

WHO'S AFRAID OF EDGAR ALLAN POE? (FROM INDEXICALISM TO SPECTRAL REALISM: A JOURNEY THROUGH HILAN BENSUSAN)

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(I). THE INDEXICAL AND ITS PARADOX

Hilan Bensusan (HB from now on), in his book "Indexicalism" reveals to us what the world really is: it is indexical. Everything substantive is reduced to implicit indexicals; indexicals are the ultimate furniture of the universe. According to an indexicalist metaphysics, reality cannot be described except through a certain position taken on a given ground (p. 11). It is, in essence, deictic. "(...) *this book claims that deixis, the very place of situatedness and, to some extent, relativity, is absolute*" (p. 12). "(...) *there is no underlying substantive reality to clarify indexicals. Deixis reaches bedrock (...)*" (Id). At various other points in the book this is reaffirmed; for example: "*Certainly, Indexicalism takes any standing location to be contingent on where the interiority is, since any connection with the exterior is situated. But deixis itself is absolute*" (p. 93).

It is curious that this philosophy of the absolute is presented, in the book, with an explicit intention of overthrowing all absolutes. Hence the paradoxical character that HB, from the outset, points out in his metaphysics. It is, at the same time, a metaphysics and an argumentation against the very possibility of metaphysics. (p. 18). "(...) *there is a metaphysical reason why metaphysics is impossible—a paradoxico-metaphysical reason.*" (p. 19). "*Indexicalism entails that whatever exists is entangled with deixis. It is a paradoxical claim because it is about how everything is, and yet it makes transcendence-free totalities impossible*" (p. 97).

Indexicalism rejects any complete view of reality obtained from a supposed "view from nowhere." Everything is situated, in a certain "standing location"

“*The present book is crucially embedded in the rejection of transparency. It proposes a framework for a metaphysics of the others that regards the Great Outdoors as thoroughly exterior – and as something other than our cognitive and thinking practices reach, indeed as seriously opaque*” (p. 4). The transcendence of the other opposes any totality, and this transcendent is not anything substantive, but an infinite and irreducible openness. (pp. 8-9). Reality is “*intrinsically incomplete*” (p. 10). It is not substantive (p. 15). Substantives are merely abbreviations for indexicals (p. 17).

However, in the preface to this first book, we already find elements, provided by HB himself, to resolve this paradox: the metaphysics that is to be dismissed is, precisely, traditional substantialist metaphysics, and the one that is to be defended is an alternative indexical metaphysics. There is no paradox here, since the metaphysics that is defended is not the same as the one that is condemned. HB states that what makes indexicalist metaphysics paradoxical is that it claims to speak about how everything is, while at the same time deeming such talk impossible. But I don't see that this alone makes Indexicalism paradoxical. There is one element missing.

The missing element is the claim that Indexicalism is an absolute *and unique* metaphysics, dismissing all the others as false (and, as we will see later, also as politically problematic). And this seems to be precisely what the previous quotations declare: that what reality itself is has been discovered, *and that there is nothing else that reality is*. It is this claim of a unique absolute metaphysics that creates the paradox. For if reality itself is deictic, as the unique and absolute truth, it seems that this can only be known from a "view from nowhere" This suggests that if Indexicalism were to renounce the unique absolutist metaphysical thesis, the thesis that "everything is, *and only is*, deictic," if it were to accept that indexicalist theses apply to itself, in the sense that Indexicalism and the deictic are also situated, also speaking from a "standing location", then the paradox vanishes. For we would no longer have an absolute denying all absolutes (a paradoxical statement), but rather a situated perspective coming into conflict with other situated perspectives, which is not paradoxical.

(2). SPECTRAL REALISM AND THE REVIVAL OF PARADOX: REFERENCES AND MEMORIES

HB's new book is largely a tributary of his previous one, as the author himself

acknowledges several times (as early as page 16, for example). In this new book, the question of paradox is revisited within the framework of "spectral realism" and the "assemblages of memory." But I cannot delve into these topics without first commenting, albeit briefly, on a methodological question about how to construct a philosophical text.

(2.1). *References*

The subject of the spectral was pioneered by Jacques Derrida (p. 8), and a vast bibliography on the subject is available. Several authors on the spectral are cited. HB is a spectrologist who fits into an already ongoing spectrology. He thus participates in the "spectral turn" (pp. 8-9). From then on, his text is an incredibly erudite tapestry of references to authors, often beginning the section with an author's name, followed by a commentary and a personal reflection on the subject raised by that author— a type of philosophizing that I have elsewhere called *thinking-with*. (The standard form of "thinking-with" sentences is: "X says that p; to this I say that q.")

In chess parlance, those who practice the "thinking-with" method prefer to play with the black pieces, never initiating the game. They do not create openings. This is not, of course, the only way to make philosophy. Others prefer to philosophize within the standard framework "I say that p" Those who use this framework don't even need to say "I say that..."; simply saying "p" is sufficient, since the authorship, within this framework, is already embedded in the sentence. Constantly repeating "I say that..." would be unnecessary. The "thinking-with" style, on the other hand, constantly requires saying "X says that p." It's a commented and reflected third person thought, parasitic on the "I say that p" (or simply "p") style of thinking. It is remarkable that some of the authors most cited by HB — notably Heidegger and Derrida — also practiced the "thinking-with" method. However, many classical thinkers with whom HB, Heidegger, and Derrida think — say, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Bergson — developed their thoughts within the "I say that p" (or simply "p") framework. It is clear that if this type of thinker didn't exist, "thinking-with" wouldn't be possible either, since there would be no one to think with. But the fact that thinking-with is a parasitic style of philosophizing doesn't mean, in any way, that it is not a very rich form of thinking.

