

Article

In What Person to Say the Disaster? From R. Kusch towards An-Other *Cogitamus*

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Abstract: “Latin America”, for the ecopolitical approach, could be appropriate as the proper name of the ecological disaster, even as its first person: the environmental catastrophe, by means of “Latin America”, would say “I”. Genealogically, and as part of the so-called “Third World”, it would delimit the frontiers where the disastrous takes place “naturally”. But “Latin America”, from the philosophical perspective, has also been the *locus* par excellence to think about the vegetal and the indigenous. This article, driven by the current relevance of these two concepts, rereads the work of Rodolfo Kusch, one of the key figures of the so-called *Pensamiento latinoamericano*, and unveils not only one of the most original reflections on “plant metaphysics” and the “indigenous thought” but also the contours of a new or alternative philosophical subject: a thinking “we”. Drawing on Kusch’s indications, this text traces “an-other us” on the discursive level and develops the fundamental Kuschian intuition according to which such “we” has a synesthetic nature. From there, this article points to the conceptual reconfigurations of the vegetal and the indigenous by M. Marder and E. Viveiros de Castro to indicate in them the need to experiment, before and in the face of disaster, an-other “us” by/in thinking.

Keywords: Latin American thought; Rodolfo Kusch; synesthesia; philosophy of the we



Citation: Peña, H.A. In What Person to Say the Disaster? From R. Kusch towards An-Other *Cogitamus*. *Philosophies* **2022**, *7*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies7010013>

Academic Editor: Michael Marder

Received: 26 November 2021

Accepted: 21 January 2022

Published: 27 January 2022

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1. Disaster in “I”, Thinking in “We”

The ecological disaster would have had a homeland: the “Third World”. By unraveling the relationships between the famines suffered by “tropical humanity” and the meteorological phenomenon of El Niño during the late XIX century and discovering there the ecopolitical materials for the invention of the “Third World”, Mike Davis [1] gives valuable clues not only about what “Third World” and “disaster” may mean but also about what the so-called Third World can or has to say about the disaster. Even if it was at the price of multiplying or degrading itself as “Third”, the world had to assign borders to the catastrophe to continue producing it, feeding on it. Closer to the geographical and thematic scale of this article, the expert in political ecology Héctor Alimonda highlights what would be if not the foundation then surely one of the main contributions of a “Latin American reflection” (“*reflexión latinoamericana*”) to political ecology: “Indeed, the territory that came to be known as ‘America’ was the scene of what may have been the greatest succession of environmental catastrophes in human history: invasion of humans, animals, plant species, diseases that devastated and subjected their native populations” [2]. Since what his text is about is “an approach to Latin American political ecology” (“*una aproximación a la ecología política latinoamericana*”), this basic awareness of having been or not ceasing to be “the scene” of the “greatest” “environmental catastrophes” could be understood as a place of exception, as an absolutely unique *locus enuntiationis* for thinking, speaking, and even naming, functioning almost as its proper name: the “disaster” or the “environmental” “catastrophe”.

Instead of developing what would have been no doubt fruitful consequences for political ecology of lending the name of America or Latin America to catastrophe so that disaster say “I”, in this short text, I prefer to take a different direction, the opposite perhaps:

