BODIES IN MULTIPLE WORLDS: MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY AND EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO[i]

Des corps dans des mondes multiples : Maurice Merleau-Ponty et Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

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Abstract: This article explores the links between Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's ideas on corporeality and intersubjectivity, inspired by an Amerindian account of the encounter with Europeans. Merleau-Ponty approaches intersubjectivity from the point of view of one's own body, recognizing others as human immediately through bodily similarity. Viveiros de Castro introduces a multinaturalism in which culture and humanity are universal, but nature and material reality vary according to perspective. The text emphasizes that relationships, for Amerindians, are actively created rather than inherited from a common origin. This perspective contrasts with Merleau-Ponty's embodied ontology, where relationships derive from a common flesh, yet are maintained by difference. In conclusion, the article suggests that Viveiros de Castro's approach can enrich Merleau-Ponty's by emphasizing the active creation of relationships and alliances, rather than supposedly innate characteristics. Viveiros de Castro's political project aims to redefine Western society as a case among others, calling into question its role as guarantor of universality. The article closes with the reference to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the invisible which suggests a possibility of humble acceptance of partial ignorance.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Brazilian Anthropology; Ontology; Intersubjectivity; Multinaturalism; Perspectivism.

Résumé : Cet article explore les liens entre les idées de Maurice Merleau-Ponty et d'Eduardo Viveiros de Castro sur la corporéité et l'intersubjectivité, inspirées d'un récit amérindien de la rencontre avec les Européens. Merleau-Ponty aborde l'intersubjectivité du point de vue de son corps propre, reconnaissant immédiatement l'autre comme un être humain grâce à sa ressemblance corporelle. Viveiros de Castro introduit un multinaturalisme dans lequel la culture et l'humanité sont universelles, mais la nature et la réalité matérielle varient selon la perspective. Le texte souligne que, pour les Amérindiens, les relations sont activement construites plutôt qu'héritées d'une origine commune. Cette perspective contraste avec l'ontologie incarnée de Merleau-Ponty, où les relations dérivent d'une chair commune, mais sont maintenues par la différence. En conclusion, l'article suggère que l'approche de Viveiros de Castro peut enrichir celle de Merleau-Ponty en mettant l'accent sur la création active de relations et d'alliances, plutôt que sur des caractéristiques supposées innées. Le projet politique de Viveiros de Castro

vise à redéfinir la société occidentale comme un cas parmi d'autres, remettant en question son rôle de garant de l'universalité. L'article se termine par une référence au concept d'invisible de Merleau-Ponty, qui suggère la possibilité d'accepter humblement une ignorance partielle.

Mots clés: Phénoménologie ; Anthropologie brésilienne ; Ontologie ; Intersubjectivité ; Multinaturalisme ; Perspectivisme.

The great challenge to an historical anthropology is not merely to know how events are ordered by culture, but how, in that process, the culture is reordered. How does the reproduction of a structure become its transformation? (Sahlins, 1981, p. 8)

Qui suis-je ? Si par exception je m'en rapportais à un adage : en effet pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je « hante » ?[ii] (Breton, 1998, p. 11)

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, about five hundred years ago, local people of the island named Boriquen, who were by Europeans called Indians at the time, decided to rise against the white colonizers. But they saw how strong the Europeans were, and so they were afraid and suspected them of being gods or spirits in disguise. Therefore, Urayoan, the chief of the Yaguaca tribe, came up with an idea to get to the bottom of this mystery: He invited a young Spaniard named Salçedo to his village to spend some time with the tribe and then offered to have his people accompany him on his return among the Europeans. His guides, however, drowned him on the way. They deliberately did so in a large group so that no individual person would be accused, and they begged forgiveness in case Salçedo was in fact a god. They watched his dead body till it began to rot, still afraid that the boy might come back to life. After a few days when the body already smelled bad, even Urayoan, the chief concluded that Europeans were mortals like them and decided to give the order to attack them. (Oviedo y Valdés, 1851, p. 478–79).

This rather insignificant episode has been preserved thanks to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, one of the Spanish colonizers who is now most famous for his texts on nature and culture in the "Indies." From the tone of the rendering, it seems that the

main intention was to show how much "Indians" were afraid of Europeans: According to Oviedo, they had heard of the enormous odds the Europeans were overcoming in battles on surrounding islands. Four hundred years later, Claude Lévi-Strauss used this story in two of his texts (1952; 1955), and another fifty years after that, the anthropologist and one of the proponents of the "ontological turn" (further as OT) Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014),[iii] wrote about it again when he discusses Lévi-Strauss.

Encounters at the seashore have acquired an archetypal power that has been feeding the imagination of history, historical fiction, and other genres such as science fiction. But in the original stories, that is, in the versions in which they have survived, there is almost always some violence present sooner or later. The natives of most regions were in the end defeated and sometimes decimated and massacred, but they were not merely passive victims, as the story from Boriquen (now Puerto Rico) above illustrates, or as we are told in the story of the killing of James Cook in Hawaii (Borofsky, 1997).

I am going to use the story from Boriquen, like Lévi-Strauss and Viveiros de Castro did, asking what it takes to be considered human (enough) by people from a different continent, a different tribe, or a person next door. I am comparing what I would call a prevalent Western[iv] conception of humanity with a system inspired by Amazonian societies as described and developed by Viveiros de Castro, and interpreted by myself. My interlocutor, as a voice of the European tradition, will be Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He is suitable for the dialogue because his focus on the body and embodied experience as well as his shift from a somewhat solipsistic subjectivity in his early texts (Barbaras, 2004) towards an inclusive intersubjectivity show flexibility and open the door to a certain version of perspectivism (see e.g. Silva, 2011).

Of course, I am not the first person to think of using phenomenological methods in anthropology. It is tricky because according to Aparecida Vilaça (2005, p. 447), one of the main assumptions of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, that "our bodies are – or at least should be, as they were in the past – identical to those of native peoples: that is, 'naturally' mindful and relational,"v simply does not correspond to various anthropological data. This quasi-Merleau-Pontian assertion seems to conflict with the "general uncertainty over forms [that] is a key factor in understanding the concept of the body found in the Amazonian region." Mortel Axel Pedersen (2020) offers a recapitulation and critique of phenomenological influence in anthropology and confidently suggests that the OT is the way to integrate these two. I can see how refraining from any a priori knowledge of the world(s) and society under study can be understood

as a case of épochè (Charbonnier, Salmon & Skafish, 2016, 3; Pedersen, 2020) but this is not my main concern here. I am not practicing any anthropology myself (not in a traditional way at least).

