

## PLACE AND SCALE

J.-P. Caron

ABSTRACT: In *Indexicalism* Hilan Bensusan brings together a multiplicity of strands in contemporary thought in trying to build a thoroughgoing foundation for a situated metaphysics. In this paper I try to connect the solutions that are specific to the book to the problems identified in two different papers of Bensusan. The author takes a polemical stand against inhumanism as a continuation of the project of the extraction of intelligibilities that is continuous with the history of Western metaphysics. Under this light, indexicalism becomes a way to deal with the will to knowledge. In this paper I try to connect the project of indexicalism with these problems by examining some of the solutions proposed in the book concerning the philosophy of language and or perception, trying to propose an answer to Bensusan's criticisms, through an immanent engagement with the indexicalist position - but in doing so we will not be kept in the confines of what indexicalism might be prepared to countenance. Unforeseen consequences lurk- reversing from within some of the philosophical valences of the position-a transvaluation towards a *non-indexicalist* position that, nevertheless, gives justice to the *situated* point of view that is always the *causal* starting point of contact with the real.

KEYWORDS: Bensusan, Hilan; Indexicalism; Metaphysics; Inhumanism

In *Indexicalism* Hilan Bensusan brings together a multiplicity of strands in contemporary thought in trying to build a thoroughgoing foundation for a "tentacular metaphysics". As he himself presents it, tentacular metaphysics in Donna Haraway's parlance opposes itself to the God's eye view, making every claim dependent upon a specifically situated point of view. To bring this about, Bensusan weaves a complex fabric of ideas. From the concern with Alterity and the resistance to integrating the Other into our own conceptual scheme that is proper to the Ontological Turn of Anthropology, to interest in the Outside typical of the upholding of Realism in the wake of Meillassoux's *After finitude*, Bensusan reaches his tentacles out to many corners of the landscape of conceptual contemporaneity.

An important ingredient in Bensusan's recipe of an upgraded Levinasian philosophy of transcendence for our times is the logical scaffolding of language

he proposes. As the name of the book suggests, the problem of *indexicals* play a great part in it, which are understood as a situated reference- a way our language can have direct bearing upon the conditions of enunciation that relates the speaker to a specific time and place. It is well known that *indexicals* such as “I”, “here”, “now” are *token-reflexive* in the sense that their referents are dependent upon *who* is talking, *where*, and *when*, changing conceptual content if they are uttered by someone else, at a different time, elsewhere. Alongside these paths taken in the philosophy of language, Bensusan offers an account of perception that satisfy a double stricture of not falling into the (Sellarsian) Given, and still having *transcendence* in relation to the endogenous conceptual infra-structure of our minds. In other words, he tries to satisfy the McDowellian positioning of perception between the Given on one side and Coherentism on the other.<sup>1</sup> These strictures respond to the necessity of a metaphysics that is both situated and that upholds radical exteriority. Thus, perception must itself be *active* in the *hospitality* shown to external contents, without thereby being closed off within its own resources.

We could take a first characterization of the project of *Indexicalism* from the following paragraph:

Indexicalism can now be described as the claim that deictic operations are the building blocks of what is real. They compose interiorities where the Great Outdoors makes an impact without ceasing to be exterior. Since exteriority can never be fully neutralized in a totality, the only possible metaphysics is one that paradoxically accounts for the impossibility of metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

A first question concerns the idea that “deictic operations are the building blocks of what is real”. A proper understanding of this entails deciding what are deictic operations and in what specific sense these might function as building blocks. Do so called deictic operations define the ontological constitution of the fabric of reality, or is their relevancy constrained to the *epistemic* conditions of access to the Outside? In what sense does the semantics of indexicals shed light on this philosophical juncture? Secondly, in what sense should a metaphysics account for its own impossibility? If a presupposed totality is impossible once the alterity of

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell, J. *Mind and world*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, ch. 1

<sup>2</sup> Bensusan, H. *Indexicalism: Realism and the Metaphysics of Paradox*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. p. 78

what is other is given its due, metaphysics seems an impossible endeavor- if we understand it as the theorization with the eye on maximal generality. But this would *prima facie* entail the view from nowhere that is Bensusan's objective to steer away from. In that sense, it seems that the paradox is one between the impossibility of having the God's eye view of the whole while still being able to describe *why* it never becomes a whole, itself a general proposition about the whole of reality, in a reenactment of the paradox of the *Tractatus*- of saying too much necessarily while trying to maintain oneself within the confines of what is rigorously sayable.<sup>3</sup>

Both requirements- situatedness, and paradox- point to a function of *localization* of philosophy. My intention here is to propose some notes particularly on the consequences of Bensusan's treatment of indexicality, that would bear upon his conception of rationality. But to shape the object of my criticisms I will be drawing on two further texts by Bensusan: the "Cosmopolitical Parties in Post-Human Age" text that was published in 2020 in the &&& journal<sup>4</sup>, and the "Geist and Ge-Stell" text that was published in *Cosmos and History* in the same year<sup>5</sup>. Doing so will flesh out what are, in our view, some of the motivations for Bensusan's commitments regarding issues of *indexicality*, and *locality* (as we shall see, two very different things), and the legitimate rational operations that can be carried through in tandem with these commitments.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The rejection of the whole is something that Bensusan shares with other philosophers such as Alain Badiou, who does not uphold anything resembling an indexicalist philosophy. Which goes to show that the acceptance of the importance of locality does not necessarily entail the restriction to locality and the impossibility of upscaling the level of descriptors (instead of a neutral *description*). I shall pursue this line of thought in the rest of the paper, not by contrasting Bensusan and Badiou, but by taking a few cues from the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Robert Brandom.