HB's text is strictly of the thinking-with form (indeed, he had already used this same method in his previous book, but in this second it appears more exacerbated). We are invited to explore a long and always interesting sequence of references: Heidegger, Lévinas, Derrida, Malabou, Bergson, Semon, Goldgaber, Delanda, Bergson, Simondon, Martin and Deutscher, Bernecker, Althusser, Nancy, Barad, Ferreira Da Silva, Negri, Bataille, Ludueña, Kopenawa, Livingston. The advantages of thinking-with — besides the ecstasy of erudition — lies in participating in a shared community of thought, which relies on what has already been thought by others, suggesting a contribution and a progress in philosophy. The disadvantages stem from the difficulty the reader encounters in identifying the author's thought in this intricate tangle of references.

For example, on page 44, the paragraph where Richard Semon's thought is presented, it ends with a first-person statement ("*...which I will call a memory assemblage*"), so that it is unclear, from the sentence that begins "*Memory is not a faculty because...*", where the exposition of Semon's ideas ends and where HB's commentary begins. In these times of authorship crisis - now accentuated by the effects of AI — maybe these problems of authorship identification are secondary. It remains to be seen whether dispensing with the ambition for authorship and first-person philosophical statements can deprive us of an expressive element of the struggle for liberation from coloniality, a subject that certainly interests HB. (I return to this later in section (3))

(2.2). *Memory and Specters*

The central ideas of this new book seem to be the following: nothing disappears completely into an irretrievable past, but at the same time, nothing returns as it was before; everything leaves marks or traces (in the form of debts, promises, inheritances, habits, legacies, requests, gestures, instructions) for a possible recovery through memory, which is never a full recovery of what was previously. There are always additions that make what is recovered seem like a spectre of what happened. The past is in the hands of the present, which brings what is recovered on its own terms, without following a strict synchronicity, but acting within a regime of anachronism. There is, therefore, no reality of presences — as postulated by traditional metaphysics — that would be brought about by a reproductive or recollective memory. Since there is no such reality, memory can

only be operative and active, incomplete, always open to additions from the Great Outdoors, never self-sufficient. What is brought about by this memory can only be spectral. All reality is haunted. This entails a new notion of reality (and of realism, as we will see in section (2.3)), since there is no ready-made reality waiting to be retrieved, but reality is essentially composed of the additions of memory.

Memory operates through assemblages (p. 2). Following Derrida, the present does not appear without what has been added by memory. It is never invulnerable or immune to what comes from outside. Spectral reality is ultrametaphysical, to use Catherine Malabou's term. Following Derrida, memory assemblages are asymmetrical (p. 3). Chapter 1 of the book is dedicated to explaining this additive character of memory; it constantly depends on additions from the outside. But there are many kinds of additions, and HB is extremely careful in characterizing the specific type he wishes to describe, making extensive use of the method of exclusion (addition *is not* this, it *is not* this, it *is not* this). For example, it is not reversible (p. 20), nor is it a completion or a juxtaposition (Id). Addition is asymmetrical; by removing the addition, we do not return to the original; it is therefore not the reverse of subtraction (p. 21). It is not commutative (p. 22). The additions are not redundant, insofar as they recognize an exteriority that demands attention (p. 23).

HB exuberantly enriches these ideas throughout chapters 2 and 3, drawing on categories from many other authors to better characterize the temporal and haunting nature of addition and, at the same time, situate memory assemblage theory in relation to other theories that address similar issues. Derrida's grammatology, the critique of logocentrism and deconstruction, messianity and spectrality; Heidegger's Ereignis, Althusser's materialism, Meillassoux's hyperchaos, Jean-Luc Nancy's struction, Karen Barad's diffraction, Lévinas's Exteriority that demands responsibility and the rejection of ontology, Bataille's economy of excess, Ludueña's disjunctology, Kopenawa and Albert's anthropology of appropriation, G. Hardin's dissemination of action, Livingston's logic of the ineffective, and Lévinas' anachronistic nature of memory assemblages, are some examples of these appropriations by HB to better characterize his own ideas.

Interregnum: Poe on the Insistence of the Dead.

It is really strange that HB never mentions, even in an illustrative way, Edgar

Allan Poe, who is the quintessential spectral writer, the poet of the dead who return transformed in an urgent and interruptive mode. Why was he never mentioned? Certainly not due to a neglect of literature, as HB mentions several other writers in his book: Artaud, Baudelaire, Beckett, Lewis Carroll, Pasolini, Juan Rulfo, Oscar Wilde, but he never mentions the writer who embodied in his stories the subject of the spectral return of what was improperly buried. Poe's most memorable stories on this subject are, notably, "Ligeia" and "Morella," about two young and beautiful women who do not want to die, who refuse to be buried, and who return to reclaim what had been denied to them in life.

The idea that the present is always burdened, pledged, mortgaged, held hostage, in debt, laden with promises, pending matters, and oaths (p. 2) is the foundation of many of Poe's stories. This author seems to dramatize, in literary image-concepts, HB's idea of a memory that refuses to be forgotten, that leaves indelible marks that is impossible to ignore, that haunts and torments. On page 9, when HB speaks of narratives of horror, of spirits and ghosts that defy the regime of visibility, raising suspicions about what is being experienced in the present, Poe's name seems to burn in the mouth. When HB says that "(...) *the spectral comes with an urge — it somehow interrupts and disturbs*" (p. 10), he seems to be speaking of Ligeia¹.

(2.3). *Realism, hyperrealism, idealism.*

I found it somewhat difficult to understand the use of the term "realism" in this second book. The spectral recovered by active memory (p. 10) would not lead us, according to HB, to any idealistic rejection of reality, but to what Juliana Martínez called "spectral realism" (p. 11). Specters are not contingencies or occasional complements, relative to our cognitive limitations, since there can be no memory without the spectral. It is the spectral that leads us to reality, which we would not recognize without the spectral. Spectralism is an invitation to rethink reality (p. 12), not an invitation to abandon it. It simply dispenses with the idea of a supposedly raw and naked reality of immediate access. A kind of hyperrealism beyond the realism of presences that comes to us from tradition is recommended.

¹ Other pages from HB's book where Poe haunts are 11, 47, 53-55, 107-108, 129-132.