What follows is hence rather a theoretical reflection on possible enrichment of Merleau-Ponty by Viveiros de Castro, or yet more precisely: I seek to make the latter more approachable through the former by using Merleau-Ponty to present Viveiros de Castro's multiple worlds as at least imaginable to a mind conditioned by the Western nature-culture framework. Furthermore, in associations between Viveiros de Castro's jaguars and Merleau-Ponty's flesh (*la chair*), I hope to find tools for looking for allies in unexpected places. However, I am not aiming at a fusion of the two concepts and their authors because I am not situated in the neutral agora, in the middle of the academic version of the marketplace of ideas where I can freely describe, move, split, and combine anything I find. The voice coming from and through Viveiros de Castro is the voice of the peoples who have been chased, tortured, infected, massacred, annihilated, and at best (with reservations and conditions) assimilated. Hence my intention is not to "save" European colonialist universalism (including but not limited to cultural relativism) by subsuming Viveiros de Castro under it and spicing it up with a few Indigenous thoughts: "The last thing Viveiros wants is for the Amerindian struggle against Western philosophy to become just another curio in the vast cabinet of curiosities" (Latour, 2009, p. 2). Instead, I will place these ideas next to each other in order to illustrate Viveiros de Castro *through* Merleau-Ponty because while philosophically informed anthropology typically engages in an honest dialogue with Western philosophy and its scholars evince solid philosophical knowledge[vi], traditional philosophy rarely bothers to take non-Western thought into consideration, if it is aware of it at all. I remind my readers that, though it may seem so at times, this article is not meant to be a cheerful tale of jaguars; it is another voice trying to bear witness to all the injustices that the Western imperialist machinery has done and continues doing to the rest of the world.

1.0 Are There Other Humans?

With the focus on individual minds, one of the favorite problems of Western philosophy traditions is solipsism – how can I tell that I am not alone here and other people are not mere machines or someone's projections? The first answer Merleau-Ponty

would give is that other people exist simply because it seems to be the case: "If my consciousness has a body, why would other bodies not 'have' consciousnesses?" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 367; 1945, p. 403). This is not to say that it is in any sense an objective body, a (to put it simply) Cartesian-like mechanistic matter that is being controlled from the inside by a soul, mind or "brain:"[vii] "the notion of the body and the notion of consciousness have been deeply transformed" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 367; 1945, p. 403). If I stay in the Cartesian cogito, it is always to an extent solipsistic because equating subjects with inner consciousness or soul (only or predominantly), leaves me in complete obscurity in terms of other subjects as I cannot directly perceive other people's consciousnesses unless I would somehow merge with them: I could only perceive their bodies that however remain pure matter.[viii] Cartesianism is caught in its own paradox: "It will never be made clear how signification and intentionality could inhabit molecular structures or cellular masses, and here Cartesianism is correct" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 367; 1945, p. 403).

However, the question whether a mere piece of matter can have a consciousness is in everyday experience hardly ever relevant: It's not that I meet a figurine in a human form and only after do I start wondering whether there is a human soul inside of it or not. As always, no matter how difficult its language is, phenomenology is trying to describe "natural experience," not fabricated philosophical problems. The point is to describe and explain what appears and how, with the first appearing being always the source of any further investigations (see Barbaras, 2004, p. 160). Complete rejection of the natural attitude in favor of the transcendental is neither possible nor desirable. Under normal circumstances, I don't theorize whether a person in front of me is a human being like me: I simply assume so. Sure, I can speculate about anything I want, but as Merleau-Ponty points out, any refusal of society and/or nature is based on the existence of this very nature and society, other people included (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 377; 1945, p. 413–14). The perception of others thus usually happens at the same time as I see them as humans: "the perception of others precedes and makes possible such observations, so they cannot be constitutive of it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 368; 1945, p. 404).

In fact, drawing from developmental psychology, the problem originally appears to be quite the opposite (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d). A child perceives their world in the corporeal symbiosis with it before they start to differentiate themselves from it. They imitate the actions of others but not because they would consciously try to mimic a person in front of them but rather because they cannot clearly conceive of the difference between

that person and themselves (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d, p. 117). This original state is not intersubjectivity strictly speaking because there is no distinct subject yet. But it is where the future and habitually undisputed intersubjectivity stems from (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d, p. 118).

Thus the initial "Cartesian" analogy (my consciousness has a body so another person's body should have a consciousness) is not as simple as it seemed. Or maybe it is simpl*er* because I usually don't need to ponder the problem at all, that is unless I write an academic text. Just as I am in fact not a cluster of individual senses reacting to stimuli but rather a manifold system with a certain "style" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d, p. 117–18), I don't intellectually assess a body in front of me as a pure material object in order to decide whether they have a soul or not, even though the perception is usually mostly visual at first:

> I can perceive, across the visual image of the other, that the other is an organism, that that organism is inhabited by a "psyche," because the visual image of the other is interpreted by the notion I myself have of my own body and thus appears as the visible envelopment of another "corporeal schema." (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d, 118).

Whereas I do agree with Dillon (1988, p. 128ff.) that Merleau-Ponty's account is solving the problem in most cases (namely, that there is in fact no problem in usual human conduct), the recognition of others as fellow humans doesn't *always* happen. Merleau-Ponty allows for corrections of perceptual illusions and inadequate concepts but if these corrections are needed any time when one group of people meets another one, the problem seems to be more complex. In my comfortable Euro-American zone, the other person in front of me glows with their style and I approach them as a human being more or less equal to me very "naturally." Until I meet a radical other which is the topic of the following pages.

It should be mentioned here that as a Western-based woman, when I wrote "human," I meant the *homo sapiens* species[ix] as it is understood now by popularized Western sciences or more precisely: as Western(ized) people perceive it in general with a vague reference to the current Western sciences. It is going to be challenged as the universal classification so in order to destabilize "common knowledge" terms and their understanding, from now on, I am going to use the term *anthropos* for this type of human, that is, the human understood in terms of the biological species of Western science, and *anthropinos* instead of the adjective "human" in the same sense. Let my attempt to inflect

those words throughout the text be a friendly reminder to readers that some languages work differently than the ubiquitous English that has been imposed on all of us native speakers of other languages. The "human" will be more of a flexible concept.

