

THE ETHICS OF THE OUTSIDE IN THE FACE OF THE PERSPECTIVE FROM WITHIN: THE INDEXICALIST PARADOX

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ABSTRACT: More than addressing a metaphysics of the paradox for its own good, *Indexicalism* throws us indirectly into a hard core through which a resolute attempt is announced: thinking through exteriority – and that is precisely why indexicalism can be no less than a metaphysics *and* a critique of it. Touching the most delicate interstices of this metaphysics that is a metaphysics of others requires me to read the difference between what is presented in indexicalist grammar as "the Great Outdoors" and "interiority". I intend to do this by treating on the "metaphysics" brought in not only in desire, as Levinas wants, but, against Levinas, by the psychic suffering extended to the other in its impossibility to be received.

KEYWORDS: Indexicalism; Hilan Bensusan; Metaphysics and Ethics of the Other

I begin by quoting Hilan Bensusan at the beginning of the book *Indexicalism: realism and the metaphysics of paradox*: "This is a book about others like others (...) where knowledge or thought cannot reach. The outside then appears as a [conversational] landscape of others." It is in this onto-political perspective of one out given by others and not conceptually open that Bensusan's book affirms deixis as absolute – "the very place of the situation and for some the relativity of extension". The deixis is therefore absolute in the multi-instantiated horizon of the 'great outside'. The statement, from which he rescues Meillassoux, also suggests a paradox that, by making room to think through a genuine exteriority, opens up both a metaphysics and a critique of metaphysics. "The book is, therefore, about the (paradoxical) limits of any panoramic metaphysics that lives

up to genuine exteriority." My dialogues with Hilan around his indexicalism will start from an inverse, if not controversial, reading of this paradox, that is, a reading of the paradox from another instance than that instigated by the book. In other words, not from the instance of the paradox where the Great Outdoors is announced by the fact of taking place in a "totality with holes", but from the interiority as interiority of others. I intend to shift the paradox of place and touch on the "metaphysics" brought in not only in desire, as Levinas wants, but, against Levinas, by the psychic suffering extended to the other in its impossibility to be received.

And yet we agree, or rather, I agree with Bensusan that more than addressing a metaphysics of the paradox for its own good, this book throws us indirectly into a hard core through which a resolute attempt is announced: thinking through exteriority – and that is precisely why indexicalism can be no less than a metaphysics *and* a critique of it. Playing without touching the most delicate interstices of this metaphysics that is a metaphysics of others requires me to read the difference – if we think with Derrida, this "line" never drawn because it is continuously erased – between what is presented in indexicalist grammar as "the Great Outdoors" and "interiority". And that's what I'll try to do, here, starting with the "Great Outdoors" to find, then, the interiority and its paradox that I see in the book among the most important sources to Bensusan, strangely and in particular, in the thinker *par excellence* of an ethic – I insist on this term, in this practice, in this metaphysical ethos – of an ethics of exteriority with Emmanuel Levinas.

THE OUTDOORS:

Indexicalism would have much in common with Amerindian perspectivism, according to Bensusan: in both cases, the deixis resists being thought of as a noun, whereas, all being animated and not substantive, that is, not objectified by proposition or coincidental concept because transparent to its reference, the possible impact to a visible and conciliatory totality would come from outside. And this "outside" translates as otherness which, because it is absolute and plural (the others), is transcendent. Nothing irreducibly substantive can be said about what exists, so that there is no totality free of transcendence. Indexicalism is therefore a metaphysics, although it is far from a standard view of metaphysics as it posits deictic elements hidden under anything substantive. Bensusan claims that

this is a form of perspectivism, that is, that everything that exists is situated on a common substratum – "humanity" – capable of volition, choice, intentionality, relationship and that it keeps an interiority also capable of deictic operations.

Thus, a question appears to me, a differential question: "culture" and "interiority" seem to find the same meaning in the indexicalist argumentation, because they are located in a common substratum towards the outside. Culture, being "human" in each existent, would find, in contrast with itself and with a prevailing totality, its singular "home", its interiority. I intend to find out more about these supposed synonyms here.

