

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND META- PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF HILAN BENSUSAN'S *INDEXICALISM*

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses Hilan Bensusan's new book, *Indexicalism: Realism and the Metaphysics of Paradox*, from two different yet interrelated angles. On the one hand, it examines its problematic admixture of subtractive and chiasmic logics for approaching the Otherwise, and questions its unresolvedness thereof. On the other hand, it analyses its anti-ontologism and criticises its subsequent mistrust of the conceptual beyond the perceptual. An in-depth reconsideration of philosophy's original distinctiveness and a polyvalent conversation with extra-modern ontologies guide the discussion, through which we nonetheless stress the relevance of Bensusan's proposal in a philosophical arena dominated by the power negative and agree with him on the importance, if not on the absoluteness, of indexicality for the renewal of contemporary thought.

KEYWORDS: Bensusan; Indexicalism; Ontologism; Otherwise

BETWEEN THE COMMON AND THE OTHERWISE

In a time in which Hegel announces his untimely return on behalf of a new functionalism that views today's production and circulation of knowledge as the ultimate *cum* triumphal expression of a universal *Geist*,¹ whose plasticity thus seems to be attracting renewed attention,² it is indeed tempting to read Hilan Bensusan's *Indexicalism* against the backdrop of Schelling's tacit criticism of Hegel, according to which it is not history that has a reason, but reason (read: thought) that has a history.³

¹ On which see Negarestani, *Intelligence and the Spirit*, esp. 11, 18, 19, 50, 129, 135, 163.

² Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 186-187.

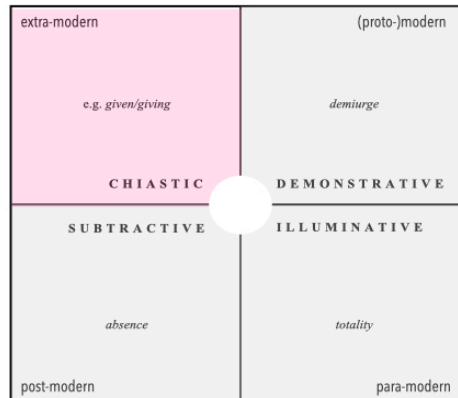
³ On Schelling and Hegel, see further Duque, *Historia de la filosofía moderna*, 907-974, esp. 913. Cf. Foucault's successive *ἐπιστήμῃ* in *The Order of Things*.

What we mean by this should not be too difficult to guess. Western thought – Western “metaphysics” would be too inexact a designation, as, *pace* Rosenzweig, there is no straight line “from Ionia to Jena”⁴ – exhibits four (partly diachronic, partly synchronic and interfering) logical architectures: *chiastic* (or double proportional), *demonstrative* (unilinear and deductivist), *illuminative* (unilinear but inductivist), and *subtractive* (de-constructionist).⁵ Heraclitus’s fragments, Pindar’s odes, Parmenides’s poem, Plato’s hypothesis on the εἶδη, and structuralism, are examples of the former type, whose savage (in a Lévi-Straussian sense) *extra-modern* qualities are anything but casual; whereas Aristotle’s *proto-modern* and

⁴ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 18. One can only approach the Presocratics bearing in mind Roy Wagner’s warning about the risk of “extending the realm of the ‘know’ by applying one’s symbolizations to the ‘unknown’” (*The Curse of Souw*, xviii-xix) which lies at the heart of the so-called “ontological turn” in contemporary anthropology.

⁵ This fourfold division is loosely based on Descola’s four ontologies in *Beyond Nature and Culture*. It may be pictured thus:

**FOUR MAJOR LOGICAL ARCHITECTURES
of Western thought**



timely & all too common
 untimely & otherwise

many-times-adapted (one need only place as first principles God, Man, the State, Class Struggle, the Free Market, or their combination) deductive mode of reasoning is the earliest extant illustration of the second type; Christian mysticism and Nietzsche's will to power, which turn around different yet similarly irradiating intuitions, reflect in turn the *para*-modern third type inhabiting the *limes* of the second one; and both Heidegger's crossed out being ("beyng") and most of today's *post*-modern philosophical drifts, from deconstructionism to object-oriented ontology, display the latter type in overt antithesis to the second one.⁶ Now, does not Bensusan's *Indexicalism* stand at the crossroads of *two* of these logical architectures, namely, the subtractive and the chiasmic – and hence between the all too common today and the Otherwise?