It's surprising that almost no contemporary philosopher wants to openly admit that reality doesn't exist, at least in the traditional sense. It would seem that no one likes being accused of denying reality, of being an idealist. Even if one admits that reality is now almost entirely constituted and not something given, it's quickly proclaimed that this doesn't mean rejecting reality, but, on the contrary, promoting an encounter with reality at an appropriate level. Everyone presents themselves as X-realists (in HB's case, speculative realism, indexical realism, spectral realism). The question is whether this strategy doesn't inflate the notion of "real"; for the motto of "idealism" functioned, in some way, as a kind of summary of all "X-realisms" When we refuse to be called idealists, it seems that the world becomes overpopulated with "X-realisms," and the notion of "idealism" becomes empty.

That "spectral realism" is somewhat strange is acknowledged by HB himself: "(...) the entanglement of memory and addition both debunks and replaces the notion that reality as composed of full-fledged presences. The idea is committed to a departure from metaphysics if understood as committed to the idea of a landscape of self-standing presences (...) It is also committed to a strange form of realism according to which neither retention nor retrieval can stand alone (...) It is the pan-mnemist form of realism" (p. 59).

Of course, if reality is understood as composed of self-sustaining presences, immune to change and interruption (p. 113), all those philosophers who oppose this conception can legitimately be seen as idealists. The merit of "X-realisms" is to show that reality can be conceived in ways other than the traditional realism of presences. But all these alternative approaches see reality as being, in some way, constituted, not given. Therefore, even without accepting the label of idealists, all "realist X" must accept that the reality of presences simply does not exist, that there is only one reality constituted by us; and we must accept that those who call "realist X" idealists from the perspective of realism of presences are not wrong.

Along these lines, it is remarkable that when HB mentions McTaggart on p. 73 - being this author always presented in the histories of philosophy as an English idealist - he calls his stance "unrealism," and on p. 221, as "anti-realist," carefully avoiding the word "idealism" Later in the book, he cites Ludueña as resisting the motto of "realism" because this term, according to this author, is tied to the

metaphysics from which both he and HB want to take distance. To say that spectres are real or objective would still mean referring to this traditional metaphysics. It is better, according to Ludueña, to admit that spectres are not real (and that, therefore, they do not rely on any kind of "realism X"). It is not, therefore, a question of broadening the notion of the real, but simply of abandoning it (pp. 120-121). It seems to me that this stance is more consistent with the spectral proposal.

(2.4). The Paradox Revisited: From Indexicalism to the Spectral

Here we arrive at the crucial point of what I want to convey in this text, and where HB's two books converge. At certain points in the exposition of the second book, he suggests that the question of paradox is what connects both works. The first hint of this appears early, at the end of page 16, where an important connection is exposed between the Indexicalism of the first book and the spectral realism of the second: if reality is deictic, the best way to remember it is spectral realism. Indexicalism itself, the deictic, is spectral, fragmentary, evasive, leaving clues, shadows, preventing any direct recollective memory. The deictic presupposes "standing position," contexts, and not substantive realities. If reality were something substantive, its memory could be non-spectral. Therefore, memory must be operative, active, not merely receptive; it must add, generate additions, even to be able to forget. (On this connection between Indexicalism and spectral memory, see also, for example, pp. 72-73).

But here we must remember the paradox of Indexicalism, as explained in section (1) of this text. Indexicalism rejected any kind of metaphysics that claimed to say how the world is, because that would presuppose a unsituated view from nowhere; but, at the same time, Indexicalism affirmed that reality is in itself indexical and that every substantive reduces to indexes: paradox! I think — as I have already explained — that this paradox is not resolved in the first book. In some way, the paradox of Indexicalism is accepted by HB in the second, with all its implications. What he tries to do now is take steps to prevent this same paradox from also appearing in the realm of spectral realism. I quote: “(...) *because while the former [Indexicalism] advocates a paradoxico-metaphysics where an indexical totally fails to be itself indexical, the latter [spectral realism] posits that no collection of memory assemblages can be anything but another memory assemblage*” (p. 16. See also p. 45). By including itself

in the spectral, spectral realism avoids paradox, renouncing the absolute unique typical of the substantialist positions from which HB seeks to take distance all along his two books.

The question of paradox reappears later in the context of the discussion—guided this time by Derrida and Malabou — on the “retention-recovery” dyad: “*Maybe we can say that the retention of the entangled pair retention-retrieval is a retention to end all retentions (...) This is a paradoxical status of a principle that is against its own governance, a principle (crossed out) according to which no principle stands alone*” (p. 39). At this point, HB seems to be dialoguing with my argumentation from section (1); he poses, in his own terms, my two alternatives: either we return to an absolute from which we reject all other possibilities, or we admit that our own stance is one among others within a diversity of stances. In the exposition of “spectral realism” in chapter 3, the question of paradox is revisited, even mentioning the first book (p. 113). A set of memory assemblages cannot constitute a retention that cannot be retrieved. Assemblages are also assemblages. HB seems here to once again accept the solution that, in my view, is the only one that resolves the paradox: “All Xs are Ys, including my X.” I quote: “*(...) the ultraspeculative move is itself a memory assemblage, and its conclusion cannot itself be invulnerable to addition*” (p. 114).

This option is confirmed in the following paragraphs, where it is admitted that spectral realism is a “storytelling” alongside others, including the narrative of the metaphysics of presence. “*Addition is a spectral, unending story*” (Id). “*The ultraspeculative spectral realism of addition holds that the narrative concerning addends and how they haunt everything is itself an addend (...) In other words, leaving space within the narrative for different accounts is postulated inside the account, and therefore no final story (...) is possible, not even the one told by the spectral realism of addition*” (p. 115). HB had admitted, a little earlier, that, at the time he wrote “Indexicalism” he thought that swallowing the paradox was the price to pay to be faithful to exteriority (p. 114). It seems that HB now thinks that a better way to honour this interest in faithfulness would be to admit that even Indexicalism and spectral realism must acknowledge their own vulnerability, their “standing situations” and their openness to additions, with no paradoxes to swallow.