For now, the outside – an outside in perspective. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro summarizes this conclusion in terms of the classical distinction aimed at any anthropology of nature: "culture is the nature of the subject". While Bensusan concludes that "others move within me" – interiority is therefore the other exteriority of the subject whatever it may be. 'Humanity' should be understood as a general name for any subject in a cosmology, or in the terms of this book, for an interiority-capable-of...

For another duality posed by the metaphysics of transparency, body and soul are found, here, as postures of interiority and externality perspectived; they are fixed locations that eventually move. To see or speak to someone else's soul, from another body, I have to leave my body somehow, as shamans do, I have to change myself so that some dialogue with the other is possible. Viveiros de Castro understands perspectivism as an anthropological method of interaction with the native deixis in which ethnographic reports do not write "about" perspectivism, but they themselves are perspectivists. The example of Viveiros de Castro (in his *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 2018, p. 89) is the common account of the Amerindians according to which "the protagonist gets lost in the woods and arrives in an unknown village, whose residents invite him to cool off with a bowl of "cassava beer" that he accepts with taste – but, to his horrified surprise, his hosts put ahead to him an overflowing bowl of human blood, insisting that this is precisely the cassava beer he had been waiting for. Which allows him to conclude, of course, that if human blood is the beer of those people, those people were not human." If the moment of the narrative and argumentation about the report is written by Viveiros de Castro in the sense of a "misunderstanding", in which he – the misunderstanding – is the common currency of a dialogue that is always of a

disjunctive type where the interlocutors do not speak the same thing and do not know it even if they suspect, according to the indexicalist argumentation, the focus is from where you are human to, from where the "cassava beer" is cassava beer so that the experience can be somehow narrated.

We can remain in the political field of a neo-liberal society like ours and still remain in the same argument of perspectivist misconception and indexicalist speech. Jacques Rancière, for example, reminds us that, in the field of the politician or in the arena of our dissent, we do not engage as subjects of choice, of a choice that is made between complex values of type "A" or "B", "freedom" or "justice" if we want, choose that would position us in the social sphere or differentiate us from the others; this is because, says Rancière, we do not have a common grammar that enable us to dialogue, we do not know among the choices put what "A" or "B" means, just as the anthropologist and the native do not know exactly what 'humanity' means, and the human and jaguar do not know how "cassava beer" is used, though they use both their humanity and their party drink. Thus, the body, not the choice or the dialogue, is the place of origin of perspective, the point of view of each species; and it is multiple since it admits several forms, in addition to, according to indexicalist grammar, several situations.

In a multination, what exists are things-to and things-from – blood/beer from/to human/jaguar – and where the shape of the Other is the person, even if seen only from the position of himself and his own. By inverting the game background ("culture") / form ("nature") into an unstable scenario that is the Amerindian transformational world and, in contrast, that of an "unlimited exteriority (the "great out" indexicalist) that provides the change of locus of what is at home" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 63), thus inverting the metaphysical game culture/nature establishes a sociality without fixed borders or in its interconnections.

Following this indexicalist idea of "being indoors," perspectivism brings the human/non-human difference to the interior of each existing one. (Viveiros de Castro, 2018, p. 61). As if by a separation of ones in the translation that negotiates with others (human or non-human) or by a separation of any totality that gives it meaning, each existent is similar to the others only reflexively – the jaguar is human to the jaguar, the boar is human to the boar, man is human to man.

Nothing else approximates each existent to the others.