For Bensusan's *Indexicalism* aims at exploring the "Great Outdoors" opened up by speculative realism in a non-substantivist manner;⁷ but it does so in an attempt to depart from the modern ontologist project viewed as the extraction of what is common, repeatable, and intelligible in order to secure the sameness of future experience against the inherently disruptive alterity of any factual or potential Other⁸ in face of what, following Peter Linebaugh, Bensusan calls the modern/colonial *ego cogito/conquiro*.⁹ Therefore, *Bensusan's "indexicalism" oscillates between withdrawal and positiveness*; or, rather, it inscribes the tension between two distinct conceptual poles: the non-correlationist withdrawal of reality, which can be indexically mapped but not thematised, and the acknowledgement of the positiveness of the Otherwise, which can neither be dissolved into an undefined totality nor marked as fully indiscernible.¹⁰ Or again: it moves half way between subtraction and chiasmus, for if the Other (any Other) can be infinitely approached but cannot be exactly known by me,¹¹ I, in turn, am, structurally speaking, that Other's Other, for each of us is caught in a structural double

⁶ For a meta-philosophical interpretation of Heidegger's "beyng" which goes beyond Heidegger's own *said*, see however Gevorkyan, "Meaning, That Demonic Hyperbole."

⁷ Cf. in this sense Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 15-16, and *Being Up for Grabs*, 32, where some degree of "substantiality" was still vindicated *contra* Meillassoux's over-empowerment of contingency and accidentality.

⁸ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 185.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53-59; cf. 5, 184.

proportion – a point that Levinas fails to see because he privileges interiority over action and appearance.¹² Despite his Levinas-inspired criticism of ethical reciprocity, it can be argued, therefore, that Bensusan somehow brings together Levinas’s take on the Other (“the Other is what I myself am not”)¹³ and the Amerindian “cannibal *cogito*” (the expression is Viveiros de Castro’s,¹⁴ the formula Manuela Carneiro da Cunha’s):¹⁵ “I am that which I am not is not” – and the Other, therefore, is what I myself am not.¹⁶

Thus, ultimately, Bensusan’s new book turns around “here” and “there,” “this” and “that,” “me” and “other.” Yet even if it is possible to concede that deictics are, as he says, ultimate,¹⁷ cannot the objection raised by Bensusan against Meillassoux in *Being Up for Grabs* – to wit, that, necessity is not sufficiency¹⁸ – be now raised against *Indexicalism*’s *absolutisation* of the indexical domain? Like ours, the conceptual worlds of those extra-moderns about whom he writes in dialogue with Viveiros de Castro and Valentim present something more than deictics; that is, their meaning elicitation (and its reversed effect: cultural convention, to employ Wagner’s wording) is surely based on an analogical flow, and analogy can be deemed indexical due to its double (in fact quadruple)

¹² E.g. a Bororo and a Tukano perceive themselves as a “parrot” and a “toucan,” respectively; this means too that each perceives himself as his other’s other forming with him not so much a totality as a relation of inverse proportionality that does not require a third, neutral, point of view placed nowhere for such opposition to be meaningful for both of them: “I have a colourful body and a small beak, while you have a colourful and prominent beak,” and vice versa. Cf. Viveiros de Castro, “Radical Dualism.”

¹³ Levinas, *Time and The Other, and Additional Essays*, 83 (cited in *ibid.*, 31).

¹⁴ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 187-220.

¹⁵ Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros*, 143.

¹⁶ Cf. Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 84-89; Segovia, “Tupi or Not Tupi”; and Chapter 7 of our forthcoming coauthored book: *Dionysus and Apollo after Nihilism*. The cannibal formula echoes the Lévi-Straussian notion of structural difference in “dynamic disequilibrium” (on which see Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 83, 256, 258. Again: the latter, no less than the two labyrinths of Borge’s two kings in *The Aleph*, has nothing to do with Hegel’s idea of totality: “palace” and “desert” do not form one thing, and their opposition cannot be synthesised in any possible way. In his response to our paper (gathered in this same journal issue) Bensusan himself seems to be willing to somehow think beyond the Levinasian critique of reciprocity and to accept the “imbalance” on which we are writing here against any “commitment to symmetry,” and hence chiasmic thought if it ensures “contradiction” in lieu of “indifference” (the terms are his). We are likewise willing to engage with his criticism of reciprocity in terms of symmetry.

¹⁷ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 7, 12, 93, 177, 186.

¹⁸ Concerning contingency (Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 15-16).

proportional qualities,¹⁹ but it transcends perception and opens up a possible world made of myths, rituals, and a number of other, both non-substantive *and* substantive, things (e.g. enemies/affines and matrilineality, respectively) which exceed Bensusan's (neo-)“empiricism.”²⁰ Matrilinearity proves a rather uncomfortable example thereof, as whatever you may become and however you may deictically re-position yourself,²¹ you belong in a matrilineal moiety whose substance your body carries and which thereby defines your substantive being – call it the hy(pokei)menal, if you wish. And even if the power of transformation or re-worlding of the given that your name and your shadow signal²² must remain un-assignable²³ to be operational – which is what Derrida fails to see in his critique of Lévi-Strauss's encounter with the Nambikwara²⁴ – its existence does

¹⁹ M resembles N, and N resembles M, for the sake of M's distinction from O and P, on which see further Segovia, “Metaphor and the Analytic Philosophy Cuisine,” 4, and the example supplied in n20 below regarding the identification of someone as “parrot,” “toucan,” “jaguar,” and “man.”