that of tracking the path towards a particular “we”. It will be necessary to move towards the “we” that Latin America, as philosophy or thought, has postulated as an irreducible subject: to think in and from Latin America, in a properly Latin American way, would be equivalent to giving the floor to a philosophy that begins by saying “us”. To avoid misunderstandings, I now assume the responsibility of sticking to a label. “Thought”, “philosophy”, “Latin America”, or “Latin American” and any of their compounds condense problems that have only expanded and become more complex thanks to the diversity and quality of the studies that have been dedicated to them. Clarifying, then, that I will use the consecrated label of “Latin American thought” (“*Pensamiento latinoamericano*”) in this article does not mean that I consider these problems as solved nor that I wish to reactivate the questions about the existence or the conditions of possibility of a thinking proper to Latin America, as if so many criticisms, turns, and studies on the matter had not taken place. As a particular project and as a recognizable effort, *Pensamiento latinoamericano* has an identifiable place in the history of ideas. It is to this place—project and effort—that I would like to direct attention. I do so with a frankly limited and, if you like, preliminary purpose: before extracting or reviving some of its theses to test their relevance in relation to current ecological challenges—before, to put it in one word, examining the current value of its *statements*—, I will concentrate on what Latin American thought would now allow us to recognize as an operation on the structure of the philosophical, ecological, or eco-philosophical *enunciation* [3]. More precisely, and in the form of a hypothesis, we could say that, faced with the catastrophe of the ecological itself—the collapse or disappearance of the pillars and contours of the *oikos*—, and face-to-face with the synthetic conception of a *cogito* (which is also, according to Enrique Dussel’s brilliant analysis, and perhaps above all an *ego conquero*), *Pensamiento latinoamericano* would have deployed the synesthetic experience of a thinking “us”. Now, even if the capital letters already serve as an allocation and offer, as it were, the coordinates of a philosophical “current”, a “period”, or a “movement” or a “field”, the limits of this article impose a more specific refocusing of the vast generality, which “*pensamiento latinoamericano*” designates. For this reason, I will take up another proper name much less problematic in its extension and much more than synecdochical as a point of reference.

2. Smelling “We”

The Argentine philosopher and anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch is in many ways not just any example within Latin American Thought and its intuitions about the potential of the vegetal, and especially of the “indigenous”, to scrutinize and define what philosophical thought must think inasmuch as it is the thought of Latin America. The “catastrophe”, the “indigenous” (“*lo indio*”), and the “vegetal” (“*lo vegetal*”) comprise in his work a triptych that, before and beyond the actuality of these themes or figures regarding our environmental crisis, outlines in the first place the contours of another “us”, an “us” as “Other”. Kusch is certainly paradigmatic in associating the existence (with everything that Heidegger still makes us and made Kusch understand in this word) of the Latin American “we” with “demonism”, with “vegetal metaphysics” (“*metafisica vegetal*”), and with “*el indio*” in stating that a thinking Latin American “us” lives and survives thanks to the survival of the vegetal and the indigenous [4]. However, in my opinion, Kusch is also exemplary in the way in which philosophical thought confronts a particular “object”, which here, is the “we” that is the Latin American. It is an object that is actually a subject, and that appears as a philosophical subject when the sense of smelling rather than thinking, seeing, or speaking is involved. The subject of Latin American thinking, this “we”, smells: it is acquainted with a particular smell and should not be afraid to give it off.

In *La seducción de la barbarie* (*The Seduction of Barbarism*), his first book, Kusch invited us to focus our gazes on the “obverse” [4], p. 19, the exterior, or the buried, “what is below the city” [4], p. 20 (“*reverso . . . “por debajo de la ciudad”*”). In a nutshell, this work deduces the Latin American from a theory of landscape. Here, the vegetal and the indigenous unfold in Latin America thanks to a vision effect. The singular and truly core concept of

“landscape” (“paisaje”) allows us to see a primal miscegenation, a *mestizaje* prior to any mixture between peoples, “races”, or cultures, which would make the Americas’ aboriginal an ab-original mestizo, a definition, by the way, of *mestizaje* that is worth taking into account when accusing the (mestizo) intellectual of the “use” of the “indigenous theme”. Kusch brings philosophy to the landscape to see the essential miscegenation of America in the form of a “split” (“escisión”). “Landscape”, the vanishing point of the “theoretical lines of the American”, is the concept that allows Kusch to see it: “at all times the American is a victim of the vegetal, on the one hand, and of the idea, on the other, and he does not reconcile this split except by becoming ambivalent or mentally mestizo” [4], p. 34.