I will not exactly enter into the indexicalist option of a certain scope of speculative work, which, although opening the way to deal with exteriority, ought to be interrupted in its connection to totality and transparency, so that it remains a certain gain of intuition on the outside and leaves the task incomplete. What interests me is that, in the case of this precise intuition against the nihilism of our times, the metaphysics of others talks to the speculative realism of Quentin Meillassoux, especially by the notion of "Great Outdoors" and when flirting with the absolute principle of facticity, and also that of Graham Harman in the flat ontology of the non-transparency of all things. And here, yes, it seems to me quite important that a deictic realism brings us "back to where we are, facing the wall that establishes the other side" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 12), or on this boundary boundary of the correlation necessary to which philosophy is seen, according to Meillassoux, incurably ensnared. In the book, the central line of argument is followed by an account of the Great Outdoors in conversation and by statements that should be "independent of the window from which everything is seen". It seems certain that nouns provide useful heuristics to disseminate the characteristics of things, of the kind *S is P*, but hide assumptions situated within them and only then given to the outside and as outside. The thesis is that the starting point of any metaphysical account of the universe is neither real substances nor entities, material or immaterial, but rather what is capable of being pointed out – that, that, inside, outside, even, another, here, there, horizons and other indexicals, which, in turn, are not a dimension of thought (or language), but a consequence of being somewhere towards an ambivalence.

But in the vicinity of argumentation lies an insurmountable paradox that Catherine Malabou sees very well and which Kant inscribes in the spirit without demonstrating it, in such a way that it is as if Kant expected Meillassoux around the corner. The critique of the transcendental always takes its form from the transcendental. The possibility of a radical contingency and, by it, of a great absolute and opaque to knowledge, is an analytical, rather than speculative endeavor; or, what would be the conditions of possibility of contingency – this essential dimension of the real that does not engage in its alleys? How to demarcated the line of what isolates the pure contingency of its substitutes? The

"difference" of everything that would be equal because is necessarily correlated is itself necessary to whom or from where?

Although it is associating with speculative realism in his exorcism of transparency to put exteriority at the heart of metaphysics that Bensusan summons Alfred Whitehead to face exteriority by the idea of perception as hospitality. That's where I want to get to the glimpse of a paradox of interiority within indexicalism. But to do so, I need an "edge" that would make me read in a different way this perception that appears in the argumentation by an intrusive structure of otherness from which it is possible to "create a way to coordinate something from the outside with something from within" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 116).

THE EDGE:

I will use as a non-specular and non-spectral example that invokes Levinas by an existent who is and is not there, who appears and is absent from the scene of exteriority. It is from this absent presence what Derrida said of memory: a "no contemporaneity to the present" for not being present as such. And I will use this example "as such", that is, from a material point to a blurred vision – the only one of a safe materiality – another aimed at Hilan's and the realists of speculation, which wave the impossible in ethics precisely in its kernel. I propose a concrete situation as a margin of the Great Outdoors towards interiority, or of bending from a deixis to a reverse address, to think of the point of paradox that, it seems to me, the metaphysics of others places; and then to ask, with it, about the scope of its reality.

We see a scene in which someone is absolutely vulnerable – too sick, too sick, worldless or too vulgar. (Perhaps it is not "exotic" to consider that someone may be a human, an animal, a God, or a specter...) Whoever he is, I can't replace him at the scene, I can't steal his expression. I will not reproduce the scene, even if in order to have it facing my perception. It disturbs me; I'm bothered by the Other, I'm bothered to bear it. I take, even unintentionally, an engagement to the scene. But if you protested by saying, "what you say is ignoble" or "what you live bothers me" or "react!" or "here I am" (well in the Levinasian way) or, still, "I can't help you, even though I wanted to." I'm trapped. So I feel it. Is something supplemented to the scene from my point of view? Does something in the form of a "perceptual supplement" endorse the scene? Something is said as if to

compose it, as if it could not be the same scene after my experience? Is anything reportable? Is there, in this notorious non-saying, an in-difference to the scene where the Other snatches me to shame?

What I want to make seen by this situation is what Levinas says, in "The trace of the other", it is another presence that orders before I perceive myself engaged, an abstract "other presence" not integrated in the world: visitation. (Levinas, 1963, p. 235) A visitation of the past without memory, of a present past, of an infinite in the finite, without becoming, without specters as it would make us see Derrida. But the presence "as such" that interrogates and embarrasses me; and the question that questions me and whether it seems to impose me is "what does the other command me?". The question, the second to this and the first that I leave to Hilan, is how to find in this other that exceeds the possible descriptions about him, I mean, how to meet him in what he himself does not leave to meet – his trail [la trace], the non-indexical (that is, his vulnerability without edge or his non-pointing, your disappointment), your infinite? Since the realism that points to his naked and indigent body does not recognize it; at least not in terms of what indexicalism expects from perception as hospitality.