2.0   Multiple Natures

Imagine that there are natures for which it is nature, not culture, that is universally shared! I am trying to feign surprise that is supposed to help me understand perspectivism. From my perspective.

I am going to get back to the opening story on Boriquen when Antilleans were testing European bodies and also to a rather anecdotal commentary of Lévi-Strauss. His conclusion is that whereas Europeans wanted to find out whether the American indigenous had souls (see e.g. Huxley, 1980), the latter were preoccupied by the problem whether the former had bodies (Lévi-Strauss, 1952, p. 12; also cited by Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 50). Lévi-Strauss considered the Antillean practice more noble because the question for them was whether Europeans were humans or spirits, as opposed to the Europeans who were trying to find out whether the Indigenous were *anthropoi* or "mere" animals. Furthermore, the Amerindians were proceeding more in line with what we call science: They examined the material realness of their visitors (and conquerors) so they were in fact performing a scientific experiment (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 81; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 51; Latour, 2009, p.1).

The way this story is interpreted by Lévi-Strauss aligns with Viveiros de Castro's definition of the Western *anthropos*: I undoubtedly see an animal entity (in the biological sense) and then I contemplate whether this animal body contains a soul/consciousness/mind so that it can be called *anthropinon*. Not all *anthropina* bodies are considered equal and the inner immaterial core is assigned accordingly. In history, it has basically meant that the darker a particular person is, the worse the soul they were assigned (Huxley, 1980). Nevertheless, no matter how much it is true that it is now the Westernized people who do most of the dominant assignments, it has not always been the case. Thanks to written testimonies of the colonizers of the past (however biased), all kinds of testimonies of anthropologists of the past and present (again, however biased), and nowadays first hand testimonies from not-so-much-Westernized people (undoubtedly biased albeit in a different way), it is possible to have a glimpse of different worlds as well as different concepts of what it is to be a human being.

The events on Boriquen can be interpreted in a rather classical way, as a case of animism: Everything has or can have a soul so there was no doubt there, but the conquerors might have been spirits which would have meant that their bodies would be of a radically different quality or not really there for that matter (Latour, 2004, p. 451). From how I imagine the encounter, it was still the bodies that were meeting but Europeans were questioning the spiritual essence of the native body while Amerindians were doubting the material essence of the European colonizers. This is very symmetrical and not so difficult to imagine. But if I follow Viveiros de Castro one step further into the territory that he called perspectivism, there are quite literally different worlds emerging.

In Western metaphysics, soul is to body what culture is to nature (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 52n14). Body and nature are physical material givens whereas soul and culture are a superstructure and something that makes *anthropous* human – it is more noble, prestigious but at the same time an extra addition that has to be earned. Having a soul is tantamount to having a culture and Europeans (and now privileged North Americans) have infamously been trying to "cultivate" the souls and cultures of peoples of other worlds (without ever granting them full humanity). If I proceed with the analogy, in Amerindian societies, not only does everything have (or can have) a soul but everything we call (non-*anthropina*) animals can have a culture, and the same one at that. "They are not human *for* us; but we know they are human *for themselves*" (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 71). Now, this is not anything that can be found in the 16th century colonialist texts. It is based on contemporary research conducted by Viveiros de Castro, Tânia Stolze Lima (e.g. 1999), Philippe Descola (e.g. 1994, 2013), Marilyn Strathern (e.g. 1987, 2005, 2016, 2020), and other anthropologists who are associated with the OT.[x]

The idea of the OT is that I as a hypothetical anthropologist should abstain from grounding my research in my own knowledge about the world/s. I should not only respect that there are different views of the same nature and different explanations of what is going on around me (this is the classical cultural relativism) but I should accept as far as possible that the natures themselves can be different. It is the most radical abstention from judgment: the *épochè* of its sort (Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, 2016, p. 3).

I argue that the method is at the same time in a certain proximity to the ontological systems of societies anthropologists do their research on. In fact, it is circular: If I want to be true to my method (accepting or allowing as an option that there are multiple natures), I need to partially adopt their method of engaging the world/s (the multiplicity of natures). Put it this way, it is all very theoretical. Viveiros de Castro coined the term

perspectivism to give people like me an idea of other worlds but that doesn't make Amerindians perspectivist: "The idea was not that we should become perspectivists; that would be ridiculous, because actually no one is a perspectivist, not even in Amazonia. […] I've never met a perspectivist in real life. That's because perspectivism is a concept, my concept," says Viveiros de Castron in an interview (Skafish, 2016, p.410). The goal is to show Western system as one of many possibilities instead of a metasystem, not to present an intellectually attractive image of yet another tribe, an activity that has historically been a concomitant of colonialism rather than a tool to combat it. Jean-Christophe Goddard (2022) also says that "the point is not to find out whether Indians are perspectivists or not (if there are perspectivist Indians walking around in the forest) but to translate and introduce into the Western academic field the powerful indigenous critique of the European colonization of the Amazon."

Hence I am not trying to become a perspectivist; I am trying to stop usurping intellectual space-time with pervasive Western dogmas by accepting other ways as possible, by "taking different worlds seriously rather than conjuring them away" (Pickering, 2017, p. 135). In order to be able to follow Viveiros de Castro's project, I am trying to imagine that there are cultures, or natures in the Amazon and Caribbean for example,[xi] for which culture is what is universally shared, while nature, even in the sense of material reality, changes according to the situation, or rather according to who is watching and experiencing it. The idea is not that there is an objective world around us that only *appears* differently depending on the angle from which it is viewed. That would be a fairly common view, after all. It is that all possible living beings share a culture – for example, they all eat meat and drink beer – but what is beer for a jaguar is blood for me: natures differ (Viveiros de Castro, 1998, p. 470). There is no ontological common basis for this blood/beer:

> We should not think that Indians imagine that there exists a something=X, something that humans, for example, would see as blood and jaguars as beer. What exists in multinature are not such self-identical entities differently perceived but immediately relational multiplicities of the type blood/beer. (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 73).

The formulation itself feels paradoxical and illogical for someone like me. We can see how even the English language defies it: If it is the culture that is to be shared, then it is impossible to speak of a different culture. Analogically, it is very difficult for me to imagine a different nature, the mono-nature always tries to sneak in: Viveiros de Castro

thus suggests to think about it not as "a variety of natures" but rather as "the naturalness of variation – variation *as* nature" (2014, p. 74). There is no original or copy, only accumulations of multiplications.