In any case, as the matter stands, the fact that the paradox has been resolved in the domain of spectral realism does not retroactively resolve the paradox of Indexicalism (as exposed by HB in the first book), even if both theories are

coupled; any retroactive movement in this direction is not adequately explained. On the contrary, it seems that spectral realism should naturally inherit the paradox of Indexicalism. For if, as I tried to show in section (1), the paradox arises from absolutism (from the claim to have described the world as it is *in the only possible way*), and since the only way to retrieve it correctly is the memory of assemblages, this idea should also be conceived as absolute, that is, as the only correct conception of memory, as the only way to recover an indexical world. To get out of this problem, the best option would be to admit the same solution in both cases: Indexicalism is itself indexed, and spectral realism is itself spectral.

(2.4.1). *On good terms with contradiction.*

Instead of taking that step, in the second book HB attempts to preserve both paradoxes, that of Indexicalism and that of spectral realism, by means of a drastic move: the open admission of the contradiction for both (and for those who have admitted the contradiction, the paradox will seem like a minor problem)². This radical path was already announced in the introduction, suggesting a way not to “swallow the paradox” but to give it full legitimacy: “*Still, it will become clear spectral realism has no special commitment to consistency*” (p. 16). (Strictly speaking, this step was already announced in the first book when, quoting Jon Cogburn, it was stated that, for the paradoxical metaphysician “(...) *the world itself is the inconsistent totality that generates these contradictions when we interact with it. If our metaphysics is contradictory, it is because it accurately reflects reality*” (Indexicalism, p. 33). (Certainly, Hegel must be dancing with great joy on his grave).

In the second book, this idea is insistently expounded: “As will become clearer later, the emergence of paradoxes is not a reason to move from exteriority (...)” (p. 86). And much later: “Addition, without the help of any other guiding principle, is neither committed to consistency nor protected from contradictions” (p. 145). And he promises, in the closing chapter, to expose several systems of paraconsistent logics that admit contradiction without trivializing themselves, logics capable of formalizing asymmetric additions. From the end of chapter 3,

² I follow the usual characterization here: a contradiction is something like “I know X and I don't know X” and a paradox something like “I only know that I don't know X.” The differences are sometimes subtle, but I disagree that one of them is that the paradox can be resolved and the contradiction cannot. I believe that, in HB's books, both can be resolved (or dissolved) by the procedures he presents; or neither can.

pages 137 onward, this is announced, following Livingston's ideas this time, with his proposal of an alternative logic of ineffectiveness, against the traditional logic according to which thought can grasp the world while preserving its consistency. The unexpected and unpredictable nature of additions makes it difficult to ensure the consistency of everything added. (p. 161). There is no total control of the conclusions from the premises, they may go beyond these; or it may be necessary to return to the premises and revise them or even cancel them. So, a logic is needed that is able of doing all these things.

According to Livingston, the paradox should not be "resolved" because it is the price paid to meet the endless demands of totality (p. 142). We are faced with a structurally inconsistent totality, not as a failure (142-143). We must find a logic that does justice to this inconsistent totality. "(...) *memory assemblages have no special attachment to their consistency – an incoherent, contradictory coupling of addends and traces can provide a suitable strategy for retrieval*" (p. 144). Logics of the ineffective reject the idea that avoiding contradictions is a good way to evaluate the correctness of thought (p. 147). There are several steps or paths toward ineffectiveness, Indexicalism (p. 149) and spectral realism (p. 150-151) being just some of these paths. If we really want to be open to the outside, we must expect inconsistencies. From a formal point of view, HB appeals to non-monotonic logics (p. 160), which are paraconsistent. In these systems, not anything follows from two contradictory premises (p. 161). Contradictions inevitably arise when additions are introduced into a minimal logical system. A logic of addition will therefore inevitably be paraconsistent. This logic has not yet been constructed (p. 162), but it is quite possible that it will be one of the logics of the ineffective proposed by Livingston (p. 164).

This move is as radical as Hegel's rejection of Kant's refutation of the ontological argument: instead of going into the details of the argument, Hegel simply proposes rejecting the logic on which the argument is based. In both cases, Hegel and HB, instead of trying to resolve the contradictions, accept them as part of reality; therefore, only contradictory systems can capture them. We can of course be suspicious of a line of argument that requires such a gigantic step to make its point. But even accepting the gigantic step, just as it was unclear before whether the pluralist solution of spectral realism could retroactively resolve the paradox of Indexicalism (something that, as I have said before, seems

problematic), it is also unclear now whether this joyful acceptance of inconsistency would also extend to Indexicalism. Nor would Indexicalism have any special commitment to consistency? Should we, then, accept the paradox of Indexicalism simply as a legitimate characteristic of it, without attempting to "resolve" anything? It is unclear whether Indexicalism and spectral realism could resolve their respective paradoxes in the same way, either by including themselves in their own assertions (Indexicalism is indexed, assemblage memories are assemblages), or by accepting inconsistency for both (and renouncing the idea that the paradox is something that must be "resolved").

These are certainly open questions, but it seems that, in this second line of argumentation, in the question of accepting inconsistency, there may be a confusion of levels. While, intra-systematically, in well-constructed logical systems, inconsistency can be admitted, at the level of macro-metaphilosophical reflection, it seems more difficult to accept. Because one thing is to say that, in the endless game of additive memory, additions can render a minimal logical system inconsistent (we can call this the *micro-paradox*); another thing is to state that Indexicalism rejects all non-situated thought but that Indexicalism itself is not situated; or that the theory of additive memory is not itself additive but complete in itself and closed to new additions (I call this the *macro-paradox*). These two claims are made at different levels; a logical system may be inconsistent, but the exposition of that system must maintain a certain consistency. We can admit inconsistent logical systems, but we cannot simultaneously allow and disallow inconsistent logical systems.

(3). INDEXICALISM AND SPECTRES IN POLITICS: OPEN THEORY AND CLOSED PRACTICE?