²⁰ Cf. Otávio Maciel's criticism of Bensusan's reduction of what he calls the “categorical matrix,” as well as Graham Harman's critique of Bensusan's dismissal of “substantivism,” found in this very same journal issue. Not only is any categorical matrix, we should like to add, plural by definition, but also dynamic. Take the following three nouns: “parrot,” “toucan,” “jaguar,” and “man.” Examination their coming into being shows that they are indexicals configured as substantives by means of an analogical flow (cf. Wagner, *Habu*, 4-6). For in each case they result from establishing similarities and differences between X and Y or, more exactly, M, N, O, and P. Thus when a Bororo says “I am a parrot” he makes himself similar to all other members of his tribe and different from the members of other tribes, e.g. the Tukano. Were he to be a shaman he would likely say that, in addition to being a “parrot,” he is also a “jaguar” so as to differentiate himself from all other members of his own tribe while simultaneously acknowledging his similarity with the shamans of other tribes. Lastly, if he were to say “I am a man” he would do so to stress his social status (as a warrior, father, etc.) and present himself as being both similar to and different from a number of other members of his tribe (whether from his own family or not) and of other tribes. The purpose of this analogical flow varies from one case to the next: in the first one it is totemic classification, in the second one it is theriomorphism and magic, and in the third one it is the attribution of social status. But notice that, in all cases, indexical invention lies behind noun convention. Once produced, though, the noun remain what they are: substantives, and acquire, moreover – we are grateful to John Bova for drawing our attention to it, an iconic value: that all members of the Bororo tribe are parrots means that “parrot” is the icon that circulates among them as a token, whereas “man” circulates as a token among a far more reduced number of them and “jaguar” is applicable to only one of them in each generation. Culture, therefore, is the product of a superimposed analogical flow in which deictics, substantives, and icons exchange their roles. On Bensusan's indebtedness to empiricism, see *Indexicalism*, 138-150.

²¹ Cf. Astuti, “The Vezo Are Not a Kind of People.”

²² Wagner, *Coyote Anthropology*, 49-50.

²³ Wagner, *Asiwinarong*, 122.

²⁴ Gevorkyan and Segovia, “Derrida's Mistake.”

not compromise any worlded substantiality.²⁵ In other words, subtraction (“deterritorialisation,” in Deleuzian-Guattarian parlance) is a *post*-modern, and hence an all-too-modern rather than extra-modern, passion,²⁶ in the same way that a “cosmopolitical forest” with “primordial otherness”²⁷ but no myths that grant “the permanence of society and its eternal repetition”²⁸ is a post-modern landscape, like a philosophy forgetful that she is the continuation of Homer’s dactylic hexameter by other means,²⁹ an *Iliad* movie with Trojans and Achaeans but no gods (those mega-demonstratives that reshape as tonal music the earth’s forces),³⁰ or Pasolini’s *Teorema* with Paolo running naked through the wilderness out of shame but without Emilia willing to regenerate the earth with her tears.³¹

Still, Bensusan (who in a Derridean gesture aims, one could claim, at depriving the philosophical *epos* of its Homeric qualities, which can be also found

²⁵ E.g. innovative myth gloss does not put at risk the perdurance of a myth’s a priori conventional image (Wagner, *Asiwinarong*, xiv-xv), which results, of necessity, from some prior innovation (Wagner, *Habu*, 6). Invention (cf. Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*) is the key to all this, and it functions both substantially and multiplicatively: Yaminahua shamanic metaphorisation (on which see Segovia, “Metaphoric Recursiveness and Ternary Ontology”) is a great example of the extra-modern preference for symbols over raw reality, and for noun play over deictics.

²⁶ Baudelaire was the first to identify “modernity” with (the experience of) “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (*The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 13).

²⁷ Bensusan, “An-Arché, Xeinós, urihí a.”

²⁸ Clastres, *Archeology of Violence*, 139.

²⁹ But under the same law: φημί → φαίνω → φῶς, one could argue after von Humboldt’s (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 7: 90) notion of conceptual perceptions (here, then, something like ΦΦ-). Cf. Nuckolls, “Ideophones in Bodily Experiences in Pastaza Quichua (Ecuador).” Very important: in its quality as a linguistic modality, the Homeric *epos* is not susceptible of an analytic or pragmatic approach to language, which proves that the discipline called “philosophy of language” has, in turn, a specific linguistic modality as its object. See further Segovia, “Metaphor and the Analytic-Philosophy Cuisine.” On the Homeric *epos*, see n32 below.