<sup>4</sup> <https://tripleampersand.org/cosmopolitical-parties-post-human-age/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/878/1500>

<sup>6</sup> I shall spill the beans and mention that I am personally cited in "Cosmopolitical Parties" as an "Inhumanist Marxist": "We can think of inhumanists leaning towards Marxism and welcoming an anastrophic view of both nihilism and capital. This is indeed not far from the position held by Ray Brassier, JP Caron, and, arguably, of the late Mark Fisher. Inhumanist Marxism claims that the revolutionary impetus brought up by capital associated with the idea, grounded in the age of danger, that most things exist to be resources for the human or post-human agents, is what could bring a future where machinery and technology, in general, will be the product of an intelligence which is capable of extracting the intelligibility of anything. Inhumanist Marxists would trust humans and post-humans are going to be emancipated by the course of a proletarian revolution that will carry the flag of nihilism. Formulated like this, inhumanist Marxism has little space for alliances either with the commons tendency or the animist tendencies of the left of the catastrophic parties. They represent precisely the anathema of the future they strive for." In: Bensusan, H. "Cosmopolitical

In that sense, we will be precisely doing an exercise in Indexicalism-answering from our own interiority the call of the exteriority of the Indexicalist position- but the fact that in doing so we will not be kept in the confines of what indexicalism might be prepared to countenance. Unforeseen consequences lurk-reversing from within some of the philosophical valences of the position-a transvaluation towards a *non-indexicalist* position that, nevertheless, gives justice to the *situated* point of view that is always the *causal* starting point of contact with the real.

### THE COSMOPOLITICAL PARTIES

One further characterization of Bensusan's stance before we proceed can be captured in Bensusan's own classification of his position, Post-Nihilist Marxism in "Cosmopolitical Parties in the post-human age". Bensusan starts this essay by offering a justification for thinking in cosmopolitical terms.

Cosmopolitics emerges then as the intertwined attention to the increasing cosmic nature of human political concoctions and the growing cosmic impact of human political decisions (...) Decisions, to be sure, are to be taken not as deliberate courses of action based on reasoned choices, but rather as consequences of non-transparent factors when a particular road was chosen. Garrett Hardin once said that the science of ecology is founded on this generalization: *We can never do merely one thing*. So is cosmopolitics.<sup>7</sup>

Cosmopolitics in the sense of Bensusan emerges as a set of typically non-thematized assumptions that guides human action in the age of the human determination of the cosmos. This amounts to a lifting of the philosophical idea of a *background* informing our sense-making practices and practical interventions upon the environment to a cosmic *scale*, justified by the amount of interventive power the human has gathered in our age. The idea of "never doing merely one thing" points to the practical consequences of unthematized assumptions that are augmented by the actual technological potency that is proper to our time. In a sense, it is already a *scaling up* of the *consequences* of the backgrounds of practices humans engage in once enough interventive power is garnered.

Bensusan proposes then two different axes along which one can take either a

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Parties in the Post-Human Age". &&&, 2020, <https://tripleampersand.org/cosmopolitical-parties-post-human-age/>

<sup>7</sup> Bensusan, *CP*.

*catastrophic* or an *anastrophic* position: the *Nihilism* axis, and the *Capital* axis. Here the proposed meta-perspective start showing its colors as the “knowledge” axis is characterized in Heideggerian terms as *nihilism*. “Heidegger reads Nietzsche as shaping the idea of nihilism to make explicit a cosmic plot in the saga of metaphysics.”<sup>8</sup> The history of nihilism coincides with the history of *knowing*, which is identified in the Nietzschean-Heideggerian framework with Western metaphysics as such. Its distinctive character is the view of the universe as “standing reserve” for a command to be seized. Knowledge is entwined with control.

The second axis is the *Capital* axis- and assembles both the *anastrophic* and *catastrophic* attitudes regarding capital’s “deterritorializing” powers. Capital is here read in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense filtered through the lens of Nick Land as “an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy’s resources” (Land apud Bensusan)<sup>9</sup>. From this characterization one can already see the similarities between Bensusan’s understanding of Capital and of metaphysics- or nihilism- as *abstracting stances* that erode given determinations and their immanent grammar of proximity and distance in social and natural worlds:

In fact, capital and knowledge- commodification and danger- have much in common apart from their (partial) simultaneity: capital also makes things replaceable, paves the way towards a greater abstraction- makes labor itself abstract- while exorcizing fixity, it interferes with the existing associations because, as the nightmare of any socius, it has a *de facto* special license to care about nothing else.<sup>10</sup>

While refraining from adopting too fast this identification, Bensusan offers a more nuanced version of this relation, stating it as a mutual reinforcement- “they certainly feed off each other even if they had different pedigree and only causally converged.”-an issue I shall return to in my conclusion.

Within this matrix Bensusan can position different strands of contemporary thought, combining different positions in the *anastrophic/catastrophic* axis with the *capital/nihilism* axis.

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<sup>8</sup> Bensusan, *CP*.

<sup>9</sup> Bensusan, *CP*.

<sup>10</sup> Bensusan, *CP*

	N-AP	N-CP
C-AP	Inhumanist Marxism	Post-nihilist Marxism
C-CP	?	Commons animism

Post-Nihilist Marxism then is Bensusan's proposal of a position that combines the anastrophic position regarding Capital- of waging on Capital's deterritorializing powers, with the catastrophic position regarding Nihilism.

