COSMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVISM IN AMAZONIA AND ELSEWHERE

Four lectures given in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, February-March 1998

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

Introduction by Roy Wagner
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CONTENTS

About this text 7

Facts force you to believe in them; perspectives encourage you to believe out of them.
An introduction to Viveiros de Castro’s magisterial essay 11
Roy Wagner (University of Virginia)

1. Cosmologies: perspectivism 45
   Perspectivism in Amazonia and elsewhere 47
     Perspectivism in the literature: some examples 49
   Ethnographic context 53
   Theoretical context 60
     Cosmology 61
     Cognition 67
   Words 71
     Subject and object 71
     Body and soul 71
     Perspective 74
     Animal 78

2. Culture: the universal animal 83
   Animism, or the projection thesis 84
     Problems with projection 89
   Ethnocentrism, or the rejection thesis 94
     The subject as such: from substantive to perspective 97

3. Nature: the world as affect and perspective 105
   The object as such: why a perspective is not a representation 106
     Cartesian animals and Turing machines: from no mind to no body 118
   The subject as object: from solipsism to cannibalism 120
4. Supernature: under the gaze of the other | 131  
   Saving the appearances | 132  
   The other side: do ontological dualisms exist? | 138  
   The death of Umoro | 143  
   Metamorphosis | 145  
   The object as subject: I am a person myself, too | 148  
   Conclusion: ontologies, from simple-minded to full-bodied | 151  

Bibliography | 155
These lectures contain the first English language rendering of an article that was written in 1996 and published in Brazil that same year. While being translated into English (Viveiros de Castro 1998), the article mutated into the backbone of a longer text that I read, in four installments, at the Cambridge Department of Social Anthropology in 1998. It was my intention to later consolidate and expand these lectures in a detailed monograph. Since such a work, over the past thirteen years, has not yet managed to emerge from the womb, and perhaps may never do so, I accepted an invitation from HAU to publish the lectures’ original content in the Masterclass Series. That content appears here, departing in no significant way from the typescript deposited at the Haddon Library in April of 1998. Any change found in the text can be almost entirely attributed to the thorough copy editing and rectification of my defective English, a process carried out by Bree Blakeman and Holly High, whom I thank. I deleted only a few passages that I today judge infelicitous, and I restored a few sentences that I had suppressed in the original typescript.

The lectures circulated, in their “Haddon version,” among a number of colleagues who worked at the time on similar themes. One of these colleagues was Philippe Descola, whose comprehensive treatise Par-delà nature et culture, published in 2005, carries out a sustained dialogue with the material that I presented in Paris on three or four occasions between 1995 and 2001. This is not the appropriate context for a return to the dialogue with Descola, which, in truth, has never fallen silent (Latour 2009). Nor do I have the intention of intervening in the many other debates ignited by the arguments outlined in the lectures and in several subsequent articles. For that very reason, I have not added any references to materials published after 1998. HAU’s gesture, here, aims at documenting one of the earliest stages in the articulation of the theme of Amerindian perspec-
tivism, or multinatural perspectivism, a theme whose repercussions in the discipline proved somewhat surprising (at least to me).

I have also not filled the text’s obvious bibliographic lacunae, which result from faulty scholarship. One such omission that cries out for remediation—a remediation I strove to provide in later works—is the nearly-complete absence of any reference to Roy Wagner’s The invention of culture (1975). I only perceived this book’s relevance to my argument at a later date. Another instance, only slightly less embarrassing, is the lack of a closer engagement with The gender of the gift (1988) and other works of Marilyn Strathern, in which the theme of the exchange of perspectives had already been masterfully developed.

The only change worthy of note is the restoration of a passage from the first lecture—the subsections “Cosmology” and “Cognition”—that was not included in the version deposited in the Haddon Library. This passage was initially omitted because, at the time, it consisted of a string of half-baked paragraphs written in a mix of Português-English, which were quickly glossed over in my oral presentation. The restored passage has had its Portuguese segments translated by Gregory Duff Morton, whom I thank (again!).

In the Haddon version, I give thanks to the following colleagues: Stephen Hugh-Jones, Marilyn Strathern, Peter Gow, Philippe Descola, Bruno Latour, Michael Houseman, Tânia S. Lima, Aparecida Vilaça, Marshall Sahlins, Tim Ingold, Martin Holbraad, Morten Pedersen, Carrie Humphrey, Peter Rivière, Joanna Overing. Here I would like to also acknowledge the Cambridge Department of Social Anthropology for the warm welcome with which they honoured me, and for their highly stimulating engagement, which opened new intellectual perspectives for me. With reference to the present moment, I must thank HAU’s Editor-in-Chief, Giovanni da Col, who suggested that these lectures be published in HAU’s Masterclass Series and that Roy Wagner be invited to introduce them, and I must also thank Justin Shaffner, who actually talked me into it, Stéphane Gros, HAU’s Managing Editor, Carla Brkvovic, Mylene Hengen, Juliette Hopkins, Henrik Hvenegaard, Luis Felipe Rosado Murillo, and Philip Swift.

I warn that some of the positions expressed in these lectures no longer correspond exactly to what I think, or, at least, to the way in which I would express myself today. The only virtue of their first official publication, insofar as I can name myself judge of the matter,
comes from the fact that they now serve as foundation for a heretofore-unpublished introduction by Roy Wagner, whose generosity exceeds the limits of any possible acknowledgement from me. It will not be the first time that the preface is worth much more than the book.
A tour-de-force in the anthropology of ours and other cosmologies. The first official version of the lessons which sparked one of the most influential anthropological movements of the twenty-first century. Four lectures given in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, February-March 1998

“Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's seminal lectures on cosmological perspectivism provide a careful and highly innovative introduction to many themes that have become central to the ontological turn in anthropology, including multiversalism against multiculturalism, transformation/exchange versus creation/production, and performativity replacing representation. They offer invaluable insight into an anthropology operating in a space where we have been neither modern nor primitive.”

——Casper Bruun Jensen, Associate Professor, IT University of Copenhagen, author of Ontologies for developing things: making health care futures through technology (Sense 2010)

“One can think of the particular turn of thinking we associate with anthropology as a concerte calibration of two scales of alterity: one that plots difference on geo-cultural coordinates, from one society to another, and one that measures distances on the terrain of the imagination, from thought to thought. Anthropologists translate ethnographic alterities into intensities of argument, transfiguring the aporia of 'culture shock' in the awe of brilliant thinking. This is an image I learnt from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's 1998 lectures, which I attended as a graduate student. Concertedly blowing our mind over four weeks—the effect of the lectures on me and others at the time was nothing short of psychotropic—Viveiros' intense anthropological wit transposed us to Amazonia and—but mainly as—elsewhere. By way of a kind of guided reverse engineering, the brillance of Viveiros' argument was made visible as a function of the intensities of Amazonian and (or 'as') other ways of living. In the process, anthropology itself was made visible as a form of living dedicated to just that: making other forms of living visible; which is to say imaginable, conceivable.”

——Martin Holbraad, University College London, author of Truth in motion: the recursive anthropology of Cuban divination (Chicago 2012)

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (b. 1951) is Professor of social anthropology at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro. He has been Simón Bolívar Chair of Latin American Studies at Cambridge University (1997-98) and Directeur de recherches at the C.N.R.S. (2000-2001). His publications include From the enemy's point of view (Chicago 1992), A inconstância da alma selvagem (São Paulo 2002), Métaphysiques cannibales (Paris 2009) and The inconstancy of the indian soul (Chicago 2011).