³⁰ The ancient-Greek gods are not supernatural beings or persons, for which reason no belief is implied in relating to them. They name the brightness and the shadows of everything that is, i.e. the all-powerful, immanent forces of the earth whether positive – e.g. love (Aphrodite) and the clear vision of things (Athena) – or negative – e.g. darkness (Nyx) and discord (Eris) – that make and unmake the world, that is, any world.

³¹ Unless one posits as spurious any difference between Paolo and the Hopi chief about whom Mauss wrote: “cet homme, recordman de la course à pied, me disait: « Je peux courir ainsi parce que je n’arrête pas de chanter mon chant du feu »” (*Manuel d’ethnographie*, 286). Interestingly, among the Dani of Papua New Guinea what we would call the “soul” (or any other similar term) is called “seeds of singing” (*etai-eken*) (Gardner and Heider, *Gardens of War*, 88); from which it might be deduced that the problem with Paolo – who is able to break off with the bourgeois order but incapable to replace it with anything else – is that he lacks a soul: he shouts, but does not sing.

in the *hereamuu* speeches of the Yanomami)³² ventures himself beyond subtraction insofar as the encounter with the Other as such (i.e. as a non-reducible Other) leads him back to the Same redefined (repositioned) as *receptivity*. Indexicalism is thus crowned by a chiasmus, the post-modern *folded* onto the extra-modern, and this is a promising move: one that does not overtly question undetermination – the modern malaise against which the dual affirmation of event (Dionysus) and form (Apollo) distinctive of most extra-modern conceptual worlds gains all its force³³ – but that succeeds, nonetheless, in thinking something *more* than just anything no matter how. And with it the idea put forward in *Being Up for Grabs* gains maturity – adding, moreover, something beautiful to *Indexicalism*'s pairing of the continental reduction of philosophy to the politics of discourse and its Anglo-American reduction to the pragmatics of the indicative mood.

³² On the Homeric *epos*, see Martínez Marzoa, *El decir griego*, as well as Míguez Barciela, *Mortal y fúnebre*; on the Yanomami *hereamuu* speeches, Kopenawa and Albert, *The Falling Sky*, 121, 254, 299, 304-306, 313, 373. Cf. too the meta-poetic structure of the *Iliad* with its incantatory formulaic descriptions at the service of ritual ontological disclosure, built upon reiterative adjectivation and the pervasive employ of aorist verbs, and the results of Fontaine's structural analysis of Yukuna ritual discourse in "Les cours d'au dans les incantations chamaniques des Indiens yucuna." In the so-called Homeric poems, and particularly in the *Iliad*, each thing is once and again summoned according to what it is, i.e. by showing its qualities and its beauty: the ships in their concavity or as objects that swiftly cross the waters, the sea with its roars similar to those of a lion, the aurora with its characteristic pinkish colour, etc. Such permanent coming into the presence of things, which does not privilege any of them over the others but allows all of them to appear equally when their turn comes – and which is both *substantial* (substantive) and *indexical* (oppositional) – makes of the *Iliad* the strict precedent of early Greek philosophy, from Anaximander to Heraclitus and Parmenides. In fact we are currently working on a new annotated translation of the *Iliad* in Spanish (which is partly available here: <https://polymorph.blog/publications/>) sensitive to the poem's philosophical ingredients (and to its tragic ones, given the central role of the concept of ὄβρις in ancient-Greek tragedy). It would be very interesting to know what Bensusan's thinks of what we are willing to call extra-modern *indexical substantiality* or *substantial indexicality*.

³³ See further Gevorkyan and Segovia, "From World of Possibles to Possible Worlds"; as well as our mentioned forthcoming coauthored book, *Dionysus and Apollo after Nihilism*, where instead of putting forward a *new* metaphysics: xenophilic, indexicalist, or whatever else – and hence instead of adding to a project that, however variously and eventually adversely, goes back *inter alios* to the early modern Empiricists and Rationalists, the medieval Scholastics, and the ancient Atomists – we attempt to reframe Kant's critical project of inquiring how we actually know and think, and we do so against the backdrop of contemporary ethnographic theory and the philosophy of mythology – somehow echoing, then, Gilbert Durand's "new anthropological spirit" in *Sciences de l'homme et tradition*; cf. too Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 11. The terms "form" and "event" are Diano's (*Forma ed evento*).