INTERIORITY:

Interiority (psyche, is the term and) is, according to Levinas, what resists totality, which resists the categories of being, among them, subjectivation. Therefore, in resistance, interiority is constituted by contents, among which Levinas confers fruition. As an event of being, if not the very cause of being or one that opens to the relationship, Levinas investigates in the second section of *Totality and Infinity* the psyche, which happens as "presence in your house" and enjoys the same things. Levinas' defense of a consummate, satisfied psyche, situated as an interior and constituted from within, seems to be due to two fundamental reasons to the ethics of the Other: 1. only a psyche, thus consummated, is capable of violence, both of committing it and of detaining it, the infinite is not; 2. it is necessary to ascertain the boundaries between the psyche and totality, towards something that is beyond that is the metaphysical desire or the work of discourse.

The Self is, therefore, an interiority positioned and constituted by a materialism before all idealism that would enclose it in a totality. I am the event of being, the absolute beginning of an existence that identifies itself, of an

embodied and separate being, not because I can point to myself and say "I am", but because "I can identify any object, any character trait and any being;" - this is what Levinas writes at the beginning of "La trace de l'autre". In *Totality and Infinity*, he says: "The ego is an existence for itself, but not initially in view of its existence nor as a representation of itself by itself; it is for you as in the expression "each for himself", for himself as it is for himself "empty belly has no ears", capable of killing for a piece of bread, for himself as the fed up who does not understand the hungry who approaches him as a philanthropist, as if he were a measly, strange species". Thus Levinas outlines the solitude and secret of a psyche marked by enjoyment, which is taken for himself in an affective state but "which does not have the warm monotony of a state, but is a vibrant exaltation in which one rises" (Levinas, 2000, p. 104). The Other does not rise from this state, as it is not an event in being, it is not in a psyche, it is not the identifiable beginning in being, nor is it enjoyment. The Other is, for Levinas, an out for which he does not point out because he is absent from this gesture, and to which the I points only towards a desire and towards an idea of infinity that meet the others who "dismantle their idea" (Levinas, 1997, p. 238).

It is also necessary to know, in a setback, where exteriority is the Other, with capital 'O', other, that not the things of the world from which I enjoy and perceive myself in the midst of them through the element – the elemental world in the Levinasian saying – but, precisely, others – the one or this or someone who asks me when he needs it, and asks me in absence since it "upsets the immanence without settling on the horizons of the world", since "(...) if it meant it was tantamount to indicating, the face would be insignificant." (Levinas, 1997, p. 239) If others are not, in Levinas, a "furniture of the world", if he does not share with the world an immanence, he is not interiority either. Levinas says it is a vestige that "is too great for discretion, for interiority, for an I" (Levinas, 1997, p. 243). And yet it embarrasses and is constrained; transforms subjectivity into an indicative labyrinth where the external and internal are entangled; it is present in the space of proximity, as Bensusan says, between every piece of bread and my mouth, between every gesture exposed and the secret not updated. What time and what instance would be able to translate the disorder that he (*ileté*. Infinite thou) *overprints* on the order of the world? I intend to follow the trace which is the Other, but which leads to a given interiority.