At various points in his two books, HB attempts to establish connections between metaphysical stances and ethical and political ones. In principle, also in the political sphere, the open is preferred to the closed. In the field of Indexicalism, everything is presented as situated, and the domain of spectral realism as a field of unlimited possibilities of unexpected and unpredictable additions, in perpetual movement and constant change. Following Deleuze and Guattari, HB writes: "(...) *assemblages are in constant variation, are themselves constantly subject to transformation'* (...) *in a memory assemblage, addition repeatedly reassembles layers and strata of memory in a*

changing process that is not prefigured by anything that has been retained" (p. 45). Further on: "*(...) the semantic import of addition – and of memory assemblages – is that no signification can be indifferent to what is to be added, and therefore no meaning can be established once and for all (...) black swans and white ravens can always be added – nothing precludes them but a commitment, an expectation, a promise"* (p. 58).

My question here is this: whether all this flexibility and mobility, all this rejection of immanence in favour of exteriority, all this openness to the unexpected, are preserved in the realm of political options and actions. In the first book, we can already doubt whether such openness and mobility are guaranteed even at the theoretical level, before entering the political realm itself. For if Indexicalism presents itself as openness to the other, it seems inevitable, by contrast, to see substantialism characterized by closure and sameness. The wrong move consists in immunizing to exteriority, in not allowing to be interrupted (p. 63). Evil bets on transparency, good points to opacity (p. 2). (See also pp. 19-20). In this context, the confrontation between Indexicalism and substantialism does not seem to seek rapprochement or consensus between the two, but rather substantialism must simply be rejected and abandoned, or "exorcised," to use a term dear to HB. This word is very strong; means expelling demons or bad spirits that have taken possession of someone's body. What is "exorcised" is seen not as a worthy adversary or rival, not even as a respectable enemy, but as something demonic that must be utterly rejected.

A first difficulty I see that the indexicalist "open to the other" must resolve in the realm of real politics is this: if we must responsibly respond to the other's call, if we must place ourselves at the other's service, remain listening, and allow ourselves to be interrupted by them, what happens when the other is the traditional substantialist metaphysician? (This could be seen, in a certain way, as a practical version of the paradox of Indexicalism). This same question arises at the field of spectral realism. When criticizing reflection as one of the notions guiding the traditional metaphysics of presence, HB writes: "*Similarly, political legitimacy is often construed in terms of reflection because it is based on representation (...) Reflection makes the transmission of political authority something that is done once and for all — the representative retains the authority with no need for any exercise of retrieval"* (p. 85). Authoritarian politics, therefore, remain in the moment of retention, closing themselves off to the retrievals of additive memory. The evil would reside in this permanence in the conservative retention of a power that legitimizes itself by its

origins, invulnerable to external appeals.

In "Indexicalism" a connection had already been established between colonization and the strategy of submitting exteriority to the universal (p. 172 and pp. 186-191). Already at the beginning of the second book, the closure to additions from the outside is connected to concrete historical events, such as the genocide of indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans (p. 4), and to capitalist realism (pp. 67-68). Later, the colonial system is linked to this attitude of closure toward the spectral character of memory assemblages, and everything that this attitude hinders in terms of openness and desires for justice (p. 97). Further still, spectral ultrametaphysics is placed against oppressive political systems that are based on the metaphysics that need to be "exorcised": "*Contemporary considerations about raciality and coloniality prompt the ultrametaphysical gesture of Ferreira Da Silva (...) The captive body 'exposes the metaphysical and onto-epistemological threads that constitute and separate the many moments through which raciality governs the political architecture of the global present'*" (p. 135). And it is immediately stated that spectral ultrametaphysics cannot be aligned with Western projects, based on categories of the metaphysics of presence (p. 136).

In all these references and quotations, we have two different things intertwined: on the one hand, a political-moral scheme, a formal criterion of good and evil: good is openness to the outside, to additions; evil is closure. On the other, there are the concrete historical political contents with which this criterion will be fulfilled (for example, colonialist experiences). Therefore, two lines of criticism emerge here: the first on the criterion itself, the second on how is fulfilled this criterion with examples of real politics.

Before that, a more general remark: we perceive in this book a curious contrast (another paradox?) between the strong anti-colonialist tone of the content, on the one hand, and the strongly Eurocentric bibliography that is handled, on the other. Some contemporary Latin American philosophers and anthropologists are discussed or mentioned (Santiago Arcila, Manuela Carneiro, Manuel Delanda, Denise Ferreira Da Silva, Davi Kopenawa, Fabián Ludueña, Marco A. Valentim, Viveiros de Castro), but the Latin American classics are ignored. Certainly, José Carlos Mariátegui would have much to say about domination, Oswald de Andrade about messianism, Ofélia Schutte about marginalization, and Aníbal Quijano or Silvia Cusicanqui about history and

memory. When it comes to addressing paraconsistent logics in chapter 4, Newton Da Costa is postponed in favour of Graham Priest (p. 142), with the great Brazilian logician only mentioned in the bibliography. The book's main intellectual guides are Lévinas and Derrida³.

But getting now to the material and moving along the first critical path mentioned above - the questioning of the criterion itself: it would seem that, in the complex flow of political actions, sometimes we must open ourselves to change, other times we must resist it. A Jew in Nazi Germany, or an Indigenous person during the European invasion, might have been forced into a certain racial substantialism in order to survive. It does not seem that substantialism *always* stands in the place of evil, colonization, and oppression, and Indexicalism *always* on the side of good, resistance and liberation. In "The Sublime Object of Ideology," Slavoj Žižek demonstrates a fascist use of direct reference (close to Indexicalism, as HB emphasizes in both books), when, in the concentration camps, "Jew" operated as a rigid designation, with complete independence from descriptions. (It is said that Himmler was once pointed out that he was sending many non-Jews to the camps, and he replied: "I decide who is a Jew and who is not." Here "Jew" was what Himmler was pointing at, and his colleague was resorting to definite descriptions to try to save lives condemned by a fanatical indexicalist).

