Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*[1]

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Turn of the Native

> What about the One as the Good, as the preferential object that dawning Western metaphysics assigned to man's desire? Let me go no further than this troublesome piece of evidence: the mind of the savage prophets and that of the ancient Greeks conceive of the same thing, Oneness; but the Guarani Indian says that the One is Evil, whereas Heraclitus says that it is the Good. What conditions must obtain in order to conceive of the One as the Good?
> Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State* [2]

Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro's Cannibal Metaphysics is one of the most radical attempts at reforming the epistemology of the social sciences in the last few years. This small book presents an effort to put forward an analogue of *Anti-Oedipus* for anthropological science — a work that would turn the fundamental conceptual relations within anthropology upside down. The question de Castro attempts to tackle is how the anthropological project in the postcolonial era may be freed from the demon of narcissism — the fundamental difference between the *observer* and the observed–which has continually been reconstituted within an-

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[1]   The book appeared in Russian translation only in 2017, which prompted its reconsideration and this review.

[2]   Clastres 1989: 217.

thropology already since its prehistory as a form of Victorian evolution- ism. In the words of de Castro, the project of *Cannibal Metaphysics* is an attempt to restore to anthropology its rights as a "theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought" (40). Within his project, de Castro utilizes various resources, including anthropological research by Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern, although (post-)structuralist projects by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and Lévi-Strauss remain the key re- sources for his work. He sees the solution to the epistemological problems of anthropology and other social sciences as residing in a particular switch in perspective. This switch entails a rebellious subversion of Western on- tology/cosmology: its infiltration by external elements, chief among which appear to be, for De Castro, perspectivism and multinaturalism.

Perspectivism is a concept that de Castro (1992) uses for describing the cosmology of Amerindian tribes, the object of his main fieldwork. A notion of perspectivism grounds various intuitions expressed in studies of animist cosmologies, including the research of Philippe Descola, who had brought anthropologists' attention back to this notion. For Descola, animism remains an operational concept, which can be used to describe the cosmologies/ontologies of Amazonian tribes and, in particular, to de- scribe the cosmology of the Achuar — the tribe that was the object of his own ethnographic research. Descola's conceptualization of animism is rooted in the view that within different societies there may be significant variations in key ontological terms such as notions of the natural/cultur- al. As opposed to a Western naturalistic view of the continuity of the ma- terial/external qualities of different entities (humans, animals, etc.) as contrasted with differences between their spiritual/internal qualities (hu- man consciousness is different from the consciousness of animals), for Amazonian tribes the principle of differentiation is determined by bodies, not by souls.

For de Castro, perspectivism and multinaturalism are concepts which can in a certain sense grasp the same traits of Amazonian cosmology: a multiplicity of bodies/natures, which present themselves as a source of difference, and a singularity of souls/cultures, which constitute a "meta- physics of predation" (49). Whereas perspectivism focuses attention on the same perspectives that are possessed by different entities, multinatu- ralism focuses on the different natures (bodies) in which they exist. One key difference between the concepts of animism and perspectivism is that only the latter is in fact a concept in de Castro's sense. The analytical value of "animism," for Descola, grounds the description and classifica- tion of other cosmologies; "perspectivism," however, as de Castro claims, is at the same time a "concept" and a *concept of concepts* (25). It is not just an anthropological theory of another cosmology, it is in fact another anthropology. This is the reason why de Castro attempts to employ per- spectivism as the new ontological foundation of his anthropological proj-

ect. The decolonial tasks for this project lay "not so much in classifying cosmologies that appear exotic to us but in counter-analyzing those anthropologies that have become far too familiar" (78). Thus perspectivism becomes an auto-referential machine, which is by itself capable of explaining and justifying de Castro's method itself; the latter consists in a certain recourse to Amerindian ontologies. This is also the reason why perspectivism is a perspectivist description of native ontologies/cosmologies, whereas animism may be called a naturalist account of these ontologies/cosmologies. This autoreferentiality is based on the logic of switching bodies through shamanistic or cannibalistic practices; what is discovered through the cannibalistic act and the devouring of the body of the enemy is not the enemy itself, but the image of the cannibal him/herself in the enemy's perspective (140). This act of perspectivist displacement cautions us against any claims about an "objective" reality; for the perspectivist mode of knowledge implies not an objectification of the reality in question by minimizing the "subjective" features of the observed and the observed, but calls for a "subjectification" of all the entities the native anthropologist sets about to study (60).

The books consists of four sections (Anti-Narcissus, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* from an Anthropological Point of View, Demonic Alliance, The Cannibal Cogito). In the first section we encounter a justification of the *Cannibal Metaphysics* project and its contextualization. Drawing on the semiotics of Roy Wagner, de Castro points out how a reconceptualization of the relations between the natural and the cultural is possible by introducing the notions of "conventional" symbolization and "differentiating" symbolization. Conventional symbolization undertakes a synthesis of those traits that unite humans and other (living) beings; differentiating symbolization draws out the differences produced by conventional symbolization against a universalist background. The second section is devoted to adapting the contents of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* for anthropological methodology. The main focus is given to Capitalism and Schizophrenia as the source of the theory of multiplicity and individuation, which is more applicable for anthropological science than traditional notions of "entities" and "kinds." De Castro points out that this implicit affinity of Deleuze and Guattari's project with anthropology explains the abundance of ethnographic references in their texts. The third section, Demonic Alliance?, explores the conceptual construction of the "metaphysics of predation" as an interpretative model for shamanist practices and as a specific relationist theory of otherness. The final section considers the various consequences of addressing native ideas and notions as concepts for anthropological science.