Nine years later, in his *América profunda*, the topic of the split is manifest as “America’s main problem”, as a problem of “mental integrity” [5]. The path is chosen from the start, and it will consist of a “solution”: “take back the ancient world to gain health”. Such returning solution will rest on two “poles”: “one is what I call to be (“ser”), or to be someone (“ser alguien”), which I discover in the bourgeois activity of 16th century Europe and the other, being (“estar”), or being here (“estar aquí”), which I consider as a profound modality of pre-Columbian culture (. . .)” [5], p. 4. These poles, perhaps one of Kusch’s most recognizable contributions to the conception of a Latin American singularity and one of the most productive conceptual uses of “ser” (“to be”) and “estar” (“being”),¹ have differential significations in Spanish that soon become “roots”, “deep” roots (“raíces profundas”), so deep as to define the depth connoted in the title of the book. They would be being (*estarían siéndolo*, one should say): they would be being, those “deep roots of our mestizo mind” [5], p. 5, since America’s “Discovery”. “Discovery”, [5], pp. 5–6 at this point, must be read as synonymous with the unleashing of one of the most cherished notions for Kusch. “Discovery” (“Descubrimiento”) strictly means the beginning of a process of “phagocytose” or “phagocytation” (“fagocitación”) [5], p. 6, which “results in wisdom”, in the “knowledge of life” (“saber de vida”) [5], p. 6 that is singularly American. I have jumped to the conclusions of this book about one of its core concepts in order to confirming that phagocytose is well worth considering in a little more detail. After all, this is precisely the process that releases another sense of “us” that philosophy should begin by smelling. This rare kind of dialectic, cata- or infra-dialectic (counter-dialectic, *stricto sensu*: directed downwards), called “fagocitación”, emerges defined for the first time as the “absorption of the neat things of the West by the things of America” (“pulcras cosas de Occidente por las cosas de América”) [5], p. 19. The latter things must be described, straightaway, for Kusch, as “smelly” (“hedientas”) [5], p. 19. Smelling what Kusch insistently calls the “stench of America” (“hedor de América”) is “taking for granted”, counting on the very effect of “phagocytose”. If it is true that, as Kusch asserts from the very beginning, “the American, taken from its roots, stinks” (“lo americano, tomado desde sus raíces, hiede”) [5], p. 6, its “wisdom” will no longer be seen, nor divided, nor buried but will have to be smelled to be integrated in a sense of origin and causality, no longer “mechanical” but of a “causality by germination” [5], p. 98. Then, “phagocytose” arises as a “reverse movement” of that of “acculturation”, which would only be visible at the “material level” in which the unidirectionality of everything that has passed “from Europe to America” is perceived [5], p. 179; “phagocytization”, in this sense, as “absorption of the white by the indigenous”, is the distinctively Latin American phenomenon that the gaze, especially the “progressive” (“progresista”) one, could never see [5], pp. 179–180.

Kusch does not affirm that the vegetal and the indigenous stink. The “transvaluing” impulse—let us call it that—, which leads the Argentine to vilify the “clean” and to the revalorization of the “dirty” and “stinking”, cannot be hidden. What Kusch calls in the exordium “the deep positive meaning that this alleged stench has” [5], p. 6 has to do, of course, with the difficulties of following the reflections and refractions of investing, exploiting, and speculating with the values of certain “prejudices”, that are, for him, “typical of our minorities and our middle class” [5], p. 6. However, that “deep meaning” is not the one that these “prejudices” could have, nor even the one that could have the stench of the vegetal and the indigenous (which in fact Kusch tries with more or less success “to

decompose”) but, in the first place, that of the evanescent “we”, said here in the tenuous “our”. The “we” that smells, in the active and passive sense—in the “*ser*” and in the “*estar*” too—is the “stench of America”. This “us” is the “subject” of “Latin American thinking” (“*pensar latinoamericano*”), which in the following paragraph, Kusch declares to be “without (serious) antecedents” [5], p. 6.

We are in Cuzco, Kusch tells us. It places us there, in the “stench”: “The stench is a sign that we cannot understand (. . .). Furthermore, it is an emotion that we feel not only in Cuzco, but in front of America, to the point of that we dare to speak of a stench of America” [5], p. 12. “We are in Cuzco”, as Kusch tells us, is anything but a way of saying or some literary device; it is my way of organizing the reading of Kusch’s profuse and heteroclitic work around which I have defined its central problem, namely the existence, the “be-ing” (“*estar siendo*”), more precisely, of “our living” (“*nuestro vivir*”) as an object of a Latin American thinking to which only an “us” can respond and that only “we” can smell, articulate, and feel.