3.0   Intermezzo: Epistemology or Ontology. And Metaphysics(s)

It may still seem that in the understanding of European philosophy, what Viveiros de Castro is doing is rather epistemology than ontology. From the interview with Peter Skafish (2016), it is however apparent why he has taken up ontology as his point of departure: Epistemology has been in focus of anthropologists much too long and it doesn't do justice to the people that are being researched on. In European philosophy, ontology is a way of philosophical questioning about what is and how it is which means that if I *do* ontology, I develop a theory about nature of existence of things (any kind of "things," so it might include concepts, language, thoughts etc., and even the "I") that is universal by definition. Epistemology then would be the (or "an") access to those things and while I can claim that my conception of epistemology is the only one – that the nature of getting and having knowledge about things is the same for everyone – it is still better conceivable that people from some other, say, cultures acquire knowledge in a different way. This is not to say that there is only one ontology, not at all, not even if I limit myself to the Western context. But it means that one person can only stick to one ontology at a time (and politely tolerate the others at best) because anything else would be contradictory.

No wonder Viveiros de Castro doesn't like this: "The problem is that we format other people's cultures in terms of our concepts of nature and culture, so we've got two and they've got one. There would be only one nature, ours, and then two cultures, ours and theirs" (Viveiros de Castro citing Roy Wagner in Skafish, 2016, p. 395). We tend to "believe that [for example] plants, animals, colors, kinship, skin diseases are in some way 'real' and self-evident *things*, rather than ways of talking about things" (Wagner, 1981, p. 103). It puts "us," the Westerners, in a superior position, making "us" a kind of arbiter talking from a universal nature (ontology) judging and comparing two cultures (epistemologies). The majority of traditional anthropologists either describe others with the unconscious background of (our understanding of) reality and they keep and assert their distance from *beliefs* of their subjects (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 1976, p. 1–23), or if they want to equalize the imbalance, they emphasize our own "primitive" beliefs and

prejudices and deconstruct them (e.g. Leach, 1966; Douglas, 2001), or they say that the people in question don't believe those things either (e.g. Graeber, 2015).

Viveiros de Castro obviously does nothing of the above: While he does expose Western prejudices it is not in the sense that we *also* have irrational, inconsistent or "wild" beliefs and traditions, but rather he aims to show that our fundamental system is not at all self-evident, no matter how internally consistent it might be (which it is not anyway). Positing two parallel ontologies side by side is an epistemological scandal, that is why I still tend to seek after a more fundamental ontology underneath. The anthropologist Tânia Stolze Lima (1999) illustrates it using the clashes between what we would call different species. The situation is *anthropoi* engaging in a hunt but other humans, peccaries, perceive it as a battle. But thus formulated, it already doesn't correspond to the unfolding realities in Amazonia, as Lima explains:

> The peccary hunt does not display the same reality seen by two subjects, following our relativist model. On the contrary, the hunt displays one event for the humans and one event for the peccaries. In other words, it unfolds in two parallel (or parallelistic) events,
> humans hunt peccaries
> humans are attacked by enemies
> events which are also correlative, and which refer to no objective or external reality comparable to what we understand as nature. One is the referent of the other. We could say, then, that the hunt presents two dimensions, given as two simultaneous events which reflect upon each other (Lima, 1999, p. 121).

This can be imagined on the basis of an analogy with language: "One is either in one language *or* another – there is no more a background-language than a background-world" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 73 citing Jullien, 2008, p. 135). I can translate between languages or learn them but there is no master language above all of them.

Viveiros de Castro's project is first of all cosmo/political[xii] – he aims to redefine "us" (Westerners, or even *anthropoi* as such) as one of many instead of universal. He doesn't stop at descriptions of other worlds: The important thing is to show that there are other systems of world description itself, that is other metaphysics. "Studying metaphysics is actually a way of politicizing the kind of intellectual work that anthropology is" (Skafish, 2016, p. 397). Hence the research is not only about ways of being or ways of thinking about that being, but the whole systems of principles that constitute any possibilities of being and thinking (and communicating). "In other words, it is not simply that they have an implicit ontology discoverable by the human sciences but that they themselves think about metaphysical issues as such," summarizes Peter

Skafish in the interview and Viveiros de Castro answers: "My intention […] was not merely to describe the relevant ontology but to show that it is a part of Yanomami metaphysics, which is a system, in a sense, of explanation" (Skafish, 2016, p. 400). We Westerners became used to calling our metaphysical enterprises "philosophy" but when a non-Westerner does something analogical, we call it "mythology" (see also Wagner, 1981, p. 30ff.). In fact however, these are just variants of each other, where one of the particular traits of the Western mythology is that it claims about itself "this is not a myth" (Viveiros de Castro, 2016, p. 261). The aim is to challenge this presumed self-evidence of the sciences but also humanities and ethics of the West, or as the Native American philosopher Brian Burkhart (2019) calls it, the claim to "delocal" truth, that is a truth that is assumed to be valid always and everywhere.

4.0   Making Kin

The simple reversal of nature and culture seems a little too symmetrical as Viveiros de Castro (1998, p. 470) also admits himself. But even in his rendition, it's a lot more complicated than my summary above. First, Viveiros de Castro is inspired by Gilles Deleuze who is very complex indeed and I will not elaborate about him here. Second, the described Amerindian system grows from fundamental, existential interdependencies between predators and prey, that originated in the past. According to some histories, "in the beginning of generations, there was nothing but at the same time, people already existed" (Carid Naveira, 1999, p. 166). All things were humans and only later did they begin to differentiate: "For Amazonian peoples, *the original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but, rather, humanity*." This means that whereas Westerners would be typically afraid of animality in *anthropous*, Amerindians should be wary of humanity in animals (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 465). The differentiation or speciation occurred through bodies, more precisely through nutrition and excretion which naturally involves impurity, something that certain spirits are devoid of:

> Do not think that the animal spirits' food is the same as ours! They eat images of what we call *në rope*, the **richness** of the forest. This is real food, both tasty and free of any filth. They only drink flavored water from the high mountains. This is why even their excrement is fragrant. Ours stinks because the game we eat decomposes inside us. But the *xapiri*'s body does not contain any tainted flesh and so even their farts give off a pleasant smell! (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, p. 71; the French version cited also by Goddard, 2022).