Cannibal Metaphysics and de Castro's anthropological research as a whole can be regarded not only as a peculiar continuation of the (post)structuralisms of Deleuze and Guattari and Lévi-Strauss, but also as a de-

velopment of the anthropological project of Pierre Clastres Viveiros (de Castro 2010). In spite of his pretense of neutrality and objectivity, much of Clastres' work was actually devoted to describing a contrast between modern societies with their hierarchical structures, political power, and so forth, and societies without a state — that is, "societies against the state." He paid specific attention to institutions of counter-power; the social structures of indigenous societies (in the case of Clastres, these were frequently the Guayaki-Aché tribes of eastern Paraguay), which maintain society in an egalitarian state and do not allow emerging hierarchical structures to become perpetuated and stabilized. Indeed, Clastres always focused on "primitive societies," yet he frequently stressed how the major schism between modern and primitive societies also implies major ontological differences. Such contrasts — as, for example, between Guayaki preachers' fear of the One and Western metaphysics' obsession with the One — serves as a remarkable symptom of this.

De Castro's project is not restricted to the aim of putting forward a counter-anthropology for reinterpreting and deconstructing Western metaphysics. One can note that it also provides a peculiar solution for questions within the field of contemporary continental philosophy, and specifically within speculative realism, if we treat this notion not as a definition of a specific intellectual "movement," but as a tendency to problematize correlationism (Mackay 2007). De Castro's critique of cultural relativism also necessarily becomes a critique of correlationism, and his argument in this light acquires new significance, differentiating his project from various solutions to the correlationist problem — as in object-oriented ontology, the theory of contingency, neorationalism, and so forth. The chief advantage of his project is that, unlike strictly philosophical authors, de Castro starts from an empirical background, which in turn enables a more "informed" relation to the Outside.

A final solution to the *correlation* problem in de Castro's project remains purely (post)structuralist: the 'Outside' (as well as the 'Inside') remain purely relational categories, and are in a way eliminated in the same way that the "universal" is deconstructed in *Anti-Oedipus*. Yet de Castro's is a fresh and persuasive form of structuralism, which sets out a specific direction for empirical research (of natives, as well as of Western metaphysicians). This distinguishes his project from those of various "realists," with which it shares some resemblance. Despite the many questions his project raises amongst "mainstream" anthropologists, it can actually be used as an interpretative model for the ontology/cosmology of the Amerindian tribe — as opposed to comparable works by Manuel DeLanda, who is commonly accused of using his empiric material merely as an exemplification for theoretical arguments (Maiorova 2017), or, on the contrary, of his theoretical material remaining complementary in relation to the empirical (Vakhshtain 2015).

De Castro's project of should be considered separately, in the context of social/cultural anthropology, because it suggests a major renewal of the discipline based on the work of other anthropologists (Wagner, Sthratern). The notion of the "ontological turn" as a term for characterizing a movement in research has of course already met with a sharp criticism. Indeed this term — as many similar ones — has a limited pragmatics of usage, as it relates to anthropological/sociological research that pays particular attention to the ontological aspects of cultural artefacts, practices, etc. Additionally, this project has various problems in terms of its prospective continuation; it remains unclear how the philosophical development of the project should unfold (should philosophers become anthropologists? Or perhaps cannibals?). Yet it is even less clear which consequences this shift of the epistemological position in anthropology (from naturalism to perspectivism) has for the applied methodology of anthropological research;the specific rules and tools that are used in fieldwork.[3] This latter aspect, despite its ostensible insignificance, complicates the anthropological reception of de Castro's epistemological project: thus most of the anthropological texts that develop or criticize his ideas draw chiefly on isolated concepts,[4] and not on de Castro's epistemology as a holistic research approach. This in many ways brings together the reception of de Castro's work with the fates of his predecessors — Deleuze/Guattari and Lévi-Strauss. It can be concluded that this latter aspect comes with de Castro's attempt to restore an interface between the social sciences and philosophical theory — a question which still remains relevant for such research areas as actor-network theory (ANT), science and technology studies (STS), anthropology after the ontological turn, and others.

Translated from the Russian by the author

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[3]   This is particularly noticeable in the context of his polemics with David Graeber. C.f. a small comment by de Castro (Viveiros de Castro 2015), in which he's being ironical about how in his article Graeber deems it to be necessary to justify the behavior of African "fetishists" before his readers by pointing down that, in fact, they do not believe in the magical power of fetishes (Graeber 2005). This leads to a response from Graeber, in which he doubts the methodological value of arguments within anthropology of the "ontological turn" (Graeber 2015).

[4]   See for example criticism of de Castro's ideas in Halbmayer (2012) and Kapfhammer (2012).

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