

## For the other

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Activism becomes *academic*, when it resists the closing down of perspective and horizon. When resistance does *not* turn into violence or the militant march in step side by side. Activism is academic when it resists the temptation of turning into suppression and assimilation, which is the “movement within the same before the obligation to the other”, which leads inevitably to “imperialist dominion, [and] to tyranny.” (Levinas, 2003, p.47). Activism is academic due to the resistance of any opinion, perspective, or decision being left unchallenged. It is the constant challenging of values, understandings, and social positions being untouchable and having primacy in itself. Activism becomes academic, when constantly calling in question one’s own power on the expense of the other person, group, or species. Academic activism is the welcoming of the “strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions” (Levinas, 2003, p.43). Activism is academic when my resistance does not consist in speaking for my own rights, or the rights of my own group or community but for others’ rights. Activism becomes academic when moving away from self-protection and by “turning into generosity, [being] incapable of approaching the other with empty hands.” (Levinas, 2003, p.50). Activism is academic when it turns from politics into ethics.

Academic practice becomes *activist*, when we lend our thoughts, words, and voices to others and let them speak *through us*. When creating concepts *from* the other’s point of view. When allowing what is different and weird and kept in the margins of our consciousness and language, to enter into institutional and societal awareness and debate and to become culturally real and a part of our societies. Academic practice becomes activist when it is led by the moral imperative of speaking for “the silent and for the silenced”, and when we say “what others would say if they were not absent, elsewhere, or dead.” (Lingis, 1998, p.136). Academic practice becomes activist when we speak in order to give the other her own voice and to defend identities and belief systems otherwise unwanted or shunned by politicized normality. Academic practice is activist because it does not want to own the voices it lends itself to, but wishes to become itself only a means, and a way. Academic voice becomes activist when we “speak in order that the other can speak for himself” (ibid.), and our speech “breaks, stops, opens silences, and awaits the moment when it shall withdraw into silence.” Academic voice becomes “grave and imperative when we speak for infants, for foreigners who do not speak the language. When we speak for those in a coma, for the imprisoned, the tortured, the massacred, those buried in mass graves.” (ibid.). Academic practice becomes activist through its failure to fulfil its ideals and realise its hopes. Being haunted by the question: have I done enough? Have I ever really *acted*?

### References

- Levinas, L. (2003). *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press
- Lingis, A. (1998). *The Imperative*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press