The fact that we feed on specific prey is behind our individuation and behind the very possibility of taking a perspective but being a predator simultaneously carries with it the danger of becoming prey – everything has its jaguar (Viveiros de Castro, 2012, p. 30). Eating is always a transgression of its kind because if everything has at least a trace of humanity in itself, with every food, we consume souls (Viveiros de Castro, 2012, p. 32).

The idea that all kinds of animals, plants, spirits or even stones are or can be human doesn't make the situation particularly friendly. On the contrary, every *anthropos* is constantly in danger of being devoured by others and of slipping into a category of animals, that is other kinds of humans because the boundaries are much more permeable. These are "the tales in which a protagonist lost in the forest happens upon a strange village whose inhabitants invite him to drink a refreshing gourd of 'manioc beer,' which he accepts enthusiastically … until he realizes, with horrified surprise, that it is full of human blood" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 88). Encounters of Amerindians with Europeans and their "trial by water" then might have been an attempt to find out where in the cannibalistic system Europeans actually are. Goddard calls Europeans hyper-predators, one of whose characteristics is that they can see – and fight – without being seen, and consequently they can devour without the fear of being eaten. Like this, they wouldn't have a point of view which was precisely what Amerindians tried to fathom:

> It was necessary to verify that the enemy was edible (i.e. a body-person), to ensure that he is completely digestible and his decomposed flesh is dischargeable by the anus – without posing the risk of intoxication by his food remains: probably, an armor or a chain mail, a heaume, a plume, an arquebus … (Goddard 2022).

Just as the Western philosophical tradition and their cultural derivatives are afraid of solipsism – that there is no soul in the body in front of me – Amerindians are afraid of (we would say "cross-species") mutability of their bodies (Viveiros de Castro, 2012, p. 37) and of being eaten and eliminated by another type of human (Goddard, 2022). Here the danger is not the solipsism (me being the only human), but rather the opposite: that everything is human. Other human beings, both *anthropoi* and non-*anthropoi*, are humans precisely because they are in a relation to me, they are either my kin, or my enemies. The question then is whether Europeans can enter these relations at all. Goddard writes that Europeans were "otherly other" (*autrement autres*) than anything else they had met before. Just like it is difficult for us to fit into their categories because of our monstrous

pervasive expansiveness, perhaps we shouldn't try to subsume Amerindians under our categories (which is an expansion of its kind).

The differences between Viveiros de Castro's and Merleau-Ponty's worlds can be summarized as follows: Merleau-Ponty rightly points out that no-one really operates on the premise that *anthropina* bodies one encounters could be without a soul inside[xiii] and suggests that we actually experience intersubjectivity "naturally" and without any prior speculations. He also argues via development psychology: A baby doesn't really differentiate themselves from their environment yet, and only gradually do they acquire individual subjecthood. Understood this way, if we look for affinity, we go back, we look for a common origin.

In the Viveiros de Castrian world, a relationship must be actively created. "While we tend to conceive the action of relating as a discarding of differences in favor of similarities, indigenous thought sees the process from another angle: the opposite of difference is not identity but *indifference*" (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 19). A relationship is distilled from the pool of random phenomena. It is similar in the case of the Wari', another Amazonion people: Aparecida Vilaça (2002, p. 359) writes that the positive type of socialization (bringing up offsprings, forming relationships) is just another way of "making kin," next to cannibalism and predation. Either way, it is always a process of body transformation via upbringing, bodily ornamentation, clothing, alimentation, and digestion (of each other at times).

In Viveiros de Castro's and Vilaça's accounts, relations and individual identities emerge from masses of undifferentiated potency. It is in a way similar to Merleau-Pontian pre-subjectivity but whereas a Merleau-Pontian Westerner would later while actively establishing connections, go back in time and draw inspiration from primordial communality, an ideal Viveiros de Castrian Amerindian wouldn't see anything positive in the initial undefined state and they would try to maneuver between various human bodily identities: the preceding undifferentiatedness doesn't offer anything to draw from. While Amerindians grow from dangerous indifference, trying to establish hierarchies and differences, Westerners suffer from individualism, even solipsism, and they try to bridge gaps between themselves, occasionally by invoking some common origin. "Our traditional problem in the West is how to connect and universalize: individual substances are given, while relations have to be made" (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 476). No matter how much certain philosophical trends, including phenomenology, emphasize intersubjectivity, subjects still come first and then on their basis is intersubjectivity

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constructed, and only in a very abstract way at that. The Amerindian problem would rather be the opposite: "how to separate and particularize: relations are given, while substances must be defined" (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 476). Therefore it's not intersubjectivity in the strict sense as there are no easily defined and definable subjects that should be connected later. It is well illustrated by the initiation process of Wari': Many entities are able to possess an agency, a point of view, and when a new *anthropino* baby is born, the goal is to secure their membership in the particular human group. The baby is differentiated by speciation of their body but there is always a danger that they could become a different "species," that is, a human with a different body and thus a different point of view (Vilaça, 2005, p. 351).

5.0   Intermezzo: Ontological Folds

Contrary to how it may seem, Merleau-Ponty can be linked to the above. But let me start with where he rather *cannot*: It is obviously the idea of a single shared world which is prevalent in most highly Westernized cultures. Merleau-Ponty does allow for the existence of multiple worlds but only in a figurative sense: "the 'worlds' stand out against the background of a unique natural world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 307; 1945, p. 304) and just as the unique natural world serves as a guarantee for multiple "worlds," that is "cultures" (Toadvine, 2009, p. 72), it might be just the opposite in the case of (truly) multiple worlds. A single universal world and reality for everyone has been common sense for most Western and Westernized people and for a long time interpretation quest for philosophy at least since the Age of Enlightenment. The endeavor to keep the material and immaterial separate while preserving the solidity of the world *out there* leads to paradoxes and challenges: How can the material influence the immaterial (that is, my mind)? How are my body and my mind connected? How am I supposed to be sure that there are other subjects with other minds if I only perceive their material nature (i.e. the body)? On the one hand, I need others to attest to reality so that I keep believing in the objectivity of the world, but on the other hand, the very same objectivity is challenged precisely by other subjects' different perspectives (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 5; 1964b, p. 19).