La seducción de la barbarie (*The Seduction of Barbarism*), his 1953 debut, was the reflection of the philosopher—in a café, holding a cup of coffee—who looked through the window and observed the outside of the Latin American city, the demonic, vegetal, and indigenous outside that the City could not repress: the Landscape (*El Paisaje*). The philosopher saw in the passers-by and in the other Latin American city dwellers and displaced people the impossibility of forgetting the depth of their bond, including the bond of the pedestrians and of the philosopher, with that “plant metaphysics”, or the “root” of their “miscegenation” (“*mestizaje*”). *América profunda* is presented as the first departure of that philosopher—who was also an anthropologist, let us not forget it—, after “numerous trips to the highlands” (we read on his first page). It is there, in Cuzco, where the “we” unfold and proliferate, abandoning the stylistic or royal form—*pluralis maiestatis*—of their previous manifestations, to become the substance, the very form of the problem: “The real problem of phagocytization is in ourselves, in the trap of our intimacy and inasmuch as we are the anonymous ones, or, better, the people of America” (“*El verdadero problema de la fagocitación está en nosotros mismos, en la trampa de nuestra intimidación y en tanto somos los anónimos, o, mejor, el pueblo de América*”) [5], p. 211. Since *El pensamiento indígena y popular en América* (*Indigenous and Popular Thinking in America*), 1970, until his last book, *Esbozo de una antropología filosófica americana* (1978) (*Sketch of an American Philosophical Anthropology*), passing, of course, through his *Geocultura del hombre americano* (*Geoculture of the American Man*), Kusch advances in the systematization of what in *América profunda* was still perceptible as “topic” and of what progressively becomes data or category. Thus, and it is not one example among others, this Sketch begins by defining in advance its main subject: the “People”. Let us say, therefore, that this visit to Cuzco, of which it is easy to map out the traces in all subsequent works to *América profunda*, was to have a fruitful ethnographic future. The field notes served to end up equating Latin America to the People. However, “we are in Cuzco”, as Kusch tells us, he wrote so as not to forget it: there you neither think nor say, nor do you stand in front of a people or the popular; in that departure from/of philosophy, in that journey of “philosophical thinking” to the outside that he previously saw or envisioned, “we” is said in the experience of smelling. This “we” does not bring together the identification of the philosopher—with his coffee, in the café—with the pedestrians, those other “mental mestizos”, nor does it in a rudimentary form express what will be more fully said later as “people”.

To make philosophy smell “us” and smell a “we” is equivalent to postulating that there is a sense of “us” that is not only understood, thought, defined, or simply said. There is something that philosophy must smell, changing its sense to achieve the cata- or meta-objective sensation of a particular “we”, of a transformed sense of “us” and (therefore) of its “object”. If, as in Kusch’s proposal, such a sense must not only include the vegetal and the indigenous—privileged figures of otherness then and today preeminent in environmental reflections and concerns—but also derive from them the cardinal philosophical horizon of that time and very likely of “our” today, then all this must be sought in another sense, in

the alteration of the meaning and the sensorium; to put it in a single word, synesthetically: altering the senses of the philosophical so that thinking stops seeing and saying (collecting, *legein*) and instead smell an-other us.

3. Saying by Feeling: The Synesthesia of “We”

Synesthesia is a remarkable and intriguing gap in the extensive catalogs of figures and tropes of Du Marsais and Fontanier. Between their monumental treatises and even through the close articulations between *Le traité des tropes* and *Les figures du discours*, synesthesia gives the impression of already being tacitly included in some category or perhaps not fitting in any. In her judicious analysis, Claire Suematsu [6] notes, “The problem arises from a different way if one chooses to consider synesthesia as a Trope. Thus, in this way, it would enter a field already crowded (*déjà encombré*) of stylistic Figures of diverse manifestations and with often imprecise limits” [6], p. 181. Suematsu refers here to the possibility of using Fontanier to locate synesthesia as a “trope by correspondence” (*Trope par correspondance*). On the other hand, later, she shows that the problem goes much further: “We saw that Souriau assigned it [the synesthesia] on the side of metaphor, and Segalen, on the contrary, on the side of metonymy” [6], p. 181. “Synesthesia is also based on conformity, an analogy, conscious or secret (. . .) qualified as symbolic by the representatives of the philosophy of the Correspondences, which justifies the choice of Souriau” [6], p. 182. Based on Segalen, Suematsu analyzes about the ascription to metonymy: “the metaphor rests on an open, recognized, and general analogy, at least within a particular culture. On the contrary, in synesthesia, the analogy is hidden, it is mysterious, and always individual” [6], p. 182. Between metaphor and metonymy, or better, between Metaphor and Metonymy, synesthesia would anticipate this difference by revealing—how to say it? —a background, a glow or a movement prior to even the establishment of the first analogy of the eventual original relationship between the same and the other. However, we will not indulge in this thorny and perhaps hypnotic undertaking—for this, we have Fontanier’s intellectual monument and his intuitions about catachresis—of finding a keystone of the rhetorical system. I am not looking for the first and the foremost of the figures or of the tropes. Suffice it, for the moment, to indicate this: linguistically, poetically, or rhetorically, there is no synesthesia either properly speaking or in a truly figurative sense. That original synesthetic background, once said, would already figure metaphorically or metonymically.