*Indexicalism* represents the groundwork of such a project.<sup>11</sup> It rejects the age of Danger represented by colonial metaphysics. It starts by positing a difference between interior and exterior, which is supplemented by an account of indexical expressions in language and fleshed out in its third chapter by an account of perception. It declares substantivism- the idea that we have access to things from a non-situated point of view, which are captured in substantives- its enemy and emphasizes the necessity of *de re* references that bypass *de dicto* senses. This visit to Bensusan's papers from 2020 makes explicit the desideratum to establish a limit to the *extraction of intelligibilities* that is characteristic of the Age of Danger that yields *substantivation*. The upholding of locality *all the way down* functions as a threshold over which one can't legitimately operate, obviating any unification of metaphysics in a view from nowhere. This is brought about partially through a certain conception of the functioning of reference in language, that is deemed always *implicitly indexical*.

#### ON IMPLICIT INDEXICALITY

Let us propose four meaning-candidates for the *implicitly indexical or de re* nature of language.

- a. Reducibility of (substantive) entities to elements to which one can point to (use of demonstratives). Paradigmatic case: Russellian objects of acquaintance.

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<sup>11</sup> Bensusan, private exchange with autor: "As I see it, Geist and Ge-Stell is the beginning of a post-indexicalist trajectory, therefore something that is not directly implied in the book's argument, although nods towards what I have called post-nihilist Marxism are found in the book, albeit initially." (08/11/2021)

- b. An anaphoric reference to some original contact that continues in its use. Paradigmatic case: rigid designators.
- c. Implicit reference that is always dependent, not upon original use, but on current context even when substantives are used. Paradigmatic case: Carnapian frameworks; Goodman's worlds.
- d. An implicit range of possible references, dependent upon the transcendental structure of the knower (its scale and perceptual inputs). Paradigmatic case: Uexkull's notion of *Umwelt*.

If *Indexicalism* has as its main motivator the necessity of a standing location from where to construct metaphysics, it seems that a certain form of empiricism (for instance, **a**) would be perhaps the most intuitive way to build the position. But this conflicts with a further commitment of indexicalism: the exteriority of one and other. There is not enough friction between an agent and its outside in the empiricist strictures- a point that will be made clearer when we talk about perception.

Alternative **b** is interesting to Bensusan, who wants to secure a *de re* mode of reference. He adopts the causal-historical theory of reference taken from the tradition stemming from Kripke's *Naming and necessity*.

Kripke uses an example from Putnam to clarify the notion of reference-fixing, which is of great importance for metaphysical indexicalism. It could be discovered that cats are robots sent by extraterrestrials to spy on human domestic life. In this case, the false sentence 'cats are animals' can still fix the reference of cats. Now, if descriptions that fix reference had to be true, the consequence of the discovery would be that cats don't exist- Kripke and Putnam understand that cats are already individuated, for it is precisely because of the false sentence that the discovery that cats are robots has any content. The discovery is therefore about cats, identified by the false sentence describing them as animals. The false sentence manages to individuate something so that it fixes the reference of 'cats'. In other words, it is not the truth of a description that denotes. It is not the substantive content of a description that determines what the sentence is about; rather, **it is the deictic operations carried on by the description that do the trick**. The lesson for indexicalism is that reference-fixing, a linguistic deictic operation, is independent of the truth of a description- and the substantives in the description have an underlying deictic role. Indexicalism holds that being is being indexical, and that deictic operations like reference-fixing are what bring something (individuated) to

existence.<sup>12</sup>

The paragraph gives some credence to the idea that *indexically implicit* would mean in Bensusan's philosophical architecture an indexical *origin* of some substantive terms- or individuation of beings as Bensusan prefers. He mobilizes Kripke's notion of a *christening* as the individuation of entities in language by fixing their reference and relate the substantive use to an *indexical occasion* whence the christening occurred. One important component of this indexical account is that reference-fixing avoid *de dicto* equivocation by *bypassing* the necessity of substantive definition of the terms used. "Cat" then has its use not denoting a four-legged mammal with such and such characteristics, but the initial deictic *ostension* that is carried over (anaphorically) to every other use. Reference-fixing, against definite descriptions (which presuppose *describing*, thus, *making something available through concepts*) fixes the borders through which something gets individuated.

I understand this movement of de-determination in terms analogous to those used by Kripke and other theorists of direct reference to distinguish between a true description and a fixation of reference. Consider the cats in the example from Putnam mentioned above. The borders of the kind *cat*- considered as a thing and not an object- were determined by descriptions such as 'cats are animals'; such descriptions can be false and still fix the reference of the kind *cat*. That is because when the word 'cat' is introduced, it carves out the thing *cat* and distinguishes it from anything else in the universe that contains it. The cat is considered, from a formal point of view, independently of the truth of the descriptions that determined its borders; a thing is therefore determined in order to be what it is and de-determined to be considered formally within its containing universe. There is a formal reality independent of the objects that bring being to a thing, and this formal reality is not an in-itself, but a difference between the internal and the external.<sup>13</sup>

Reference-fixing in a sense replicates the *form* of the gesture of pointing at an internal and external border. It is akin to Spencer-Brown's first axiom: *make a distinction*. The specific way it is drawn is in a sense forgotten, and the formal reality of the entity is then recognized through the anaphoric chain that links this first identification with every other identification. Robert Brandom works through the idea of a causal determination of reference through *anaphoric chains*. Anaphora amounts to the tracking of the reference of non-repeatable contents,

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<sup>12</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p 36

<sup>13</sup> *Indexicalism*, p.64



such as indicatives, pronouns, etc... to an originary occasion- the *anaphoric initiator*. For instance, in the following example, given in *Making it explicit*, the correct understanding of the sentence depends on the correct individuation of the content of the pronoun.

Carlyle wrote his brilliant satire of Hegel, *Sartor Resartus*, in part to show that he was an important thinker.<sup>14</sup>

It could, according to different anaphoric commitments mean:

“Carlyle wrote... to show that Carlyle was an important thinker”

Or:

“Carlyle wrote... to show that Hegel was an important thinker”.