PLUCKING A NON-ONTOLOGICAL DAISY

Another great thing of Bensusan's book, given the realist and materialist texture of most contemporary philosophy, is its generosity towards two key figures which tend to be either despised today on account of their alleged idealism (Plato) or else assimilated (Leibniz) to the hyper-connectivism (we are tempted to write "machinism") prevalent where cosmopolitical opposition to subtraction is being engineered. Aside: one wonders whether, in the end, what Bensusan does is (1) to *bridge* both camps (the anti-correlationist and the cosmopolitical, which form the two sides of today's philosophical currency), (2) adding to them *interiority* as a "supplement," in the Derridean sense of the term, (3) in order for Alterity to be *engaged* with as such and (4) for *ethics* to have a say in a field otherwise dominated by the admixture of aesthetics and politics. Which is, anyway, an elegant way of taking distance with the given, conceptually speaking.³⁴

Leibniz surfaces – or rather resurfaces, for he was invoked in *Being Up for Grabs*, *contra* Meillassoux, to prove that exteriority is relational plus regular to some extent – in Bensusan's attempt to (now) conciliate interiority and relationality.³⁵ Indexicals denote positions, and "a position can be understood as composed [...] of a border that distinguishes what is inside it and what is outside it."³⁶ Were it not for this difference, indexicality itself would hardly be possible, as everything would disappear in a purely external night in which (as Hegel feared) all cows would be black. Yet Leibniz's take on interiority is not substantive: "composed of [...] their relations [...] and the events they participate in,"³⁷ Leibniz's monads are individuated with the help of others and therefore relate as "interdependent units of action."³⁸ All this is fine as regards Leibniz's metaphysics, which Bensusan reworks creatively. But could not Leibniz's epistemological *approximationism* be turned against Bensusan's triangulation of perceptual approximation + cognitive opaqueness *vs* the (false) prerogatives of cognitive

³⁴ We try a different move in Gevorkyan and Segovia, "Earth and World(s)," by reimagining the cosmopolitical, or maybe it would be better to say the cosmo-logical (i.e. the logic at stake in the making of any world), in neo-structuralist key.

³⁵ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 29, but see also 23-28, 103, 123, 150.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

transparency?³⁹ Does not Bensusan fall here, despite his contention that “[a] baroque realism is one in which shades [and] lighted areas compose a view [...] never complete,”⁴⁰ does not he fall into the trap of what Serres calls the Cartesian law of “everything or nothing,” according to which anything one may not be certain of must be declared unknowable?⁴¹ Leibniz views knowledge as being always translucent: 0.739, 2.244, 8.009 times clear and distinct – and, consequently, as being always-already situated between the καθόλου and the καθ’ ἕκαστον, the “general” and the “particular,” the familiar and the otherwise. Amerindians regard knowledge in the same manner, as no matter how much room you may be willing to make for ontological unpredictability (especially if you are a shaman) and contextual or deictic referentiality (what is a prey or a person always depends on someone’s perspective)⁴² you cannot survive in the rainforest if you don’t know that the sound you’re perceiving right behind you is the roar of a jaguar instead of that of a caiman. Put differently, for them the question “what is *x*?” (call it the *Seinsfrage*, if you dare) is anything but dispensable: there is no true *situatedness* (one of Bensusan’s leitmotifs) at the expense of it.⁴³ Conversely, we have made such question dispensable because we are traumatised by the ontological fixity we have imposed on all Others we have encountered, and so we prefer not to choose (and not to say) what things are – hence Derrida’s motto: “*Nous ne choisirons pas.*”⁴⁴ Yet this ontological *epoché* is unnecessary to care for the Other as an Other.⁴⁵ For (please reread Anaximander and his Homeric subtext carefully)⁴⁶ ontology, *pace* Levinas, presented ethical concerns from the

³⁹ Ibid., 2-4, 6-9, 17, 25, 27-28, 47-48, 52, 54-55, 58-61, 80, 84, 92-98, 103-105, 110, 114-116, 120, 126-128, 134-142, 146-177, 197. In the online discussion of his paper, Bensusan reiterated that he does not militate against cognition. Yet the opposite notion is partly deducible from the pages of his new book, as Graham Harman, Charlie Johns, and Jean-Pierre Caron highlight too, albeit differently, in their contributions to this same journal issue.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁴¹ Serres, *Le système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques*, 127.

⁴² Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism.”

⁴³ Cf. Lévi-Strauss’s “science of the concrete” (*The Savage Mind*, 1-34) which, on the other hand, overflows any pragmatic boundaries.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence*, 125. Cf. Neher’s replacement of “l’être” by “le peut-être” in *L’exil de la parole*, 246ff.

⁴⁵ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 106, 186.

⁴⁶ Surely there is no need to recall here that one cannot keep unfairly what belongs to Apollo, e.g. Chryseis but also being *qua* presence; for Apollo, like the sun does when it makes visible all things by highlighting

start; and φύσις and thus being, *pace* Heidegger, does not lead straightforwardly to the modern *Gestell* (please reread attentively Heraclitus's frag. B123).⁴⁷ In fact the Greeks, like most other pre- and extra-modern peoples, were so intrigued by the Otherwise in spite of living in a world made of ontological determinations (which allowed them to care for things, as justice stands in direct proportion to knowledge),⁴⁸ that they dedicated a sanctuary to a "god unknown." The contention, therefore, that "ethics" *begins* where "ontology" ends is less a necessary logical statement than a cultural *prise de position*. It is Levinas's secularised⁴⁹ Jewish argument.⁵⁰ But some of us do no longer feel at ease with monotheism to resume it, as Bensusan does when he speaks of "Jewish

their contours, watches over the limits of each, which is why he encourages self-knowledge. The *Iliad* thus advances two ideas – namely, the correlation between presence and absence and that between being and justice – that one rediscovers in Anaximander's sentence, the first philosophical fragment we know of (cf. n32 above).