Paul Hadermann [7] frames the question in a dimension closer to the one that interests us now, in which synesthesia goes beyond the tropic or rhetorical level to define the synesthetic as the meaning of sense, meaning by sense, or meaningfulness in sense. After noting the “episodic” presence, if not of synesthesia, at least of the synesthetic in Antiquity (notably in Aristotle), and recalling that it was not until the end of the 19th century that the notion of synesthesia (“*synesthésie*”) came from the field of the medical-psychological sciences, which had already coined “*audition colorée*”, “*synopsie*”, “*pseudophotesthésie*”, or “*pseudochromesthésie*” to “express the confusion or association that certain subjects make between two sensations of a different nature”, Hadermann [7], p. 83 recalls the suggestive intuition of A. Leroi-Gourhan, according to which synesthesia would constitute a “first intellectual language of our ancestors” and a “step on the path of symbolization proper to the human brain” [7], p. 84. The language of the intellection of the sensation and the inseparable sensation of the intelligible of language, synesthesia would define a kind of human condition before meaning at the same time that it would reveal itself inextricably linked to the unintelligibility of the singularity of each language: “we laugh green in German and yellow in French, a wine can be flat (we translate “*un vin peut être plat*”), a garish or velvety color (we try to translate “*une couleur criarde ou veloutée*”)”, notes Hadermann [7], p. 84.

In this “definitional essay”, Hadermann traverses passages ranging from the striking case, already eloquently referenced by Locke, of Saunderson, the man born blind who identified red in the sound of the trumpet, to the typology of Otto Weininger, who in an association of misogynistic and aesthetic prejudice—susceptible, of course, to fer-

tile revaluations—, scorned synesthesia for representing a “blurred state of mind” (“*verschwommenen Seelenzustand*”) typical of women. His essay, however, keeps its focal point always in sight, even though it is a maelstrom: “I will not go so far as to say that in the beginning it was synesthesia” (“*Je n’irai pas jusqu’à dire qu’au commencement était la synesthésie*”) [7], p. 85. What I appreciate as more interesting is not this assertion with an air of apophasis but the vertiginous acceleration that leads him from positing synesthesia as a function, movement, or “chaos” originating language (“to name, that is: perceive or invent a sound where a thing is found”—“*Nommer, c’est percevoir ou inventer un son là où se trouve une chose*” [7], p. 86—and even to conceive it as a principle, not only descriptive, both of human intelligence and experience, to have to “limit himself” (“*Limitons donc la synesthésie à (. . .)*”), to delimiting synesthesia, up to the point of repeating or almost transcribing the medical definition that accompanied it since its birth. Hadermann then ends by presenting as preferable the phlegmatic solution of W. Bedell Stanford, who, “speaking of literature” [7], p. 86 at the level of expression, recommended not to speak of “synesthesia” but of “synesthetic metaphor”.