According to Brandom:

This asymmetric structure of recurrence (inheritance by one token of the substitution-inferential potential of another) is *anaphora*. For one tokening to be anaphorically dependent on another is for it to inherit from that antecedent the substitution-inferential commitments that determine the significance of its occurrence.<sup>15</sup>

Brandom proposes then that *modal rigidity*, such as proposed in Bensusan’s paragraph is an anaphoric phenomenon.

Instead of repeating the proper name, the modal claim above can be expressed by saying Archie is the most spoiled cat in the room, but *he* (or *that cat*) might not have been the most spoiled cat in the room.

(...) the anaphoric chain to which it (the pronoun) belongs is then available to

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<sup>14</sup> Brandom, R. *Making it explicit. Reasoning, representing and discursive commitment*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994. p. 455

<sup>15</sup> Brandom, R. *Making it explicit*, idem. The vocabulary used in the passage of course presupposes Brandom’s conception of conceptual content as inferentially articulated. I do commit to this conception, but for this paper this would simply kill the discussion at the start, since if conceptual contents are inferentially articulated, indexicals can only play a conceptual role if they are enmeshed in substantive-lead inferential articulation. Brandom, in *Between Saying and Doing* proposes that anaphora is actually necessary for the use of indexicals. Anaphora is thus more pragmatically fundamental than indexicality. This does not mean that indexicals are semantically reducible to non-indexical vocabulary, though. Only that 1- they don’t form an autonomous discursive practice, that is, a language game one can play without playing any other and 2- what you have to do to be using indexical vocabulary can be expressed by use of non-indexical vocabulary. Which means, there is a non-indexical pragmatic metavocabulary for the use of indexicals. I refrain from using this argument because it would entail presupposing a different conception of concept use wherein the limits of indexicalism can be shown without presupposing an external conception of concept-use.

specify that same cat in other possible situations.<sup>16</sup>

A different sense of *implicit indexicality* is indicated in the following paragraph by Bensusan:

Several similar expressions are less than explicitly indexical because a tacit point of view in the middle of things is assumed— a point of reference or a fixed standard for measurement is implicitly established. Arguably, other deictic operations could be hidden by a shared tacit point of view. Prototypical substantives such as ‘mountain’, ‘book’, ‘sky’ and ‘liquid’ could be regarded as hardly indexical, but this is because a point of view is always tacitly assumed; a mountain can be a shelter, a book can be a source of food, the sky could include the Earth viewed from Mars, and a drop of liquid can be a solid surface for some micro-organisms.<sup>17</sup>

Here, as in our option **d**, the indexical character is related to the function assigned to an object from the point of view of a specific intentionality, the composition of which is determined in relation to its surroundings, scale, necessities, etc. This can, though, be connected to **b** in the sense of specifying how an initial description can be provided, which then fixes reference anaphorically.

This is also related to measure, in the sense that these substantive contents presuppose according to Bensusan a relationship to a standing location of an interiority with a specific constitution, that in turn presupposes a certain scale of measures in the relationships to the outside. Measure then is also *implicitly indexical*.

Measurement appears as a deictic exercise, and furthermore, the world being measured appears as implicitly *de re*. Episodes of measurement are prototypical cases in which a standing location is *sine qua non*. The system of measurement, the equipment used, and the metric geometry make sure that nothing can be measured without the contribution of the (measuring) spontaneity. A four-yard wall has four yards only if measured in yards and depending on the material used to measure— one could use a rubber ruler as easily as a metal stick.<sup>18</sup>

Measuring then depends on a degree of constancy achieved through the comparison between elements of reality the scale of which is invariant upon extended observation- if we also understand observation as *sensing* through a

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<sup>16</sup> Brandom, MIE, p. 468

<sup>17</sup> Indexicalism, p. 38

<sup>18</sup> Indexicalism, p. 45

specific set of inputs. But then conflicts in measuring appear.

Barad endorses what she claims to be Bohr's view: that indetermination is a consequence of measurement, that there is a *diaphonía* in the measurement procedures and that this divergence cannot be dissolved by appeal to any matter of fact— or at least to any matter of fact independent of the experimental apparatus.<sup>19</sup>

Here something interesting happens. Scale-sensitivity appear as locality dependent upon the nature of the sensory inputs and measuring procedures, yielding a specific sensitivity in the cognizing system that makes present for the system a “world”. Indexicalism shows to have its own way of building scale-differences out of the interrelationship of one-and-other with their sensitivity to each other's outside. Yet here we have already the building blocks of an escape of indexicalism's strictures.

#### THE FRAMEWORK PROBLEM

Once in a while, someone asks me rather petulantly "Can't you see what's before you?" Well, yes and no. I see people, chairs, papers, and books that are before me, and also colors, shapes, and patterns that are before me. But do I see the molecules, electrons, and infrared light that are also before me? And do I see this state, or the United States, or the universe? I see only parts of the latter comprehensive entities, indeed, but then I also see only parts of the people, chairs, etc. And if I see a book, and it is a mess of molecules, then do I not see a mess of molecules? But, on the other hand, can I see a mess of molecules without seeing any of them? If I cannot be said to see a mess of molecules because "mess of molecules" is a sophisticated way of describing what I see, not arrived at by any simple look, then how could I be said to see a magnet or a poisonous mushroom?<sup>20</sup>

In this paragraph, Nelson Goodman refers to an indelible dependency between what is *seen* in our so-called immediate surroundings and the terms under which these contents are *understood*. For Goodman, our experience is not necessarily *theory-laden*, but at least *conceptually laden*, and the concepts we take to be organizing the field of experience have an unavoidable function in determining the types and natures of our *worlds*. Goodman uses worlds in the plural, as, for him, we live in several worlds at once, depending on the cluster of *seeings-as* that are being generated by the predicates we are using at the moment.

