

# Review

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2015. *Metafísicas Canibais*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify. 280 p.

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It is fitting that a historian should review a work of philosophy written self-consciously by an anthropologist. For the project Eduardo Viveiros de Castro outlines in his introduction to a Borgesian book as yet unwritten sounds a call to a new effort to decolonize knowledge across disciplines. He names this project- for which the present book serves as “a synopsis, almost a press-release” (19)- Anti-Narcissus, an attempt to tear down “Narcissus from the role of patron saint or tutelary spirit of anthropology” (25). For those dismayed by the quietist, even nihilistic turn that the social sciences took in the throes of acknowledging their own implication in colonial projects, this alone is invigorating. (History faced its own version of this challenge: witness the case of Subaltern Studies, where the attack from postcolonial theory on the idea that the subaltern could be represented proved nearly fatal to a fecund historiographical project.) Anti-Narcissus offers us freedom from the debilitating (and Euro-centric) conclusion that in the study of the Other, the anthropologist is doomed to see Self: instead, anthropological theory consists in “versions of indigenous practices of knowledge” (24). More radical is the premise that such indigenous practices, as anthropological theory, is the ground of philosophy, thus far the preserve of Western epistemology, or, put another way, “the Occidental soul” (23).

The book demonstrates this through Amerindian perspectivism, the notion that all beings possess an undifferentiable soul, such that difference, the particularity of point of view, is in the body. For those who have followed the author’s ground-breaking work on the Araweté, much of what follows is familiar. He then shows the challenge Amerindian multinaturalism poses to Western assumptions regarding the duality of nature (unmarked, universal) and culture (particular) and the ontological order between human and

non-human. Moreover, Amerindian notions of affinity as predation, most clearly expressed in the enemy-centric ritual of cannibalism, upends Western intuitions of the split between Self and Other.

If *Anti-Narcissus* recalls Deleuze and Guattari's landmark 1972 text, *Anti-Oedipus*, Viveiros de Castro unpacks the allusion explicitly in the following section. To the rhizomatic epistemologies through which Deleuze and Guattari sought to escape the oppressive binaries of Western thought, he counters the philosophical possibilities afforded by multinaturalism as "a new image of thought" (112). Here, his interest is not only in their philosophy of multiplicity, but in the role becoming plays in shifting the terms of filiation and alliance in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. If *Anti-Oedipus* marked filiation as intensive and alliance as extensive, by the tenth plateau on *Becoming-Animal*, alliance is not social reproduction but transformation, perhaps best exemplified in the ways sorcery refuses the identification of man with nature but instead transforms both. Moreover, in the shift in emphasis from capitalism to the state in the work, the relative emphasis of filiation and alliance shifts too: "All filiation is imaginary, say the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*. To which we may add: and all filiation projects a State, is a filiation of the State. Amazonian intensive alliance is an alliance against the State (...in homage to Pierre Clastres)" (206). What Amazonian thought reveals is a possibility that Deleuze and Guattari miss in their shift from filiation/production to alliance/becoming: the simultaneity of both intensive and extensive alliances and filiations. In his reading, Viveiros de Castro (re)turns in the last section to Claude Lévi-Strauss, noting that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming exists between his "logics of serial-sacrificial and totemic-structural: the imaginary identification between human and animal, on the one hand, a symbolic correlation between social and natural differences on the other" (184). In doing so, he fulfills the promise of his introductory chapters of rescuing from his later works the post-structuralist gestures that would come to undo Lévi-Strauss own structuralist project.

Even this brief summary must suggest the richness and pleasures of Viveiros de Castro's engagement with Western theory. But herein lies the disquiet: a sense of the creeping capitulation, however unwilling, to Eurocentrism. It seems neither accidental nor incidental that the work was published in French first. The politics of knowledge of the publication and *consumption* of this book suggest the ways in which this remains a press-release,

not yet a blueprint, for Anti-Narcissus. Consider Bruno Latour's recent Gifford Lectures: borrowing not a little from multinaturalism but ostensibly a dialogue with the Scottish James Lovelock, he acknowledges only in passing the anthropological theory of Viveiros de Castro and ignores almost entirely the silent contribution of "the indigenous practices of knowledge" which was its object. Yet again, European thought cannibalizes its Other, (re)producing itSelf upon the erasure of that Other.

This eventuality may have been circumvented by a more radical commitment to Amerindian *ontology*, as opposed to Western *epistemology*. When the author proclaims, "*Por fim, muito se falou do corpo neste livro*" (259), one is surprised: in his focus on mythology, there is in fact rather little exploration of the *embodied* practices of knowledge that might characterize Amerindian experience. Certainly, his relative lack of engagement with this critique from other ethnographers of Amazonian peoples, evident in the selective bibliography, is troubling.

The real problem may be in his incomplete exploration of Roy Wagner's work as a foundation for Anti-Narcissus. The maxim he quotes- "Every understanding of another culture is an experiment with one's own"- is borne out here: his particular (if contested) understanding of Amerindian culture allows him to experiment with Western thought dazzlingly. But, if Anti-Narcissus is to be fulfilled, we must acknowledge in some methodological way the same possibility for the Amerindians in this co-production of knowledge. In his laudable attempt to take Amerindian thought seriously, Viveiros de Castro ends up ignoring how Amerindians, like us, experiment with, invent, stand at ironic distance to their own (and our) culture. Amerindian cosmology, in his version, seems curiously static, with no politics that might (productively) interfere with our use of it to re-invent the terms of our politics of capital and state- though Amerindian experience was and is still shaped by both. What might a philosophy resting not on Amerindian cosmology, but Amerindian cosmopolitics, look like? If Fabian showed us out of the cul-de-sac of the denial of coevalness (22), perhaps the next step to Anti-Narcissus is to recognize our implicit monopoly of the right to historical change through the ethnographic encounter.