The essential point is found here, in this transit or transport (it is difficult not to be reminded of all the attention paid by Jacques Derrida to the movement itself, to the commotion of the Same in the metaphor) that leads synesthesia from being the only thing that is said—from being the very source and movement of saying—to never being able to be said as such. Perhaps, beyond the obvious anachronisms, Du Marsais and Fontanier located there precisely the reason for not including synesthesia in their analyses of tropic or figurative discourse: an uttered synesthesia would be nothing more than a kind of Metaphor or a derivation of the Metonymic. We cannot be sure, and my purpose is not to scrutinize the possibilities of integrating synesthesia into some special science of discursive forms. My interest is simpler and can be expressed in a few words: what if synesthesia could actually be said? What if there was a synesthesia properly said? What if “we” were the privileged way of expressing a feeling necessarily in a word? What if, finally, “we” were synesthesia par excellence: feeling us by saying “us”, feeling us in saying “we”, and feeling us and not being able to feel it or express it other than by saying “us” (or what is the same: look for other “us” or “we” (even “they”), etc., to tell us in the feelings or by the experience of other us, of an-other “we”)?

4. An-Other “Us”

A valuable approach not to the rhetorical but to the grammatical or linguistic aspect of what it could mean philosophically to say “we” can be found in an important work by Elise Marrou [8]. There, she develops a cardinal idea: the pronominal system is one of the main ways of seeing the sociological, the irreducibly plural, in the conjunctions between the individual and the collective. Therefore, Norbert Elias and his sociology would have opened the “balance” (“*équilibre*”) between identity in “I” and identity in “we” to deep “transformations” [8], p. 17. That “balance”, which would already be open to transformation, rests on a “disproportion” (“disproportion”) [8], p. 17 that for Marrou would have to be “shown”: “disproportion” between “the attention given to the ontological dimension of being ‘us’ and the place that has been granted to the linguistic and grammatical dimension of saying ‘we’” [8], p. 17. Émile Benveniste offers Marrou the opportunity to scrutinize not only a form but an instance of the “we” alien to mere “pluralization” and “performatively produced”.

Let’s read, then, not only Marrou but Benveniste [9] along with her. After all, it is there, in the work of this linguist so lavish in providing starting points, that we locate that of Marrou’s proposal. It is imperative to take seriously what Marrou herself calls a “change of level”, from “quantitative” to “qualitative”, in the Benvenistean approach to “us”. “The correlation of subjectivity [so called by Benveniste himself] that applies to the tandem ‘I’/‘you’ applies equally to the relationship here between ‘I’ and ‘not-me,’ the correlation of subjectivity becomes a correlation personality” [8], pp. 21–22]. The “I” in the “we” neither decenters nor opposes but rather “expands” (“*s’elargit*”, says Marrou), unites with, and joins

("joint", says Benveniste) a "not-I" and "not-me" ("non-je"), who for its part, presents in that particular instance of the discourse—I insist, with Marrou and Benveniste—must be able to join an-other "not-I" by saying "I" in "us". In other words: "every member of 'us' must be able to say 'we' [...] every participant ("participant" I want to highlight) of 'us' is a potential 'I' / 'me' ("je potentiel"). Any member ("tout membre") of the 'we' must be able to achieve the amplification of the person from which from whom the 'we' results" [8], p. 22. We know well that Benveniste defined the third person with unlimited consequences as a "verbal form" of "expression" of the "non-personne" [9], p. 228. Then, the problem of "subjectivity" and its "correlation" appears in Benveniste and Marrou in the following manner: between "I" and "you", a relationship of "asymmetry" and "reversibility" is established. The "subjective pole" is thus shown in its discursive "mobility": "you" is my "I", my name in your discourse, and vice versa. This essential "mobility" of discursive subjectivity reveals at every moment affirms every time the "transcendence and inequality" of that relationship [8], p. 22, [9], pp. 229–231: "'you' is a person but a person 'not-me/I'" [8], p. 22. It is necessary to proceed from now on having this point clear: in a "we", the transcendence and inequality inherent to discursive subjectivity are encompassed, disseminated, or "phagocytized" (to use a word that I have underlined above), or, as Benveniste would say, they are "dilated": "The reason is that ("en est que") 'we' is not a quantified or multiplied 'I', it is an 'I' dilated beyond the strict person, at the same time increased and with vague contours" [9], p. 235 (highlighting of Benveniste). Although Marrou did not point it out, Benveniste allowed us to realize that "we" is a person "beyond the person", diametrically opposed, as we recall, to the "non-person" of the third person. Diametrically opposed includes each one of the members of "we" becoming capable of enunciating "we" on their part. With this inestimable revelation, to which Marrou does not allude, we will leave Benveniste: "(...) the plural is a factor of limitlessness, not of multiplication (...)" [9], p. 235. The space and the instance, not for a multiplied "I" but for unlimited "I's" are, thus, deployed in or by "we" / "us".