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<sup>19</sup> Indexicalism, idem

<sup>20</sup> Goodman, N. *Ways of worldmaking*, Hackett Publishing, 1978. p. 71

Now one can ostensively define a proper name, the name of a colour, the name of a material, a numeral, the name of a point of the compass and so on. The definition of the number two, "That is called 'two' "—pointing to two nuts—is perfectly exact.—But how can two be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn't know what one wants to call "two"; he will suppose that "two" is the name given to this group of nuts!—He may suppose this; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake; when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might understand it as a numeral (...) <sup>21</sup>

For Wittgenstein, the reference of “this” depends on the language game played. There is always an operative restriction regarding what appearing property or object is being pointed to. While Wittgenstein’s example is restricted to *ostension*, therefore *demonstratives*, and not *indexicals*, Bensusan’s broad way of understanding indexicality defines it as being the result of a *standing position*. Reality should be built out of deictic operations, that are forged in the relationship between an interiority and its outside. This seems to be broad enough to include traditional indexicals, but also demonstratives, and reaches out to include substantives as *implicitly indexical*. We have been parsing out this affirmation in terms of an *anaphoric chain initiated by an original act of naming*- and this origin can be understood as encapsulating the empirical properties (color, size, texture) that generate the reference. As we have been arguing the causal theory functions as a kind of *bypassing* of the problems of localization- which is a peculiar strategy. Because Bensusan wants to have no truck with substantive language that leads to substantivist metaphysics, names *encapsulate* all possible clusters of properties a thing might have without referring to them or having them as *conditions* of their use. It is the sheer baptism that is responsible for the reference-fixing, and that comes about through an act of ostension- the nature to which is left underdetermined.

But if we believe Wittgenstein this goes to show that non-indexicality is always implicit in the act of pointing to local appearances, if we don’t necessarily think of this non-indexicality as full-fledged (in other words, as explicit). A child may learn the language by having objects pointed and their names uttered, while not possessing the relevant concepts to be able to ask “which part? Which property? Which object?” to every act of pointing. But the idea here is that context and

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<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th revised edition, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009., § 29.

repetition will sort which *element* is being pointed at each occasion. The context and repetition will *prepare the spot* where the relevant predicate will be positioned. As Wittgenstein says, about someone to whom it is explained the moves of the “king” piece in chess: “We shall only say that it tells him the use, if the place is already prepared.”

Even if we concede that the identification and reference-fixing are not cognitive types of contact, in keeping with Wettstein’s motto “linguistic contact without cognitive contact” that Bensusan makes his own, the original anaphoric initiator, paradigmatically here a demonstrative, or an implicit ostension, comes about typically through *sortal restriction*— the determination of what *kind* of thing is being pointed at. Which points to the division of labor between sensible and conceptual contents that provides us with an entrance to the problem of *perception* as it is presented by Bensusan.

#### PERCEPTION AND THE GIVEN

Bensusan looks for an optimal relation between passivity and activity in the way perception operates. If it is too passive, it ends up falling onto the classical empiricist image, and perception, thus is an *impingement*— we are *open* to the outside so as to not have any kind of externality left. The alternative would be to understand perception as a proper *gate*, that does not impinge upon thought, but if taken to the extreme, would fall into a “frictionless spinning on the void”, as McDowell talks about it. The problem has the familiar delineations of what Sellarsians think of as the Myth of the Given.

The empiricist claim can be presented in its general form: experience itself must be capable of altering the course of (empirical) thought. Experience is interruption. This is where empiricism (classical or otherwise, as we will see) closely approaches the metaphysics of the others. Empiricism in general challenges, in the name of something exterior, the idea of a totality immune to any attrition. Experience is what makes thinking less than immune— and so long as experience is never redundant, no thought is such that it cannot be supplemented.

Because thought can be interrupted from the exterior by the senses, the idea of a Given is tempting. The claim that receptivity is hospitality has to be a form of non-mythical empiricism, the kind of alternative that Wilfrid Sellars sought. Sellars characterized the myth as taking the deliveries of the senses as ‘given’, as ready-made ideas provided to empirical thought; it is mythical to take the deliveries of the senses as full-fledged episodes of thought.<sup>10</sup> According to Sellars, the myth

consists in the conjunction of three mutually incompatible theses: 1) sensing red is enough to conclude that ‘*x* is red’; 2) sensing red requires no inference and no recourse to other capacities; and 3) to conclude that ‘*x* is *P*’ requires the exercise of a capacity which is alien to (pure) sensibility.<sup>22</sup>

For Sellars, accepting 1 entail rejecting 2 and 3, and configures a form of the Given. A piece of perceptual input carries by itself a thought content. The idea is important for Bensusan to keep the Other at bay, as it is part and parcel of Indexicalism also an optimal equilibrium between exteriority and the constitution of interiorities through the indication of exteriority- thus a form of openness to the other. This is parsed regarding perception as a desideratum for a form of *filtering* of the perceptual information that would make us *external, yet hospitable* to the Other.

This is not the place to flesh out the complex way Bensusan builds his conception of perception, but what we just proposed is sufficient to understand why our first candidate- *knowledge by acquaintance*- fails to be a form of implicit indexicality that would interest Bensusan. He wants to steer clear of the classical empiricist picture since in it contact is sufficient for *integration*- thus breaking the difference between one-and-other that is crucial for the metaphysics of others.