⁴⁷ In his response, Bensusan himself acknowledged this and proposed an interpretation of Anaximander's saying according to which the "order" (τάξις) suggested in it "is eroded and reshaped at each new event and nothing is safe from deviation, from interruption or from nonmonotonic addition," so that "the issue of injustice (and merit) persists because it involves a quest that cannot be dealt with once and for all" (see his own contribution to this journal issue). In this sense, he stresses, indexicalism, i.e., the subordination of being to positionality and exteriority, remains "faithful [both] to Anaximander's sentence [...] [and to Heraclitus's frag. B123:] Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ ~," on which see below; and it opposes the obliteration of the non-closure of the world's event structure on behalf of a closed order of presentness. We are ready to agree with this, and therefore too, to some extent, with Levinas's rejection of *clôture*. But then, one could argue, the question is not whether φύσις and being have led to the modern *Gestell* – they actually do not; the question is rather the corruption of τάξις into closure, which need not be the same as wholeness, since any possible world has a *limes*, and whose source, on the other hand, in no way exhausts the notion of ἀρχή, since the ἀρχαί of any possible world are always plural. Take, for instance, the earth in ancient-Greek culture: as we have written elsewhere it is the one that shelters the dead, i.e. those who no longer shine forth; but it is also Demeter, who is sometimes sad and sometimes happy on account of Persephone's misadventures, as shown by the earth's changes in mood in winter and spring, respectively: whereas the ἀρχή of the former portrayal is a synthesis of tragic awareness and poetic perception, the ἀρχή of the latter combines poetic perception, cognition, affectivity, and imagination (Gevorkyan and Segovia, "Paul and the Plea for Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy," 630). True, the two are connected by the notion of shining forth, the ultimate symbol of which is Zeus, and in that measure Zeus can be said to be the ἀρχή of the ancient-Greek thought world; but it does only encircle it to protect it, e.g. from turning the earth into a wasteland; apart from this, Zeus merely inspires the growing impulse of the world of which it is precisely the ἀρχή, a world which will inevitably expand in many unpredictable directions engendering new ἀρχαί along the way and across its boundaries, i.e. according to the dis-order of time and space.

⁴⁸ Cf. Severino, *Il giogo*, 211-217; Martínez Marzoa, *El decir griego*, 31-39.

⁴⁹ Like Badiou's "Christ-event" without Christ and Agamben's "messianic" time without Messiah, on which see Gevorkyan and Segovia, "Paul and the Plea for Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy."

⁵⁰ E.g. in *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*.

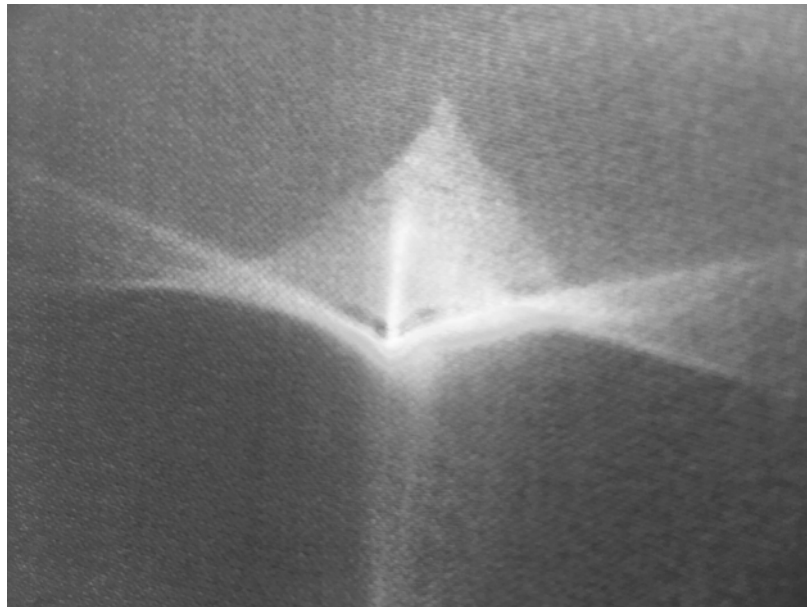
animism.”⁵¹ Paraphrasing Lacan’s suspicion about the modern “death of God,” we don’t want the god of monotheism to become unconscious under the pretext that we have killed him.⁵²

Much like that god, Bensusan’s Other is like a Stranger who does not come fully out of the mist and whose figure is barely seen,⁵³ but with whom one must interact asking oneself how to relate with it. Is it a subject without predicates, as it eludes any attribution of being, or is it a collection of merely indexical predicates without a subject, like Deleuze’s “black” and “white” nothingnesses, respectively?⁵⁴ Or is it a “border” in itself, as Garcia fancies?⁵⁵ One does not finally know. *One can only pluck it as if it were a non-ontological daisy.* For even if it is

⁵¹ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, xii. Cf. his former *Linhas de Animismo Futuro*, where, in contrast, “animism” remains unqualified (plain).