Sometimes transparency can be more politically appropriate than total opacity. Inclusion can be colonizing or liberating. Along the same lines, we can ask: why should we systematically "open ourselves to the other"? Why should we always allow ourselves to be interrupted? We are not morally compelled to allow ourselves to be interrupted *by anyone*, no matter who they may be; that would be

3 In a private communication, HB attempted to attenuate Lévinas's European character by emphasizing that it's no wonder Enrique Dussel uses him extensively. But Dussel, in addition to Lévinas, draws extensively on Latin American literature. HB also mentioned that, according to Derrida ("Violence and Metaphysics"), Lévinas is the philosopher who doesn't speak Greek, the language of European philosophy, or speaks with a strong accent, and was unable to communicate with Husserl and Heidegger. Lévinas's entire "rupture" with Greco-European philosophy, his critique of the philosophy of being and its misunderstanding of otherness, is all articulated in relation to this tradition; in such a way that it can be read as a vicissitude of Greco-European thought, and not as the beginning of something radically new. Latin American thinkers wouldn't even need such charitable readings.

to conceive of "the other" in an abstract way⁴. We may have a moral obligation to close ourselves off to fascist or colonizing discourse, even in an obstinate and dogmatic way. This suggests that, in our concrete political actions, it is appropriate to practice a careful flexibility, not to have decided once and for all where good and evil lie. And this brings us to the other critical line: what concrete historical political content will be used to fulfil the criterion (suspending, for a moment, criticisms of the criterion itself).

Very early in this second book, addressing the subject of "thou shalt not kill" following Walter Benjamin, it is stated that life itself is spectral, raising the question of the political effects of continuing to live or not. Not every form of life is preferable to death. Sometimes it will be necessary to fight for a dignified life, which can lead to one's own physical disappearance for the sake of a struggle whose importance surpasses the mere survival of the individual. There are cries for justice that cannot be stifled for the sake of mere survival. Following Santiago Arcila (p. 13), the issue of the assassination of important leaders and the social and political impact of their deaths is addressed, generating spectralities of resistance. Jorge Eliézer Gaitán, Marielle Franco, Che Guevara, Rosa Luxemburg, Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara and Martin Luther King are remembered as examples of this spectrality.

What is intriguing about this list is that all the examples, without exception, were left-wing activists, more or less radical (from journalism and oratory to guerrilla). No mention is made of victims of the systems of Stalin, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung or Pol Pot, and specifically of intellectuals who dared to oppose left-wing regimes. Perhaps many conservative intellectuals opposed to communist regimes were not assassinated, but were persecuted, imprisoned, subjected to torture or exiled, such as the writer José Lezama Lima in Castro's Cuba or Pasternak and Solienitzin in Stalin's Russia and other Russian governments. These persons too fought for what they understood to be a dignified life, risking their mere physical survival for their ideas. Why are not they on HB's list? (Leaving aside that the mass murders of ordinary, anonymous members of the people are as important for capturing spectres of resistance as the

⁴ Graham Harman points out the same thing in his article "Indexicalism and its risks: a response to Bensusan", pp. 139-140.

assassinations of prominent political figures).

This raises a first suspicion that the ethical-political criterion (I insist: suspending criticism of the criterion itself) is being applied in a way that calls into question the very idea of vulnerability to external additions, since it is impossible to know the political leanings of these additions, which, as HB points out many times, they are unpredictable. It is impossible to know from which side the victims we want rescue or retrieve will appear. Even if we accept that, in general, closure is bad and openness is good, that opacity is good and transparency is bad, we cannot know with certainty, once and for all, ahistorically and definitively, whether it will be the right or the left that will occupy the positions of closure or transparency. In Edgar Allan Poe's terms, we do not know the intentions of the spectres that will haunt us, whether Ligeia's demands will be conservative or progressive. Contexts and circumstances should be consulted and carefully examined, if it is really a cry for justice that interests us and guides our actions.

It is true that "(...) it is unfair to leave anything out of the scope of what can be remembered. In other words, there is a sense in which memory assemblages are brought about to attempt to do justice to the traces" (p. 56). But the peasant or indigenous person cornered by capitalist projects that devastate their territories cries out for this justice of memory, as does the journalist who rots in a Cuban prison for having written against the regime. It is also true that "When torture and war crimes are concealed by the official narrative, this is unfair to the victims more than it blocks some truths from appearing or rather because it blocks some truths from appearing" (p. 165). But this applies to every victim of any regime, insofar as there is always an official narrative in the name of which torture, deaths, and exiles are committed and justified.

Taking sides with the left — as the lists of victims presented by HB seem to suggest, as well as the exclusive interest in the "spectres of Marx" (why not the spectres of Edmund Burke or Adam Smith?) — would undermine the thesis that nothing is immune to the interruptions of the Great Outdoors. Sites of oppression and resistance are empty spaces, which can be filled with the most diverse historical contents. A left-wing spectral realism seems difficult to understand. Assemblages of memory are not left or right; they are assemblages of memory. And if memory assemblages are not committed to consistency, why not admit as legitimate political stances with mixed right- and left-wing elements? A previous

political stance by the left would seem strangely careful not to fall into this kind of contradiction between a left-wing A and a right-wing non-A. There is a gap here that needs to be filled: what are the characteristics of indexicalist theories and memory assemblages that determine that the side of what must be “exorcised” inevitably falls on the side of the political right wing, and the side of the desire for justice inevitably falls on the side of the left; this step cannot be understood without further argumentation, even for those who intuitively agree with these political trends.

If this gap is filled by showing that these places are fixed, that the right wing always occupies the place of what must be exorcised, then it must be admitted that not everything can be heard (Zionism, for example, has no chances of been retrieved), which must limit the scope of additive memory and its initial openness to the other, the generous Lévinas’ idea that the others have an infinite capacity to disturb and interrupt our agenda. Here one could reply that *listening* to the other's interpellation does not imply *accepting* it (“Indexicalism,” pp. 50-51, 109). But if a right-wing conservative's appeal is merely heard but never accepted as providing a legitimate and enriching interruption, if over time this acceptance is always maintained in the realm of *prima facie* but never effectively realized, can one still state that this stance is politically open to all additions from outside?