Thus, **b** and **d** are accepted as cases for Indexicality. **b**, because it bypasses the need of the extraction of intelligibility. **d**, because it expresses a form of constitution of each and every entity that is responsible for specific sensitivities that operate a hospitality. Which leaves us with **c**.

I take it that it is **c** that is responsible for the chasm between my position and Hilan’s. Interestingly, **c** is also a way to respond to the critique of the Given- but one in which non-indexical abilities come into play. This echoes Goodman’s framework problem in the sense that deixis depends here on non-deictic specifications.

This is an interesting account of *locality* that has a broadly defined *indexical* character. Since we live in several worlds determined by the mobilization of clusters of predicates and statements taken do be true in a framework that are not necessarily true in another, every access we have to *the world*, understood as “the stuff out there” is mediated by a *standing location*, in the logical sense. So far so

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<sup>22</sup> Indexicalism, p.141

good. But the paragraph exhibits a kind of *tension* between what Bensusan understands as a *de re* and a *de dicto* mode of address that will determine Bensusan's options in his book. Localization in the sense of **c** restricts ostension to the aspects already filtered by the framework.

Here we find a *differend*. Either:

1. Indexicality *situates while de-localizing* (in the sense of presupposing the universal reach of the anaphoric chain).
2. Substantive language (with sortal restrictive functions) *localizes while de-situating* (in the sense that universality lies here in the transformative capacity sheltered in the seeings-as that are part of framework construction.)

Bensusan's framework in our view can be understood as connecting a localized *metaphysical* point of view to a picture of language use that gets *causally* determined by this metaphysical desideratum of locality. Thus, the idea that everything is *implicitly indexical* might be cashed out in terms of everything being *caused* indexically by a standing position. From that point of view substantive non-situated language seems to be an outgrowth of the indexical strictures.

The opposite framework, that insists on the relativity of frameworks captured in linguistic *worlds* and substantive, sortal, locutions does not claim that *causally* these are first in the order of explanation. It can concede that some form of perceptual contact with one's surroundings is causally first, while considering substantive vocabulary as necessary for retroactively *expressing* these localizations. There is an important overlap between the positions in terms of the *causal space* wherein both are originated, but 2, the *localizing but non-indexical* vocabulary is necessary for describing the standing position wherein one gain access to the world.

While Bensusan's position makes use of *bypassing* strategies of reference-fixing with no appeal to descriptive contents, and to the physical-intentional constitution of sensitivities to causally constrain the expressive means, the alternative strategy (let us call it the from now on the *inhumanist strategy*) deals in the constitution of conceptual frameworks as ways to make the world intelligible and produce *alien* effects. It upholds the expressive necessity of substantive language to make the work of localizing within the frameworks- which enables one to also change frameworks, attempting to achieve the controlled coming about of different agencies constrained by different sets of framework-relative

commitments.

## GEIST UND GEISTER

An interesting juncture where to examine the face-off between these two forms of indexicality/locality is the thought experiment of the Scissiparity of Geist, that Bensusan proposes in *Geist and Ge-stell*, which is a critique of Inhumanism as presented in Reza Negarestani's *Intelligence and Spirit*<sup>23</sup>. The paper starts by characterizing the project of Metaphysics, or Nihilism in a way that is similar to what was presented in “Cosmopolitical Parties”:

The inhumanist is ready to depart from human nature driven by the force that makes the intelligibility of things gradually more transparent. The path towards artificialization is one where intelligence is extracted further and further to the point that nothing is fixed – if Geist builds itself a habitat, it does it through constantly refurbishing. Inhumanism is an episode in the adventure of nihilism because it proposes that we sacrifice our own nature in the altar of metaphysics – just like Ge-Stell would not stop short of ordering human features (or human lives) into standing reserve.<sup>24</sup>

*Geist* for Bensusan is an agent of the *Ge-Stell*, the composition of what appears in terms of a standing reserve for a control to be seized. Here the metaphor of the *extraction of intelligibility* shows its full spectrum, as an extractivist endeavor that betrays proximity and exteriority by positioning the other as a reserve of intelligibility.

While the image is compelling, it is, from my point of view, an illegitimate extension of an analogy. For one, to *extract intelligibility* does not result in the exhaustion of the resources being “mined”. Intelligibility is lent by the other as a set of constraints through which it reveals its relevant aspects. Finding such intelligibility is more akin with finding the right *resolution* for an image to be looked at- finding a *scale* of analysis that makes phenomena appear. The finding of a right resolution that yields the secret of a determined formation, a social or a phenomenal one, does not exhaust it in the sense of exhausting resources, but neither in the sense of finding the unique conceptualization in terms of which one can proceed to *subsume the non-identical* under an identifying concept (as

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<sup>23</sup> Negarestani, R. *Intelligence and Spirit*. London: Urbanomic, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Bensusan, H. *Geist and Ge-stell*. p. 100



Adornian and Deleuzian tropes would have it). The workings of the concept are a patient *probing* into the phenomena trying to find the *logics* that might help unlock some of the parameters by which it unfolds.

Bensuan then proposes an interesting thought experiment. It seeks to ask the question of an *intelligence after nihilism*- after the metaphysically “convergent” project of extraction of intelligibility. If Geist is convergent in the sense that, in its trajectory it mines the intelligibility of all there is including its own, it is also singular. There is only one Geist. Yet, according to Bensusan, the scissiparity is thinkable, which would show the inadequacy of the inhumanist point of view.

Geist is a recognition machine that works solely for itself. Imagine Geist in scissiparity. There is now Geist-A and Geist-B. To be sure, they don't see each other – they don't recognize each other as Geist. One is not intelligible for the other. If there is no other intelligence in the universe but Geist-A and Geist-B, we would have two incommensurable intelligences each one incapable of spotting any other intelligence in the world. But there is no viewpoint that can appreciate that as each Geist can view no more than its scope and recognize no more than its own intelligibility.<sup>25</sup>

He proposes the following narrative as a way that the scissiparity could come about. A machine is built by the inhabitants from *Geist A* that practices A-mathematics. This machine goes uninspected. It trains a different machine which is here the proto-*Geist B* to do mathematics.

