundamental act of ethical responsibility from which communication is constituted. The sense of the anteriority of the face in relation to the discourse is not based on the question of the "nonverbal" as a precedent of the "verbal", but of the sense of summoning by the face of another to give me an answer; not any answer, but one considered with its human condition represented by the face worthy of respect.

The other's gaze challenges a responsible relationship without which communication becomes impossible. The deviation of the gaze before the face of the other is constituted, in this aspect, as an attempt to escape this responsibility to which one is summoned. The deviation of the other's gaze, Goffman (1983, 1978) recalls, in social terms, can be understood as an attempt to escape this need to establish a connection with alterity — perhaps it is no coincidence, in the plane of daily relations, that this attitude also shows a "lack of respect" towards the other. Goffman undoubtedly writes on the sociological level, but perhaps it is also possible to see here an indication of the foundation of responsibility for establishing communication. If, for Goffman (1999), the act of looking — or its correlate, looking away — is linked to the conditions of interaction, Lévinas's point of view is anchored in a different stage.

As Zielinski (2004) recalls, responsibility, for Lévinas, has "no reason". Responsibility to others is the condition and, in turn, unconditional. There is no reason for the sense of

responsibility towards others; it is because alterity exists that this bond is constituted. There is no reason, in this case, beyond a transcendence of the other — there is no reason, there is the other.

The act of communication presupposes this original responsibility to constitute itself as an action in the direction of others. The openness of communication, recalls Ferrara (2012), is established to create constant and continuous possibilities, in which a relationship is formed.

The face as ambiguity in communication

If hospitality and responsibility, as seen in the previous items, are initial constitutive elements of the communication relationship understood as ethics, on the other hand, one could not help but locate, briefly, the place reserved for the image of the face. Devoid of all the clothing responsible for showing, before any interlocution, the "place of each" in the social sphere, the face appears, in Lévinas's philosophy, as the most direct aspect of the communicational relationship.

The other's face, in its unadorned nakedness, is the turning point of an equality in difference. He invites and summons to think the selflessness that is reflected out of itself in an intricate set of mirrors — the other's face is absolute difference, except that at that moment we remember our own face.

The ambiguity of the face is highlighted by Souza, Coelho and Marques (2016, p. 11), when they state that the image "can give a face to an individual, making them subject to our eyes (humanization depends on the visibility of the human face) therefore, by allowing its appearance, it gives rise to the place of communication, reciprocity." On the other hand, they go on, "it also produces (in)communicability: a face shown to us via the image can, at the same time, reveal a 'in common', an unusual and a part of another that cannot be apprehended, that cannot translate into communication."

The face equals the difference without reducing the other to the same: the gap between these two elements is a cornerstone of the communication relationship. The sight of the other's face recalls the common humanity and makes it impossible to escape this question — hence, in this sense, one can also think of the "violence of the other's face" responsible for challenging, making the consciousness move in the process of creating meaning (LÉVINAS, 2014).

In his approach between Lévinas and communication, Marcondes Filho (2007, p. 62) rightly points out that "the face of the other is proximity that is not signic, does not refer to any theme, but is only a trace of itself, something that bothers me, that does not equal me."

The face of another is at the beginning of the summoning of the communicational phenomenon. As Lévinas (2015) recalls, it is difficult to be silent in the presence of others. One can artificially try to ignore its presence, but the artificiality of the situation is always noted, and its inflections are generally aimed at creating artificial isolation. The refusal to

the face can become silence. In the same sense, Marques and Souza (2016, p. 18) take up the idea that

> The face is a living presence, an expression: it speaks without mediation, because its manifestation is already speech. Therefore, the speaking face is described by Lévinas as the event of alterity. The word is, for him, listening and responding once it is received and offered. Alterity communicates through the face: it is the cry of the other that summons me and establishes an irreversible relationship.

At the same time, the presence of the other's face crosses us, summons and asks for the welcome that begins with the communication relationship — this crossing is the basis of a communication relationship thought also as a destabilizing phenomenon of the flow of consciousness of the subject and creator of a demand to establish a relationship — metaphorically, the other's face challenges the "talk to me" arising from the fact that the person is not only there, but has their presence acknowledged.

To think communication from the face is to remember a certain reflexivity in the process, which, in Lévinas's view, is not confused with reciprocity: the responsibility is "without reason", bringing again Zielinski (2004), and does not depend on the action of the other to take effect. Perhaps it is not wrong, at this point, to seek an approximation with Braga (2011) when he postulates the idea of communication as an "attempt" to reach the other. There is no expectation of reciprocity in this "attempt": the responsibility towards the other translates into the attitude of taking the initiative of the communicational act without waiting for an answer, but simply for the existence of the other.

Sharing, in this sense, becomes tentative since it does not depend on the reciprocity of the other to exist — it exists at the moment when the encounter with alterity is established, even if it is unwilling to engage directly in this web. The responsibility for silence in the face of the other's communication lies with those who voluntarily silence themselves in the artificial effort to show others that the difference in their relationship translates into inequality and silence.

Evidently, we understand here the voluntary silencing resulting from the absence of a sense of hospitality and responsibility in the violence of ignoring the face of others; of course, we are not talking about the silences caused by embarrassments of any other order. At this point, silence before the other's face assumes considerably ambiguous conditions. The silence of perplexity in the face of the presence of alterity coexists, in daily life, with the silence of violence before the other with whom one does not want contact. Rolando (2001, p. 80), problematizing this relationship of violence, states that

> Opposition implies, in fact, a resistance. Not because the other shows itself as force or hostility: it can be helpless, defenseless, naked, but in its nakedness is

resistance, as opposition that is not absorbed, lead to unity. [...] It is an ethical and not a physical resistance. For this reason, the tyrant runs away from "face-to-face", from the most original dimension of ethics.