⁵² Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 59. In the online discussion, Bensusan denied his philosophy’s religious *commitment* to Judaism; any claim to the contrary would be unfair indeed; yet Bensusan’s conceptual *indebtedness* to Judaism via a Jewish philosopher and Talmudist like Levinas is, we think, indisputable, and the expression “Jewish animism” an incontrovertible symptom of it.

⁵³ Something like this then:



Photograph by the authors

⁵⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 28.

⁵⁵ In *Form and Object*; cf. Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 62-63.

“close enough to be pointed at”⁵⁶ and minimal phenomenal traits are bestowed on it,⁵⁷ it eludes “thematisation.”⁵⁸ In other words, Bensusan does not count knowledge⁵⁹ among the “technologies of contact”⁶⁰ that might help us interact with it, except in a few brilliant pages on Whitehead’s “concepts”⁶¹ that open up an interesting line of inquiry maybe insufficiently explored. As if we did not consist in “picturing facts to ourselves”⁶² rather than thermosensing our surroundings like von Uexküll’s tick;⁶³ as if perception and knowledge did not go hand in hand for us; as if knowledge were not what makes us capable of assuming other perspectives; as if it were not the guarantee of the transcendence that Bensusan seeks beyond immanence;⁶⁴ as if concepts were more a danger than an aid to us in *our* mapping of reality. One wonders: should we discourage their use because some have been misguided by their inevitable dose of sameness, as Averroes ironically suggested those willing to prohibit wine should do with water given that some have drowned in it? This may just be another symptom of our modern malaise: if the Yanomami fear that which makes their “head[s] spin,”⁶⁵ the Guarani fear the lack of repetition,⁶⁶ the Atchei fear the “shifting face of the world” and “distortion,”⁶⁷ and the Parakaná only relate with those others whom they perceive to be at an “optimal distance between the identical same and the indifferent other” lest their alterity become “inapprehensible,”⁶⁸ i.e. ontologically and cognitively inaccessible, we are terrified before anything *too defined*.⁶⁹

⁵⁶ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-83.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii, 7-8, 21, 70, 91, 95, 108, 155, 171, 187.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150-154.

⁶² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.1, which Wagner glosses thus: “Outside of this [...], and inside of it as well, there are no human beings, only bodily functions and our apprehensions about them” (*The Logic of Invention*, 22).

⁶³ Cf. Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 150.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2, 9. Cf. too Charlie Johns elegant amplification of Kant’s transcendental idealism in this same journal issue: the meteorite appears to us as a meteorite due to the earth’s structure.

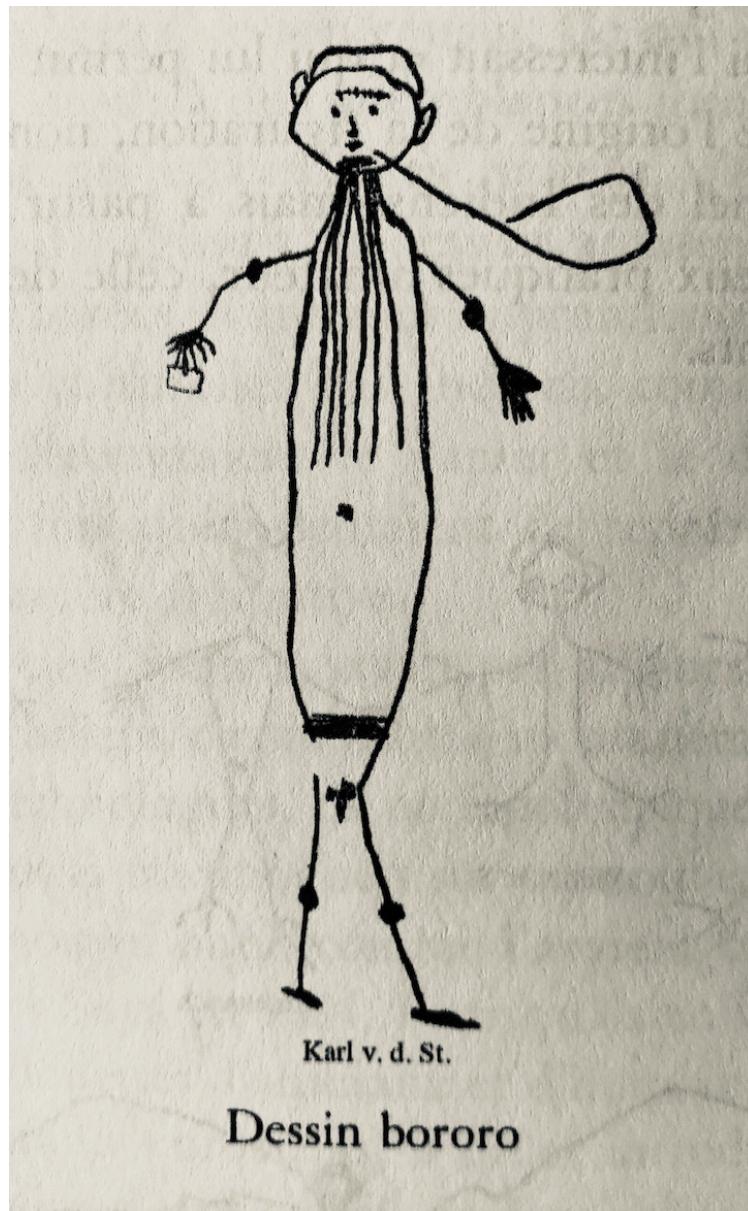
⁶⁵ Kopenawa and Albert, *The Falling Sky*, 40.