Given this panorama, it would seem that at least one of two alternatives should be admitted: (I) Either everything is open to additions from the outside on all sides, (II) or, in the realm of real politics, there are absolute truths no longer open to additions. In the first option, we cannot systematically reject the interruptions of the substantialist or the conservative right. In the second option, if these rejections can and should be made, we must admit that theoretical openness to additions cannot always be operated in the realm of real politics, and that the “other” to be heard and by whom we must allow ourselves to be interrupted is not just *any* other, but a qualified other belonging to a certain restricted community that shares certain values and attitudes with us.

Without having read it previously, I followed a critical line here similar – not identical - to that of the already mentioned Graham Harman when, in the interview with HB, he writes: “(...) *it may be asked whether it is even possible to link specific ontologies with specific political positions (...) There are both “Left” and “Right” Kantians, Hegelians, Nietzscheans, and even Heideggerians for instance*”. And in his article

“Indexicalism and its risks: a response to Bensusan”: “*There is a further tendency in Bensusan’s book, which I find regrettable, to link perspectivism with welcoming diversity and substantivism with oppressive patriarchy (...) My objection is certainly not to decolonization, but to the trace of moral blackmail that links admirable political goals with a specific and highly debatable ontology (...)*”.

It is interesting to pay attention to HB's responses to these criticisms. Following Heidegger, HB emphasizes that traditional substantialist metaphysics attempts to bring things to transparency, to their availability, to make them intelligible, and to leave them under control and exposed. And he writes: “*There could be Right and Left Heideggerians, but both are committed to the criticism of metaphysics that arises from Heidegger (...) Further, both sides would endorse these reflections and the corresponding diagnosis. Similarly, indexicalists of different persuasions would be faithful to a refusal of substantivism and endorse a situated metaphysics (...) The metaphysics of the others is engaged in struggle against the view from nowhere, and this can indeed have different macropolitical implications*” (Interview, p. 11).

This response shows that Indexicalism — and the spectral memory associated with it — is open to macropolitical realizations of the right and left only if both share the conviction that substantialism must be exorcised. In other words - returning to the two intertwined levels previously mentioned – the actual political content with which the criterion is met may be diverse, but the criterion itself will not be discussed. Thus, the claim that Indexicalism openly admits right-wing and left-wing versions is questioned by the obligation to accept a basic requirement that is never challenged. Really accepting a plurality of forms of life may have to include substantialist and non-situated forms of life, proposed by both right-wing and left-wing macropolitics. In this same response, HB, after admitting that preaching Indexicalism is not enough to change colonialism, he says: “*Still, there is a diagnosis that can be made*” (p. 305). I believe this is the way out of this impasse: admitting that these connections between metaphysics and political stances are just that: diagnoses, quite hypothetical and provisional, and not firm and permanent connections. An Indexicalism and a spectral memory effectively open to the interruptions of the other must allow for other narratives, where heroes and victims change their names and their situations.

(4). THE TERMINAL CONDITION OF INDEXES AND SPECTERS.

Indexicalism, like spectral realism later, is open to a Great Outdoors that is incessantly added to and never complete. If we accept some version of the ontological difference between being and entities, the difference between the form of the world and what is within the world (the intraworld), the idea that the world has a structure and does not consist of a pile of things⁵, one could say that everything HB asserts in his two books, about the indexical nature of reality and the spectral character of memory, applies to the intraworld, not to the form of the world, not to its structure. Considering this difference, what Indexicalism achieves is, at most, to describe the furniture of the intraworld, not of the world, much less of the universe.

Indexicalism explains the feast of human creativity, everything humans can build in the intraworld while they live, and spectral realism refers to what exists (for others) after death. But death itself is not addressed, and therefore neither is birth. Everything that is said is about someone who was never born and who will live in the memory of others; but nothing is said about the structural (worldly) ending of that someone, this ending that begins with birth. Precisely, the form of the world relates to those two poles, birth and death, which traverse and influence the intramundane directly or indirectly, with relative independence of their specific contents. By attending to the form of the world, and not just to what is within it, we can recognize a strong substantive element in this Great Outdoors, which cannot be reduced to indexes, nor be considered merely another addendum by spectral memory. I have called this substantive element of the Great Outdoors "terminality." Terminality seems to be the Great Outdoors that no longer admits additions, because it subtracts, remains, and finalizes.

Let us try to clarify this term. "Terminality" refers to the ending of each and every singular being (not just humans) by the simple fact of having come into being. Each thing and each of us is not just a being, but a *being-so and so*, a singular and unrepeatable *someone*. (Not just a *Dasein*, but also a *Sosein*). This singular being is the object specifically affected by terminality. To suggest that perhaps matter in general, or energy in general, are eternal and never end because they never

⁵ This difference, usually associated with Heidegger's philosophy, also appears in several other moments of contemporary European philosophy; for example, in Wittgenstein's Tractatus, 3.221, 6.44, among others, as well as in his "Lecture on Ethics".

began is pointless. Terminality is the ontological burden of every singular being. This singular ending is not merely punctual, but progressive; it refers both to the dated end of singular beings and to the — quick or slow — process of their withering, already beginning at their birth.

This ending is affected by frictions, not only physical, but also psychological, social, and moral. The exhausting and tiresome relationships (even "good relationships," and perhaps especially them) between beings (not just humans), their endless aggressions, wars, and conflicts, are part of their terminality. Particularly human beings not only die (punctual death is merely an unfolding of their structural terminality) but constantly suffer in the triple register of pain, discouragement, and moral incapacitation: physical and emotional suffering, and mutual discrimination, from harmless gossip to terrible persecution. Human beings are terminal with respect to each other, in the sense that they need to use the others for their own benefit, to feed their own self-esteem, not as an occasional moral fault, but as a requirement for continuing to exist.

Terminality is the Great Outside that we cannot consider as just another addendum, because it comes not to add, but to subtract or remain, to diminish and end. It nullifies everything it approaches, admitting no partnerships. There is nothing transcendent about Terminality; it is completely "intranscendent", radical immanence, the transformation of all interiorities into a permanent and irreversible exteriority. All subjectivity becomes objectified, transformed into a dead and inert object, incapable of going beyond. It is total transparency that no longer admits opacities, that which cannot be re-signified because it is the end of all significations, the Great Interruption that can no longer be interrupted. The singular is completely absorbed by this Great Outside, without any possibility of continuing to develop its interiority (or the various intraworld exteriorities at its disposal), as it did during its —brief or long —sojourn in the intraworld of indexes and spectres. Terminality came to tell us that the dream is over.