The face of the other calls for an infinite responsibility to which no one can subtract without neglecting their human condition and without making a considerable effort. Ignoring the other, the refusal of this sense of responsibility seems to be the negative of being immersed in its ipseity and, therefore, far from any communication.

Final remarks

The face, a condition of communication in Lévinas, is related to the strangeness of the other, with its radical, disquieting and irreducible alterity, which cannot be conceptualized or reduced to the familiarity of representation or framing. The face sends us an appeal that moves away from hostility and approaches the hospitality it welcomes and, at the same time, interrogates and demands an answer. Thus, to experience the other's face is to experience a sense of responsibility in the face of vulnerability, allowing individuals to find themselves by responding to another's appeal.

> [...] Responsibility is an answer that no one can provide in our place, for when we answer someone's appeal, we affirm ourselves as unique and irreplaceable subjects. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me (LÉVINAS, 2007, p. 84).

The other's face affirms me and makes my own human existence by asking me to listen and, at the same time, asking for a word. In this respect, saying establishes a relationship between two freedoms, affirming the identity of the interlocutors. We recognize each other when challenged by the face of the other: it is not submission, but a command or appeal made from one identity to another. The face, the human, opens a crack in the shell of being, making it hostage to the other, the stranger knocking on our door. Exposure to the other defines identities and makes the other important, vital to the existence of the self.

Thus, the relationship with the face is not through knowledge or the way of representation, but through sociability, through social communication. In Lévinas (1995, 2014), the face is the basis not only of social relations, but of the existence of a social, although not reduced to it: it is the intersubjective structure from which politics and justice emerge. As Carrara (2010, p. 131) points out:

> We can call the sociality thought by Lévinas as a community of differences without the universalization of the concept erasing the differences. It is in this sense that individualities never get lost in the neutral and anonymous whole. Members of such a community retain the ability of a word of their own that prevents them from getting lost in the universal language of the concept. It is a dialogue from interlocutor to interlocutor.

The communicational openness made possible by the face, in this respect, places us before not only a face, but a plurality of faces and dilemmas linked to the answer that must be elaborated to all of them. Thinking about the field of plurality, because with third parties "one goes from the invisibility of the ethical relationship with the face to the visibility of the faces when being together in one place" (CARRARA, 2010, p. 90). The way to respond to the multiple demands made by the various faces that rise before us cannot be resolved only on an ethical level, but requires a decision made in the realm of morality and justice. Politics is born of this ethical and communicational relationship that precedes it and involves welcoming, meeting and responsibility. However, politics in Lévinas does not translate into the dialectical and discursive relationship of argumentation. The relationship configured by the encounter with the face is asymmetric and not reduced to totality. It is precisely ethics that comes from listening to the voice of the face that can prevent totalitarianism and universalization: "whenever politics deviates from the demands of responsibility for the other so present in the face" (CARRARA, 2010, p. 92).

The face speaks, makes its appeal, in a concrete situation in which the suffering of the other displaces us, withdraws us from ourselves and demands a word. Thus, Lévinas (2014, p. 28-29) emphasizes the communicative and corporeal dimensions of ethical responsibility:

> But the men round about me are multiple. Hence the question: 'Who is my neighbour?' The inevitable question of justice. The necessity of comparing incomparables, of knowing men; hence their appearance as plastic forms of faces that are visible and, one might say, "de-faced": like a grouping from which the uniqueness of the face is torn free, as from a context, the source of my obligation toward other men; the source to which the quest for justice goes back, in the final analysis, and the forgetfulness of which risks transforming the sublime and difficult work of justice into a purely political calculation — to the point of totalitarian abuse.

At first, Lévinas (1980) wishes to preserve the ethical encounter capable of configuring the identities of the interlocutors, ensuring the importance that one subject's life, in its vulnerability, has for the other: "it is very important, in my view, that justice should flow

from, issue from, the preeminence of the other" (LÉVINAS, 2014, p. 35), preventing politics from configuring a form of moral judgment that silences and erases the face, the faces that rise before us.

In this sense, Lévinas (1980, 2007) proposes that, given the multiplicity of faces that challenge us, deciding who and how to respond to it is a political gesture that involves the norm and the moral and ethical code, but also requires fraternity, friendship, bonds in which responsibility as an ethical relationship not only means taking on the other's burden or helping them to bear the hardships of existence, but, above all, carries something spontaneous, intuitive, so that the experience of the other's face and the demand emanating from it be positive and enriching, since "It is on the basis of the existence of the other that my own existence is posited as human" (LÉVINAS, 1995, p. 167).

Fraternity, as responsibility for all others, ensures that justice can flow from the unrest and non-indifference caused by the proximity of the foreigner, to whom we offer hospitality. It stands between normative and rational justice and injustice, making "an appeal to the 'wisdom' of the I, the possibilities of which perhaps don't include any principle that can be formulated a priori" (LÉVINAS, 2014, p. 35). Here, in our view, is an important aesthetic and ethical dimension of politics in Lévinas: for him, the source of justice lies not only in the set of norms and values that drive the institutions, but, above all, in wisdom, the unique experiments that, because they are not captured and mapped by the rule, they renew the passages between Saying and Said, raising new ways of life outside disciplinary regulation, updating the future of a common that, tentatively, communication seeks to build.

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