Now, I will follow only Elise Marrou directly towards her conclusions. Although the "we" is said, it is possible to conceive and produce—effectively counteracting and conjuring the proper "we"—a "we" "reified", passivized, or objectified, a "we" "one speaks about" ("un 'nous' dont on parle", [8], p. 24) is equivalent to the cancellation of the unlimited personalizing power of "us". This is a "we" used in such a way that no one but the user could actually either say or feel: a "not-us", an "anti-we", *stricto sensu*. However, Marrou's true conclusion goes further. Besides the effective and the "reified" "we", there would be other, another "us" capable of resisting and of "turning against" ("de se retourner"): the "usurpation" of "we" [8], p. 36. "Beyond" is an expression that must be seriously considered at this point: beyond the opposition to a false or illegitimate "we", there is a "we" constituted in the speech as "eventual" ("evenementiel") and constitutively unlimited and "opaque", which we say beyond and not purely "against" the "between-us" of collective intentions, actions, or declarations [8], p. 36. This "we" is beyond the univocity and clarity assumed by the models based on a "We-intentionality" [8], p. 36. With the sighting of this "we" for which, for our part, we do not find a better name than "an-other us", Marrou approaches the end of his essay in a tone that changes and that even seems, so to speak, to stop seeing "us" and to having the question of us "in front". Marrou uses Michel de Certeau to indicate, almost to touch silently or to feel with the ear, the emergence of a "we" so particular, so fragile, revealing, and powerful. It is Michel de Certeau speaking of May '68, speaking, that is how we hear him—we hear him feeling himself speaking in that "nous" —, in May '68 although more than twenty-five years later, in his *La Prise de parole*. Because I consider it absolutely necessary, I will completely transcribe the fragment extracted by Marrou, and I will interrupt the original with my attempt to translate this truly untranslatable "nous":

"Quelque chose nous est arrivé [Something happened to us]. Quelque chose s'est mis à bouger en nous [something was set in motion in us]. Émergent d'on ne sait où, remplissant tout à coup les rues et les usines, circulant entre nous, devenant nôtres mais en cessant

d'être le bruit étouffé de nos solitudes, des voix jamais entendues nous ont changé [voices never heard changed us]. Du moins avions-nous ce sentiment [At least, that was the feeling that we had]. Il s'est produit ceci d'inouï: nous nous sommes mis à parler. Il semblait que c'était la première fois (Something unheard-of happened: we started talking. It seemed that it was the first time)" [8], pp. 36–37.

Marrou reads: "The 'we' is also lodged in the interstices of the speech" ("*interstices de la parole*", [8], p. 37). One can imagine few more eloquent conclusions for an attempt to correct the traditional "ontological" imbalance in the conception of "us". A "we", a third as we have recognized in our reading of Marrou, "an-other we", as it should be called, which is said, which must necessarily be said, but which does not fully or exactly correspond to any word, and which needs the word "we" to make itself audible and sensible, to make itself felt, to speak, even if it does not just say "us" in it. Marrou, in her conclusion, will distinguish in Certeau's declaration a "tonic", "strong" "we" / "us" ("*nous*"), which "is said in the subject position" from a "quasi-effaced" "we" ("*nous*" "*quasi-évidé*"), which "questions itself about what happened to it before being able to speak in the position of the subject" [8], p. 37. This "we", who "pre-says" itself, who is "before-said" in its interrogation, which is formed by wondering about a sensation that was neither only subjective nor "eventually" ("*événeementiellement*") individual, for Marrou: "is certainly pronounced, but it is not said" ("*est certes prononcé (. . .) mais il ne se dit pas*") [8], p. 37. We would add: such "we" is given or made to be felt in speech without being exclusively or exhaustively said.