Merleau-Ponty would dismiss any kind of a "general illusion" (that what we perceive is not *really* the world in the sense of Descartes' demon's illusion) as irrelevant precisely because our world is a phenomenal world: "the world is what we perceive"

(Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxx; 1945, p. xi; see also Dillon, 1988, p. 156). This doesn't mean that there are no illusions, dreams, hallucinations etc. They happen but their deceptiveness is determined by comparison with the "real" things. I can doubt anything, even all things but the doubt itself is embedded in the world: I cannot doubt the world itself as a whole. This is the first assumption or rather not even an assumption, it is the natural attitude according to which I and most people like me live our everyday lives. But it gets complicated as soon as someone actually tries to explain it:

> We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute "opinions" implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this we, what seeing is, and what thing or world is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 3; 1964b, p. 17).

If it is my own perception, what is the status of others and what is the relationship of their perceptions to my own? While the early Merleau-Ponty starts from the self and "glues" the world and consciousness by means of perception, the late Merleau-Ponty's answer is that everything is of the same element, that is *flesh* (*chair*), so that sensorial communication between entities can be understood as an extension of what happens when I perceive myself or reflect on myself. He still starts from the self, but that's because it is convenient, it is the Being I embody. If my right hand reaches out to touch objects and I touch it with my left hand, I can either reduce the right hand to an object which results in it losing its grip onto the world, or I can retain the right hand's touching activity but yet I can never touch the touching itself – my left hand only perceives the right hand's surface (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 147–48; 1964b, p. 191). It is this very overlap between the perceiver and perceived in a subject, the overlap which never becomes one, that makes up the flesh, the embodied unity subject-body. The self-sensing is always shifted, with the gap, divergence or dehiscence (*écart*): "If this gap or spacing from self to self were ever to be bridged or closed, then there would be no self and no sense or sensing," explains Marie-Eve Morin (2022, p. 174).

Just as I can sense myself (with a divergence), I sense the world and I can do it precisely because I am a part of the world and the world is a part of me – because we are both made of the flesh. There is a reciprocity in every perception, as Merleau-Ponty illustrates by citing painters' experience:

As André Marchand says, after Klee: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me. … I was there, listening. … I think that the painter must be penetrated (*transpercé*) by the universe and not want to penetrate (*transpercer*) it. … I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out (*surgir*)." […] it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 167; 1964c, p. 31–32)

No matter how much I would like Merleau-Ponty to talk about actual trees actually seeing me, the reversibility is a matter of *visibility* (and perceptibility in general), not vision per se: "not that the tree I see sees me, but that I am visible from the standpoint of the tree as it is from mine because we are both made of the same stuff: the flesh of the world. Thus conceived, perception is a worldly event and not a private occurrence that takes place within an invisible sphere of immanence" (Dillon, 1988, p. 170). This is also why Morin writes that in order to understand Being, "the important thing to notice here is that the visible/tangible is first in the order of explanation. Rather than explaining visibility starting from vision, we need to explain vision starting from visibility" (2022, p. 171). The capacity of the flesh has a priority over a singular occurrence of seeing, which is why late Merleau-Ponty is closer to ontology than phenomenology.

In an even more fundamental way than in the case of objects, I am of the same element as other subjects. The Other can be understood as a mirror of myself, someone who is giving me a different perspective (Dillon, 1988, p. 166). But the Other is not identical with me: that fold that is my body is always already "infected with the germ of mineness from the very start" (Dillon, 1988, p. 168).

6.0   Boriquen Once Again

I argue that Merleau-Ponty can "accommodate" some parts of Viveiros de Castro's or his informants' world/s. Surely not the ontology(ies) itself, at least not in its raw versions, but concepts of intersubjectivity and even humanity are quite compatible if I bend both sets of ideas a bit. The first thing is that both in Merleau-Ponty and Viveiros de Castro, being human or a specific type of human (*anthropos* or other) in the case of the latter depends on the body. Contrary to Western thought as presented by Viveiros de Castro, the Merleau-Pontian humanity is not animality with "something extra": there is already "another manner of being a body in human being […] human being is not animality (in the sense of mechanism) + reason. – And this is why we are concerned with

the body: before being reason, humanity is another corporeity" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 214, 208; 1995, 277, 269; see also Barbaras, 2001, p. 27). Theoretically, other species could have their own humanity but the fold in the flesh that I am, is of such a kind that I cannot relate to them the same way I relate to another *anthropon*. He even says that "we can speak in a valid way of an animal culture" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 198; 1995, p. 258) but this is not an attempt to revert human exceptionalism, rather a way of acknowledging the presence of being and its perception on "lower" levels (Toadvine 2007, 28). According to the Merleau-Pontian worldview, animals could never access the higher abstraction, the "structure of structures," multiplicity of perspectives etc. (Merleau-Ponty, 1967b, p. 122; 1967a, p. 133).

This approach would probably also be the case of the Boriquen story from the beginning. After all, Merleau-Ponty (2004, p. 70; 2002, p. 34) puts animals, children, the handicapped and "primitives" in the same category and he comments an Inuit mask as revealing "the original double nature" of human and animal (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 307n11; 1995, p. 277n"a"). The questioning of other people's humanity because of their different hair, skin or eye color, so common in the past (and much too often still) would not then be that much of a questioning of their "inner" souls, but rather the questioning of the flesh, the whole bodily *style* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964d, p. 117–18). Conversely, when I perceive other subjects as my fellow *anthropoi* or humans, this is when intersubjectivity and sharing of the world happen:

> It is said that the colors, the tactile reliefs given to the other, are for me an absolute mystery, forever inaccessible. This is not completely true; for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green […]. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 142; 1964b, 185)

In other words, experiencing other subjects is about taking their perspective, attuning to them, similar like with Viveiros de Castro, where a perspective is a point of view, residing in the body (e.g. 2014, p. 72). This point of view is being co-created and reinforced by the very act of taking a perspective, as Viveiros de Castro explains by a citation from Deleuze: "Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pregiven or defined subject: to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view" (Deleuze,

1993, p. 19; 1988, p. 27; cited by Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 72). This is also to some degree quite Merleau-Pontian, in the sense of perception (or later perceptibility itself) constituting subjects and objects.