These pupil-devices are closely supervised by the original machine-which-lost-supervision-from-Geist-A and eventually become part of a community with mutual supervision – just like the one associated to Geist-A but disjoint from it. No mathematics-A is being done by this new community, that we can call the community of the embryonic Geist-B. But to be sure, there would hardly be a surprise if a human (from Geist-A) manages to inspect the community of embryonic Geist-B only to spot them expanding  $\pi$  as expected. John McDowell, in his “Wittgenstein on following a rule”, suggests an explanation for this: these devices could be doing mathematics-A even if they have no means to find this out. There could be a reality to rule-following, and one that could escape Geist-A's ability to grasp it. Notice that the idea here is simply that there could be a reality to A-rule-following that escapes Geist-A.<sup>26</sup>

We seem to be encountering here a version of the famous Quine-Davidson

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<sup>25</sup> Bensusan, *Geist*, p. 107

<sup>26</sup> Bensusan, *Geist*, p. 109

debate about conceptual schemes. But the point of contention here are not schemes, which would entail a bunch of issues that are *prima facie* unrelated to the point at hand, such as the problem of the scheme-content dualism, etc... Although, the thought of two *Geister* would seem to entail also a scissiparity of conceptual schemes to go with the differing sets of rules. But lets not deal with this here.

A lot hinges on the proper interpretation of the meaning of “There could be a reality to rule-following, and one that could escape Geist-A ability to grasp it.” If this is a version of the Quine-Davidson debate, it would mean:

- a) There’s rule-following that is unidentified by an external observer.

I may find someone playing a game I don’t know about. It seems random from the outside- like baseball for non-North Americans- but once the rules are explained I can come to identify them in the game. But this does not seem to be what is implied. The non-identification have to be much *stronger* than that. It seems to hinge upon a form of rule-untranslatability. I don’t know the rules of *Geist B* and there’s no way for it to be explained to me.

It could also mean:

- b) There’s rule-following that is unidentified by the ones following the rule

Something like Brandom’s *implicit norms* might be a candidate for this. We might do something without being able to identify explicitly the rules we are following. But then we need a way to disambiguate between sheer regularities and implicit norms. Self-correction might be a paradigmatic procedure. If I act in a certain way that hurts the achievement expectations of the activity I am carrying on, I correct myself, which indicates a distinction between correct and incorrect- the distinctive mark of a rule.

But the way Bensusan puts it connects something from understanding a) to something from understanding b). It is neither. The key seems to be in the sentence: “Notice that the idea here is simply that there could be a reality to A-rule-following that escapes Geist-A.”

So, there’s a lack of immediate contact between *Geist A* and *Geist B*, and *Geist B* might as well follow type A-rules, as the paragraph expresses. It is not then unrecognizability of B-rules from the point of view of A, neither unrecognizability of A-rules from the point of view of A *while following them*. It is unrecognition of A-rules followed by B uninspected by A. What work is this argument doing?

Bensusan thinks it vindicates a form of externalism about rules. A rule can be followed even though its individuation is not predicated on assent from the one following it. There is a matter of fact of there being A-rules beyond the assent given to it by *Geist A*. It is a formally similar argument to the one for reference fixing. Once rules-borders are fixed, they become independent of recognition to be understood as rules. This seems to be the function in the argument of the physical lack of contact of A with the A-rule-following B community. The fact that they follow A-rules is not dependent on A recognizing them, because A is not inspecting them. Bensusan attributes to the inhumanist an *intenalism* about rules, in the sense that it is the *sharing* of commands that make them commands. In other words, rules or commands are exhausted by their first-person phenomenology.

But I offer a different criterion. Rules are exhausted by their being followed, but not necessarily by me. So the example is unproblematic. Even if B follows A-type rules independently of A, it follows rules as long as they are *internally* recognized by B (and not A) in a way as to yield a difference between correct and incorrect applications.

That means that we can't find something in the world- and it is a rule-type object. We only find patterns that are candidates to rules. The same can be applied to the relationship between sensible contents and the space of reasons. It is not as if a piece of information can't enter a justificatory chain because it is not *previously a reason*. It becomes a reason once it enters the justificatory chain. The point is simply that a given sensible content by itself with no discursive structure can't justify anything. Analogously, a pattern by itself is no rule. But it *is thinkable* that wildly distinct kinds of patterning come to specify different sets of rules. And wildly segregated communities may come to follow similar (A-type) rules. Again, the criterion here is not *causal contact*, but framework-dependent identification. Under what description is B doing the same as A?

In that sense there is a specific *divergent* reason that is not only compatible but is part and parcel of Inhumanism. A divergent reason guided by the devising and recognizing of *candidates* to norms. In a previous essay about Henry Flynt<sup>27</sup> we

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27 Caron, J.-P. "On constitutive dissociations as a means of World-Unmaking: Generative Aesthetics redefined" In: e-flux, #115, February 2021. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/374421/on-constitutive-dissociations-as-a-means-of-world-unmaking-henry-flynt-and-generative-aesthetics-redefined/>

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proposed with him the hypothesis of an *epistemology laboratory* as a way to tinker with the coordinates of experience. The difference is that for the inhumanist the upholding of different localities enable the construction of a trajectory of transformations of these different seeings-as through abductive operations. If a reason is not something simply *recognized* as one, but something *made into one* once it is turned from a natural occurrence to a normatively defined item, intelligibilities are not then *extracted from* phenomena as given by them but created through the making of frameworks wherein the relevant piece of information exhibits saliences that enable their conceptual entwinement with other pieces of information.