5. In Conclusions: For a *Cogitamus* to Come

To go back to our first subject, Rodolfo Kusch signals the moment for philosophy to go out, turn around, and allow the use of another sense in the search for "the indigenous" and "the vegetal" as sources of a smell that, at the beginning of 1960, he did not hesitate—and perhaps he did not err—in calling "American". The indigenous and the vegetal served then for a philosophy to find itself in the roots—"stinking" and "phagocytizing"—of its identity. Today is another time for these same figures of the other and for the alternative figurations of identity. Still, surely, it is still a time in need of changing the philosophical person (and the sense of its subject) and therefore of a thinking experienced in another sense, in the experience of itself in the unlimited plurality (Benveniste), "pronounced but not said", (Marrou) and synesthetic of an-other us.

Indeed, the work of Kusch would merit a much broader and surely more detailed study on the theme that sustained it throughout more than thirty years: the interweaving of the disappearance of a world with the survival of the plant and indigenous as a Latin American singularity. If the Latin American, for him, had to be philosophically experienced in another sense (it had to be smelled), it is because the Latin American world itself would have already suffered its end even if the Latin American would have survived as "we". For my part, on this occasion, I have limited myself to the sketch of that "we" which begins with the disappearance of the world or, more precisely, the "an-other us" that comes after the dismantling of a worldly matrix that can be described as "ours".

In the 1960s, the vegetal and the indigenous characterized the feeling or experience of this surviving "we" as properly Latin American. Faced with the current environmental crisis, the reappearance or renewed pregnancy of the conceptual reconfigurations of the plant and the Amerindian have returned to say and to make us think about what it would now be necessary to feel in pronouncing "we", in saying "us". A couple of simple reading exercises would suffice (once again with names that are much more than examples) to glimpse this other direction, open by the vegetal and the indigenous, to take the floor before the disaster. On the one hand, before extracting the ontological or epistemological implications of the "geophilosophical" display of the *Métaphysiques cannibales* by E. Viveiros de Castro [10], it is vital to explore the place of enunciation of the "we", the "an-other us" of the "*o povo que falta*", "the missing people" [11], that is not the main character of *Há mundo por vir? Ensaio sobre os medos e os fins* but its key—although absent—philosophical person. On the other hand, it is time to derive the consequences of the "post-metaphysical

ontology of vegetal life" [12] envisioned by M. Marder in *Plant-Thinking*, from the second of the theses of one of his most suggestive texts, a short but inexhaustible article: "Vertimus: Dix thèses sur le devenir-plante" [13], the thesis according to which: "Becoming-plant is becoming-we".

This simple chronological inversion or reorganization of texts not only allows us to discover the question of "we" as fundamental but also imposes another initial question: Now, when the vegetal and the indigenous do not speak in memory of the true disappeared America nor in the name of the roots or the horizon of a genuinely Latin American thought, would not only the time of disaster have come but also the time to unleash the most radical of its proposals: to think is to feel "us" thinking, to pronounce "we" by thought? About the "thinking-we" de-limited in us by the vegetal and the indigenous, about this irreducible and yet to come *cogitamus*, R. Kusch as well as M. Marder and E. Viveiros de Castro have much more to say than a remark.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The excellent work of M. Lugones and J.M. Price [14] with Kusch's first title translated—very, too, late—into English shows that the best solution to render the differential value (radically oppositional in Kusch's perspective) of "ser" and "estar" consists in allowing them, without translating them, alters the syntax and logic of English, e.g.,: "Kusch contrasts *estar* and *ser* (to be). He connects *ser* with what is Western and urban. *Ser* marks a relation between subject and objects understood as definable, fixed, having an essence, ordered in relations of cause and effect [. . .] *Estar* instead situates one within the world, where one senses its volatility, its mutability, its instability, its bearing fruit. Thus, the logic of *estar siendo* is incompatible with essentializing things and relations. The logical movement of *estar siendo* is connected to seminal activity and to the logic of seminality, life sources, growth" (14, p. lvi). Thus, when trying to emphasize the difference between "being" and "to be", I am not trying to fix the translation of "*estar*" and "*ser*" but rather to accompany, without risking a definition, the reading in English not of two untranslatable words but two specific concepts of Kusch's philosophical proposal.

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