When Europeans were (are) trying to deprive other societies of their humanity, it was because of their (so-called) cultures but equally importantly because of their bodies: on the basis of the plain racism first of all, but also depending on what they wore, ate, what was their corporeal behavior. This is the case of Amerindians as well – a point of view is manifested not only in physiology, but rather "the affects, or strengths and weakness, that render each species of the body singular: what it eats, its way of moving or communicating, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary, timid or fierce, and so on. […] What we are calling 'body,' then, is not the specific physiology or characteristic anatomy of something but an ensemble of ways or modes of being that constitutes a *habitus*, ethos, or ethogram" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 72; see also Vilaça, 2005, p. 449ff.).

I believe I can now see the story from Boriquen from a slightly different angle: Both Europeans and Amerindians saw beings that somewhat looked like humans to them. But Europeans were not sure whether the Indigenous bodies were similar *enough* (as we know, African bodies in particular have been often failing the test in white people's eyes) and thus their souls were put into question. Amerindians arguably also saw bodies[xiv] but they were afraid of illusions and volatility of what they were seeing since they knew that there is no such thing as a universal stable reality. "It is always best to distrust one's own eyes" (Vilaça, 2005, p. 451). Indeed, physical appearance "can be quite deceiving; the human figure, for instance, can conceal a jaguar-affection" (Vilaça, 2005, p. 451), which is sadly exactly how it turned out to be. This seems to problematize the "perceptual faith" that Merleau-Ponty takes as one of the presumptions that humans should share. In Amazonia, it is questioned from both sides that he mentions and ultimately refutes as irrelevant concerns (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 5; 1964b, p. 19), which are the danger of illusions and the fact that my view may be challenged by another person's view: 1) Illusions seem to be much more common in the Amerindian worlds, without a sturdy basis consisting in the belief in the shared world and 2) the problem of multiple views is actually not really a problem, as much as simply the way the worlds work. Still, with added volatility to reality(ies), Merleau-Ponty doesn't need to be in contradiction with Amerindian perspectivism, thanks to his focus on reversible perceptibility in his later

texts. He could represent, well, one perspective out of many which is precisely what Viveiros de Castro's cosmo/political project consists in.

7.0 Against the Totalizing Force

To conclude, I want to adumbrate possibilities that open up with the perspectivist point(s) of view. First, understanding alliances (kin) as actively created (as in Vilaça, 2002 for instance), rather than a given that is anchored in the past, would make us less fixated on supposedly innate characteristics (such as ethnicity) and more prone to creating and taking care of coalitions between various human and non-human actors. Besides Indigenous knowledge, we can take inspiration in the Western science itself, as long as it steps out of the neo-Darwinist framework. To list just one example, James E. Lovelock and Lynn Margulis (e.g. 1973) developed the idea of the Earth as a complex, self-regulatory system. If I put the detailed disputes aside, it very roughly says that living organisms while interacting both with each other and non-living elements of the planet co-develop in (something like) symbioses in order to maintain favorable living conditions. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with altruism: it is the inevitable way for organisms to behave in order to subsist and possibly evolve (Margulis and Habib, 2019). This refers to entities we are used to calling individual organisms, which are in fact often more or less integrated groups of trillions of organisms: "[w]e must begin to think of organisms as communities, as collectives" (Margulis and Sagan, 2008, p. 45). And it is as well the case of physically separate organisms that need to cooperate (the cases of natural processes like pollination but also asymmetrical relationships such as parasitism or commensalism).

Second, far from thinking that a typical Westerner like me could easily or any time soon start inhabiting unstable multiple worlds (not that it would be desirable, anyway), it doesn't seem that pervasive human exceptionalism has done us much good either: Instead of seeing "Nature" as something firm and independent to be either conquered or protected, the Viveiros de Castrian interdependence of humans and natures and their changing relations might provide better tools for dealing with the catastrophe we are heading. *Anthropoi* should as soon as possible realize that *we* are in a real danger: It's not about protecting *it*, it's about finding new strategies of cooperation. As Burkhart (2019, p. 268) says, "in order to open the possibility of right relationships with the nonhuman world, we need not rework our moral theories; we must rework the notion of a theory as

a delocal moral abstraction." Which means that the belief in one objective world with several more or less accurate descriptions that supposedly aim at the universally valid (delocal) truth simply hasn't been working. While "Nature" might not die with us, we will certainly die when it is gone. It's this position from which Latour (2018, 64) quotes ZAD who claimed that they are "not defending nature," but they "are nature defending itself."

However, there is a danger around all the Western-based scholars who got inspired by either their own or other people's field research of struggling communities on the edge of our worlds for their cosmopolitical ideas: by accepting multiple natures and including non-*anthropous* into dialogue, they (we) might create just another totalizing theory which would, this time, encompass truly *everything*. First of all, it doesn't need to be us who will solve the problem. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2017) make an important point: If there is no land to live on, humans will perish: humans without land will become land without humans but it already happened at least once in human history, in Americas, only in the opposite sequence. We are used to thinking about ourselves as humankind (or even more often 'mankind') but it is only now, when white people are in universal danger, that we (well, some of us) actually recognize the urgency. Just like white civilizations are most to blame for and the most to profit from the present day destruction of everything alive, they already did it once with the populations of the Americas. The idea of "a world without humans" that served as an excuse for invading so-called empty space effectively meant that the humans that had actually been there, became "humans without world." When it comes to disasters, there has been almost nothing as devastating in human history as the so-called 'discovery' of the so-called 'new world' and its consequences. Americas' indigenous peoples then had to learn to live in the ruins and the world that was made to not be theirs. The authors ask us "to learn from these minor peoples who resist in an impoverished world which is not even their own any more" (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 105–120).

Similarly, Guilherme Orlandini Heurich (2007, p. 110ff.) mentions in his article comparing Merleau-Ponty and South America-inspired perspectivism, that if anyone has an access to multiple perspectives and therefore multiple natures, it's not the Western scholars, but shamans, even though they can't embrace the totality of the worlds either. When I read the words of Davi Kopenawa, they appear eerily accurate even to the Western mind: "by digging so far underground, the white people will even tear out the sky's roots. […] The soil will soak up water and start to rot. Then the waters will gradually cover the entire earth. […] If you destroy the forest, the sky will break and it will fall on

the earth again!" (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013, p. 287, 406). Shamanic warnings are correct, and not only metaphorically or within their world. By protecting their forests and defending their land rights, Indigenous peoples play a crucial role in preserving ecological balance.