Bensusan seems to solve something of the issue of interiority by monadology. Monads are also subjects independent of their indexical situation. A way out to this absence of a position that make them substantive is to provide the units of interiority with deixis. The metaphysics of others is a first-person philosophy, and with Levinas from an asymmetric point of view, but still against Levinas who sees idealism as the philosophy in the first person. Nevertheless, it does not have the interiority, a constitution of its own and separate, rather it is simply the locus of experiences (Whitehead) in which "the Great Outside is already fully available in the very frontiers of our interiority" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 95). And, however, I insist that enjoyment and psychic suffering are not experiences *stritu sensu*; they are, therefore, indistinct to a monad in the interior of which both are agency and the relations with exteriority are forged. The access available to the outside makes interiority units capable of transcendence; while the outside, the exteriority, the other are components of a reality that is more like a horizon than something that can be mapped (Bensusan, 2021, p. 98). The Levinasian distinction is maintained: on the one hand, a monadic interiority capable of transcendence and plastic when it receives the from the outside; on the other hand, the same transcendence alters, accessible to the horizon which "forms my borders" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 99).

Levinas, for his part, and for whom the name is necessary - psychism - delegates to the world of things and elements (the elemental environment) the value of enjoyment or dependence on things which is also, paradoxically, their independence from them while enjoying them. Therefore, it is the locus of experience. In contrast psychic suffering would be left to violence that is always my violence, addressed to the other – murder – and, therefore, led to death and the uncertain "internal" suffering of the other. And this is the clash with Levinas that extends and finds no point of support in indexicalism: the interiority of the other.

The face is pure exteriority, nudity and exposure; it communicates a demand or teaching in absence, in what is left over since an immemorial past that takes place as an over-impression (Levinas, 1997, p. 242). It upsets the order of the world; that is, a face, rather than a psyche, is what is before an indexical. There, where the other is absent, is the suffering suffered from him by me – the Other, then, unwounded, not wounded because not intimate, but already hostage,

hostage of the hostage which I am of his demand; relational violence, batting, but not co-answered. In Levinas, suffering does not make the Other a psyche, but it holds him hostage to a hostage in the ethical scene. Exteriority is the target of the murder of an interiority that is only struck as a face. Others is face, nudity and, as such, ex-absolute position. The Other dies in many ways with my violence, but does not suffer or enjoy. Or how would you suffer an exteriority? This is a problem for Levinas and an invasive question to an untouched interiority that undoes, despite violence, the confines of its limits and leaves an exteriority orphan – and makes a world disappear (Celan).

Bensusan detects a problem of traditional metaphysics with regard to the interiority of the other, which is that of not leaving the other a space within itself; although it populates the psyche with the theater of others - the "furniture of the world". For, the question for indexicalism is less about interiority and more about proximity. "Proximity is the interiority next door" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 53) which is moved at a distance from a perception. I quote Bensusan: "The answer I would like to recommend is straightforward: it is through the perception that the big outside interrupts a link. (...) The perceptual experience provides constant supplements. The very image of a perceptual subjectivity is that of a house with an open vision; perception is the very locus of hospitality in interiority." (Bensusan, 2021, p. 126, 217). It also brings a situation, a "edge", in which a sense opens when I open my eyes and become hostage: "the bodies of refugees are nearby, they are there around the boat, visible, screaming for help" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 135) Perception is passivity without spontaneity.

Once perception is established, there is no action that can dispel it, Bensusan says, although it brings together all the vulnerability of a deixis linked to a localized position. And yet, this vulnerability of perception seems to be resolved in a gesture of hospitality, in the "remodeling of the interior", since perception is ubiquitous and, in being so, receives the other, each interiority includes an exterior (of which it is hostage), so that all concrete existence resides in an interiority. (Bensusan, 2021, p. 23). This residence is conferred by the hospitable perception on the condition that it is oriented, or rather, incited by "something like the Levinasian obsession with the Other" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 140), and an "obsession" that is expressed in acts of response.

The paradox of interiority in indexicalism begins to show itself when

perception, which opens the dimension of time not as synchrony – non-transparent encounter between objects (Harman) – is not completed through its hospitality but in a setback. The look to the other is the retrospective gaze of a here, according to messianic thought, and this is the time without place that is the time of the other – that is the time that is made by interruption. For Levinas, otherness has never been there, but it always advances in a form of materialism – the one that summons the ways to sustain a world that is continually lost, disjoined, goes off the axis, disappears (Derrida in *Spectres de Marx*).