This is compatible with Bensusan's theory of perception, but not with Bensusan's externalism about rules. By eliding the distinction between regularities and rules the indexicalist is not *making plausible* the thought of different, external kinds of agencies, she loses the means by which any agency can be discerned. Either we get reduced to a set of patterns, or patterns are promoted into full-blown rule-following. The scissiparity of Geist loses much of its bite in that way.

## CONCLUSION

Let us get back to the "Cosmopolitical Parties" framework. We have an important degree of overlap with what Bensuan. Yes, indexicality is semantically irreducible- yet its pragmatics is definable by non-indexical vocabulary. Yes, indexicals might have a priority in the order of learning a language, and of perceptual/experiential contact; although this does not entail that everything one does with language is hostage to indexicality. And in turn this pave the way, through the imaginative variation of the different seeings-as, to different kinds of experience in terms quite different to those that appear immediately in one's surroundings. Which means in turn that one is not necessarily hostage to the immediately external- even if that immediate externality is, according to Bensusan, negotiated with in terms of a hospitality of perception.

But I have been focusing on the "Nihilism" axis of Bensusan's diagram. I want to add briefly some remarks on the "Capital" axis. I would like here to evoke an

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extract from J.A. Giannotti's *Trabalho e Reflexão* that I have been citing recently<sup>28</sup>.

“(...) the object is metamorphosed, it is worked on so that the weight property of the object, among others, can be exercised in the right conditions. Here to determine is to negate while configuring. The effectiveness of the game, however, comes to effectuate this negation (...) As natural objects, the soccer ball and the tennis ball are like any two bodies reacting to the impact of forces of nature. But a soccer ball is not the same thing as a tennis ball (...) That is why the effective game exercises the contrariety of weight in a context in which it has already been circumscribed and measured by labor. (...) The operational scheme, constituted by the ball, by its trajectory, by the agents as pitcher and catcher, establishes a very elementary social objectivity (...)”

We believe that the operational scheme exemplifies, in a very crude way, the type of object whose plot Marx calls "contemporaneous history", this structure of social relations of production, constantly nourished by the repeated actions of men and which are objectified in figures such as commodities, capital and so on.”<sup>29</sup>

Here we have an account that might satisfy perfectly indexical strictures-locality, specificity of the ball's weight, determined form of the game being played, etc- while already pointing towards the transcendence of locality. Giannotti here proposes an account of what he calls an *operational scheme* that constitutes a social diagram of action, from which emerges different kinds of abstraction. The ball is effectively measured not by any conscious decision to measure it, but by serving the game itself, for which a certain degree of weight and resistance to the air is of the essence. Giannotti deems this kind of *wiring diagram* both a way agents get enmeshed in social practices, as a form of what Marx called “contemporaneous history” and a way abstractions both emerge and get “extracted”.

This is somewhat similar to Alfred Sohn-Rethel's account in *Intellectual and Manual Labour*<sup>30</sup> of the emergence of cognitive abstraction in social activity, in the sense of the *activities* of people- specially engaged in the exchange of commodities being responsible for the generation of abstractions. The point being abstractions emerge in reality- both as a retroactively posed way to explain the connection

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<sup>28</sup> For instance in the collective work “Atlas of experimental politics” by the Subset of experimental practice. Section XIII- “Real Abstraction and the Given” (Forthcoming in *Šum* journal). A video presentation of this is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2cdcETip5g>

<sup>29</sup> Giannotti, J. A. *Trabalho e Reflexão. Ensaio para uma dialética da sociabilidade*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Sohn-Rethel, A. *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. Macmillan Press, 1978.

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between one-and-other as in Giannotti's example- but one that seems to obtain objectively once we recognize that the *standing location* and the properties of the elements of the diagram being connected are what connects the agents one to another- and in the sense of Marxian value-form, which can be read off the activities of commodity exchange that individuates an equivalence that is made manifest in the form of money.

This makes the disconnection between the Capital and the Nihilism axis that is characteristic of "Post-Nihilist Marxism" somewhat a difficult recipe, in the sense of upholding the deterritorialization operated by Capital while restraining the extraction of intelligibilities. The emergence of value form *is* both what makes intelligible the capitalist social formation *and* what makes it actual. This is not to say that the evolution of knowledge practices necessarily needs to be subsumed under Capital, only that it seems historically dubious to sustain a complete disconnection between the forms of abstraction that emerges in capitalism and the conceptual abstractions that shape the history of thought. Equally dubious is to impinge the conceptual resources we can mobilize as being subsumed to capitalist forms as if an "impure" origin forever taints what can be done with them. The way out is a dialectics between social practice and emerging conceptual (or real) abstractions that may in fact constitute the *production* of different, *divergent*, forms of intelligibility as Bensusan wants it. The social dialectics is the genus. Capitalism the species. As proposed in a previous work:

(...) we want our theoretical space to be infinitely richer than our social world, so that capitalist social formations might appear within it as particular solutions within the broader space of other possible solutions to general problems of social coordination, allocation of resources and free association.<sup>31</sup>

Abstraction then is not something one can opt out of. While we do need to have a concern with ethical limits in our dealings with the Other, those will be also recognized and derived through the use of full-fledged resources of our current language and its future elaborations.

jpcaron@gmail.com

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31 STP. "Contribution to the Critique of Political Organization: Outline of An Ongoing Research Project", Crisis and Critique, 2020. <https://crisiscritique.org/uploads/24-11-2020/gabriel-tupinambaet-al.pdf>

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