For my own strategies how to connect with the otherness, I am going to get an inspiration once again from Merleau-Ponty and Ted Toadvine's interpretation which can be seen as a middle ground between Western universalism and (at times arrogant) appropriation of concepts from other nature-cultures. Toadvine argues that while the concept of nature where humans are merely its part might as well be a better alternative to the nature-as-an-object (i.e. a passive entity our knowledge and technology can take full possession of) but it is but a variation of the same paradigm (Toadvine, 2003, p. 142): naive versions of "kinship" are in the end Eurocentric as well. Toadvine (2003, 2004, 2021) offers a third way, better corresponding to the Merleau-Pontian scholarship. Nature in later Merleau-Ponty is something that is non-instituted, which means it "has a meaning, without this meaning being-posited by thought: it is the autoproduction of a meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 3; 1995, p. 19; see Barbaras, 2001). With Toadvine (2021, p. 8), I can call it the "unbuilt," something that "we neither construct, nor control, nor necessarily understand, but on which our building constantly relies, such as pollination, fermentation, metabolism, sedimentation, erosion, sunshine, rain, gravity, air pressure, friction, and so on." The "non-instituted," "unbuilt" is something beyond our comprehension that cannot be subsumed under the transparent objective nature passively waiting to be controlled and explained away, or penetrated, by Western science. Nor can it be identified in an anthropomorphic[xv] way as a single harmonious organism which humans are a part of as everything else (Toadvine, 2003, p. 142).

There is a "kinship" but it is secured by differences just as much as by similarities. Everything is composed of flesh that is instituted by *écart*(s), separations, spreads or folds, to create hierarchies and to ensure that there are any relations at all, that there is anything to relate to (and talk about): without the deflection (*écart*), "the experience of the thing or of the past would fall to zero" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 124; 1964b, p. 163). But this *écart* is not only a cut, it is also "an openness upon the thing itself." My inclination to nature is caused by the inner force between the two poles of the flesh (their 'intertwining'): my flesh and flesh of the world. There is the "visible" sensible matter but the power that brings them together, the "call" that radiates from nature is the "invisible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 145n5; 1964b, p. 188n). The invisible is "the invisible of this

world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being (*l'Être de cet étant*)" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151; 1964b, p. 196). It is not a negation, it is the "margin of the visible" (Merleau-Ponty n.d.: Inédit 37).

The affection and longing for fusion with the world is conditioned by the fact that the fusion is never complete and importantly, not fully "reflectable": "Perhaps the root of ethical exigency [to 'protect nature'] lies in the resistance of the unreflective to reflection, in that aspect of the crisscrossing of our glances that prevents anyone from assimilation to the others" (Toadvine, 2005, p. 170). "[W]e need a healthy respect for what exceeds our management" (Toadvine, 2021, p. 10). The mystery of the world, that what makes us perceive the world but at the same time prevents our multiple glances to fully merge, is the invisible. Which might also be the force that urges us not to destroy the planet. If this seems vague, it is because it's supposed to be. The ethics grounded in philosophy according to Toadvine (2003, p. 150) should be "displaced by a phenomenology of the impossible — that is, by an attentiveness to the resistance of what cannot be thought or perceived, to the opacity of a wild being that circumscribes our concepts and percepts."

It is the admittance that "we" (meaning Westernized, supposedly scientifically oriented rational *anthropoi*) don't know everything, but – or precisely because of it – what we don't know is still worth our care, be it the Western concept of nature or other natures and other humans.

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[ii] "Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.'" (Breton, 1960, p. 11).

[iii] Viveiros de Castro apparently used the story already in the 1990s but the precise history of this motive in his writing is quite irrelevant for whatever I am trying to do.

[iv] I believe David Graeber is partially correct when he criticizes Viveiros de Castro's usage of the term "Western" as problematic since most of the "Western science" was developed outside of Europe and "[m]ost scientific research is no longer being conducted by Euro-Americans at all" (2015, 21). Nevertheless, I am going to use the term to designate the ways of thinking that are typical of international scholars and scientists, as well as most other people who have gone through the educational systems heavily influenced (or imposed) by Euro-American hegemony.

[v] Merleau-Ponty certainly wasn't after any romantic 'noble savage' ideal. I consider Vilaça's comments to be a critique of attempts to integrate phenomenology into anthropology, rather than an apt analysis of phenomenology itself.

[vi] I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me. The examples include cited texts by Viveiros de Castro, Vilaça, Pedersen, and the text by Guilherme Orlandini Heurich (2007) that I will touch upon later.

[vii] In this text, I am assuming like Viveiros de Castro does (e.g. 2014, 52n14) that the soul, mind, and consciousness have been occupying the same or very similar position throughout the Western history.

[viii] Renaud Barbaras is not convinced by the reasoning in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty is allegedly still trapped in the duality between consciousness and the body. Because consciousness is incarnated and therefore opaque, the Other is a possibility, but not a necessity (Barbaras 2004, 33–40; see also 2008, 71ff.). After all, it was Merleau-Ponty himself who was not entirely happy with some aspects of his second book, judging from his working note from July 1959: "The problems posed in Ph.P. are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'-'object' distinction" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 200; 1964b, 250).

[ix] Since the term *homo sapiens* was first used at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and this text also deals with events that happened in the beginning of the 16th century, it is inevitably anachronistic. However it is the easiest possible Western-centered referent in this case.

[x] For an introduction to the Ontological Turn, see e.g. Paleček and Risjord, 2013; Farquhar et al., 2014; Heywood, 2017; Jensen, 2017; Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017.

[xi] "As various ethnographers have noted (unfortunately too often only in passing), virtually all peoples of the New World share a conception of the world as composed of a multiplicity of points of view." (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 55).

[xii] While the political only includes anthropous, the cosmopolitical has broader ambitions of including other elements of nature/s (see Latour, 2004; Stengers, 2010; 2011; for a critique, see Blok 2020). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

[xiii] Viveiros de Castro tends to reduce Western thinking to simplified Cartesianism. Solipsism surely is an important philosophical problem and it is probably mirrored in the Western ways of treating non-*anthropina* animals in the sense that many people condition the better treatment of animals precisely by them having "souls" or "minds." However, I argue that the phenomenological insight is a better description of everyday life.

[xiv] Even though as was pointed out to me, Europeans might have looked quite weird, if they had armory or heavy European clothes (see Goddard 2022).

[xv]Needless to say, it is obviously a very different anthropomorphism than the one identified by Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1998, 2014, etc.