It is essential to understand that terminality is something that "happens" to beings, not something to which they are the controlling subjects. It is not something we conceive or represent, although we are, of course, capable of forming concepts and representations of terminality. But these concepts and

representations are no longer terminality as suffered by the singular beings⁶. What we conceive or represent cannot reconstruct the content of what is suffered. We can never be subjects of that which makes us objects. Terminality is what we cannot include or construct because it is what excludes and destroys us from birth. We only know about it, even without understanding it, through the terminal experience itself. Terminality is not, of course, an argument, but rather what closes all arguments.

I maintain that all of HB's analyses are conducted from the perspective of what we can construct in the intraworld and from everything that the others construct with our shadows; that is, the entire constructive moment, the affirmative moment of the process, but say nothing about what worldly deconstructs us. It's a description of a world without structure, or a worldless intraworld. It perfectly describes everything we do, and everything the others do with us, but there's not a single line about what constantly and restlessly undoes us. He addresses everything that can be said from the speaker's perspective, but nothing is hinted at about the language by which we are spoken.

In HB's profuse bibliography, there is not mention of a single book or article by the philosopher — as close to Heidegger as Lévinas and Derrida — who developed this idea of the language through which we are spoken, of a structure of which we are not subjects: Hans-Georg Gadamer. This philosopher is ignored even in passages of "Indexicalism" where his name burns on the tip of the tongue (for example, in 83, when HB speaks of a conversational metaphysics, or in 170, where he refers to perception as a conversation). For Gadamer, the best conversation, the most profound, is the one we do not lead, but the one that leads us. In this vein, terminality is a structure we cannot grasp from the speaker's point of view, but of which we become aware when it subdues us, overthrows us, and terminates us, like the Great Outdoors that we cannot control because it puts us out of control. And it is in suffering that we recognize it as substance.

The interplay of expressions between *Grund* and *Abgrund* (alluded to by HB on

6 I know of no better text to highlight the contrast between conceptual explanation and lived existence than Sartre's essay "The Singular Universal," presented in 1964 at the "Kierkegaard alive" colloquium, especially when it refers to Kierkegaard's place within Hegel's system (as "unhappy consciousness") and Kierkegaard's existence between 1813 and 1855. According to Sartre, nothing that Hegel says affects Kierkegaard's existence while alive, but when he dies, he becomes trapped in the objective descriptions of Hegelian knowledge. Ultimately, we can only understand what is dead.

pp. 25-26) is relevant to the metaphysics of terminality, insofar as, through suffering, through *being affected by* what we cannot control, terminality is not a "foundation" in the sense of traditional metaphysics, but, precisely, an abyss, into which everything sinks, including all foundations. An abyss is anything but a support, a secure base, a parapet; an abyss is a fall into the void, it is perdition, utter helplessness, a journey with no real return, only a spectral return to which we are no longer subjects. Ghosts are always being-for-another, as in Poe's short stories.

It is possible to return to the political issue here, in the light of this negative ontology. HB's political analyses limit themselves to denouncing the patriarchal colonialism that certain metaphysics would favour, but he never asks *why humans colonize, why they seek to expand, dominate, and exterminate others, why this fascination with control, dominance and profit*. Traditional explanations have brought to light the "intrinsic evil" of human beings, their predatory "selfishness". Negative ontology allows us to consider that perhaps the root reason for human destructive expansionism is not an enigmatic "instinct for destruction", but a consequence of the terminal situation in which humans were placed by their progenitors, which forces them to develop a strong self-esteem and fight fiercely to occupy a space for survival. Maybe understanding this would help us see our enemies more as colleagues in misfortune than as simply ambitious villains, recovering partially the idea of the "immanence of the enemy" addressed by Viveiros de Castro. Some indigenous ontologies seem to be clearly negative ontologies.

We can say —though the topic deserves further development elsewhere — that a negative ontology avoids Levinas's criticisms of Heidegger's "ontology"; these criticisms apply only to affirmative ontologies, ontologies of openness and light. No affirmative being can assume totality and remain above ethical demands, but a terminal being can, in the sense that ethical explanations of human attitudes—of colonialism and the desire for power, for example—are not sufficient, but that everything begins to become clear when we discover the terminal ontological roots of human violence on all sides. Moreover, the negative ontology of terminality can also offer good answers to the apparent incongruity between open theories and closed politics, addressed in the previous section: terminality can disturb and provoke discomfort in such an acute and unbearable way (think, for example, of the Gaza tragedy) that it prevents us from remaining

in the vegetal tranquillity of theory.

Finally, it must be said that spectrality does not defeat terminality but confirms it. For to become a spectre, a ghost, a shadow, one must die. Terminal beings can only continue to exist as spectres. Of course, singular nothingness *does exist*. Nothingness cannot be *conceived* but is regularly endured by singulars. Singular human beings will end up completely as a first-person subject, trapped in the spectral memory of the others, not always welcoming (the others can distort or even destroy our memory; we can all have our Plato or our Aristophanes). All immortality is impersonal, something that can occur to us at the hands of others, not something we make happen; and the price of this impersonal immortality is the guaranteed loss of our personality, of our *Sosein*, definitively dead⁷.

Furthermore, spectres are also terminal, to the extent that they are singular: memory can discard certain things definitively, so much so that they cannot even be spectres. In any case, spectrality carries a natalist commitment, because to become a spectre we need future generations, for people to reproduce. To be for others, it is necessary to continue to be others.

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⁷ A funny illustration of this difference is the joke with which Woody Allen closes his autobiography: "*And really, no interest in a legacy? I've been quoted before on this, and I'll leave in this way: Rather than live on in the hearts and mind of the public, I prefer to live on in my apartment.*"

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