This absence that resists recognizing others in locus leads us to what Levinas calls trace - an otherness older than presence - and it is only or only "read" by an I, by me that I perceive in a double gesture: the interruption of others and the metaphysical desire. *Totality and Infinity* and "The trace of the other" take metaphysical desire in opposition to necessity. This is still identification of the I with one's own, restlessness in being, "restlessness of ones that fulfills in happiness his 'for himself'" (Levinas, 1997, p. 234), position. Metaphysical desire is, instead, the very sociability that can only be thought of without deictic, in the manner of a diaphonic judgment. The metaphysical desire disturbs the interiority formed by the interruption of the Other even if it puts it into relevance (as an *Aufhebung*) the interiority of the Other.

As one turns to the Other, "in a way that compromises the sovereign identification of the Self with oneself," an interiority is threatened in what he could receive from me in hospitality; while another interiority is, in its own way, threatened by the hospitality of perception. That, that someone who, at first, did not concern me or would make me indifferent by my "already fulfilled and independent" interiority, interrupts me but does not form my interiority, but rather stops at the borders. This takes place in a setback between me and him, and by a dystopia acting upon an impossible desire.

The interiority of the other is the notion necessary to an impossible desire, that something cannot be exposed because it does not find place, does not index, does not depend on who perhaps could welcome it. Between the 'life I live' and the 'fact of life', the psyche divides, according to Levinas, between the solitary ultraempirism of fruition and the theory that begins with a realism and develops in the intentional act. Through theory, the outside becomes an object and refers not to a deixis but to an interiority. But interiority is a psyche that never arrives –

in Levinas' sense, because she enjoys but does not share her fruition, does not make her arrive; as in Lacan, where neither enjoyment nor suffering simulate a complementarity between subjects, but rather a disparity and a mismatch given the inadequacy between the object (of desire) and the desiring. It is quite certain that "the exterior with which perception is involved is constructed by an act of indexical attention, and not of a geographical position" but "it is from somewhere that a real entity reaches others". (Bensusan, 2021, pp. 149, 150). However, from nowhere I can perceive his mediations – what he wants, what he does not want, how to conceptualize himself by which content despite and through the sense or adversity provoked, what he seeks, what he seeks – I cannot tell them, nor can the protagonist himself do it, because what happens there is that an interiority is exposed without being itself perceived.

This real existing does not perceive its surroundings and is not perceived by them; and yet an "ought to" is announced to the words of Bensusan and Levinas and Derrida beyond the supplement: "to give a finite answer to an infinite demand" (Bensusan, 2021, p. 154). At the end of "Trois phrases de Jacques Derrida", Nancy writes: "(...) le schème et l'intonation du singulier, de l'insubstituable, le propre dans son archi-propriété inaccessible, inimitable, inappropriable, le propre tel que proprement il se dit, tel qu'il se pense, tel qu'il se souffre et tel qu'il demeure – en nous, en lui-même enfin – en lui-même, c'est-à-dire hors de lui, exilé, excrit, ek-sisté, dehors – c'est-à-dire où ? ici, avec nous". In absolute local inaccuracy and in the setback of an extended present past, we read indexicalism portraying an interiority not as a guided unit, but as a complex deitic environment. The call to responsibility would bring an anarchic force that erodes the structures of the ego while holding him hostage to his exteriority; and, however, something remains singular, averse to the report, even to conversation, and foreign to indexicalism: the "naked and indigent body".

Indexicalism is a work in which positions play the game of meaning and relationships (report or conversation) with the metaphysical insignia; the position plays but does not decide, nor does it decide, as Derrida wants. The position establishes borders, not communicability. Far from being a noun, the interiority of the Other does not appear on the horizon of deitic perception that, when receiving it, does not respond to what it receives. To indicate another paradox in the plethora of paradoxes already in *Indexicalism*, and to point it in the

vulnerable condition of an unreported incommunicability, because it is not situated, is to point towards a legacy of this dense work. And, I remind that a legacy is not exactly the answers that a work provides and that could last in time, but rather the drama that it makes explicit and, in doing that and above all, implicates us.

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