⁶⁶ Clastres, *Society Against the State*, 169-175.

⁶⁷ Clastres, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, 219-220.

⁶⁸ Fausto, *Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia*, 178, 181.

⁶⁹ See further Segovia, “The Alien.” Compare the Bororo portrait of Karl von den Steinen reproduced on p. 26 of Pierre Déléage’s *Lettres Mortes*, which supplies a perfect example of the extra-modern perceptual-conceptual correlation:



Von den Steinen's genitalia were not seen by the Bororo, but they drew them all the same, since a man without genitalia would simply not fit within the concept of a man, and conceptualisation and sensible representation go hand in hand for the Bororo. Nor is the size of von den Steinen's pipe what we would call realistic, but serves to stress the uncommonness of an object, hence a conceptual challenge, by expanding its perceptual dimensions (the same applies to his beard). Actually, only conceptual definition grants

This takes us, finally, to Bensusan's rereading of Plato's *Sophist*.⁷⁰ Plato's Stranger, he stresses, "surrounds" *being* by "four indexical kinds that [...] affect it from without":⁷¹ Same, Other, Rest, and Movement. Plato's reasoning can be summarised thus: since Movement is not alien to being, being cannot be exclusively identified with Rest, it is Movement in one sense and Rest in another sense, yet without being a third divisible genre; and this means that Same and Other must be included among the fundamental ontological determinations. This, however, does not imply a departure from "ontologism" on Plato's part, as Bensusan claims;⁷² even if, as he remarks, it "puts ontology on a level with dynamics, statics, the metaphysics of the other, and the metaphysics of sameness as constitutive and fundamental aspects of reality."⁷³ For it is the study of being that guides Plato's conceptual *démarche* in the *Sophist*, which thereby anticipates Aristotle's "τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς."⁷⁴ Put otherwise: Plato's Stranger is *not yet or no longer* – take your side – the Stranger in the mist.⁷⁵

We stop here. A philosophical conversation ought to delimit problems and invite to think through them. Bensusan's *Indexicalism* is a perfect example of it. It is also a precious book, not only because it develops in novel ways all the major issues at stake in the contemporary philosophical debate, but because it tests its

experience: if, when you wake up, you were not able to re-cognise this as the morning of another day, you would not be able to do anything (new) in it, you would be lost in perplexity not knowing who you are, what the things around you are, etc. Repetition allows for variation, identity for difference; conversely – paradoxically – where difference in itself rules only sameness reigns: everything becomes indistinct and thus indifferent. Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, 1835, 114: "la similitude est le moyen de la différence," as well as our brief discussion of Nietzsche's eternal return elsewhere (Gevorkyan and Segovia, "On Nietzsche's Eternal Return"). None of this means, though, that a concept is sufficient to account for what we experience: attunement to reality is a necessary and ongoing exercise (Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, 113-158).

⁷⁰ Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 17, 19, but see also 100-101.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Met.* Δ, 2, 1003a 33.

⁷⁵ This could be a fine place to open an excursus on Plato's εἶδη and the Mediterranean light, on how their co-implication was once questioned on behalf of the voice of an invisible Other originally addressed to a group of people that traverses the desert in a flight, and on how it is often questioned today on behalf of the blind possibilities of touch (in a time in which no one seems to be anymore willing to be told anything) which, we are (nonetheless) told, is (therefore) the only truly decent sense we still can rely on in order to engage with what rejects being subsumed under any kind of correlationism and must thus remain forever concealed in a sort of global-nordic mist. But we are running out of time \ space...

limits, eventually venturing itself beyond these and into the Otherwise. It should be judged, then, on account of the new moves it risks on today's philosophical board and of its willingness to broad the game currently played on it.

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