

The Bee Lecture: How Amerindian Perspectivism Psychoanalyzed the Western Symbolic Order and its Historicity and Set a Precedent for a New Kind of Politics.

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ABSTRACT: “The Bee Lecture” is an essay/performance that attempts to make a consistent representation or sketch of Viveiros de Castro’s anthropological description of Amerindian cosmology, which he calls perspectivism, through the persona of ‘the Bee.’ Perspectivism serves as a jumping board for an exploration of performance and some of the implications that perspectivism has for our historical moment of crisis vis-à-vis climate change, mass extinction, and the violent appropriation of nature in the capitalocene (Jason Moore). Walter Benjamin’s critique of modern historicity and Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic concept of the Real allow for a theoretical staging of the non-human gaze as a performative challenge to the Western symbolic order. I pinpoint an equivalence, between perspectivist equivocation and the experience of transference in psychoanalysis, to argue for the need and possibility of a cure from the Western denial of nature’s gaze. I begin by locating in the language driven culture/nature duality the sign of a repression. Following Benjamin, I suggest that the avoidance of nature’s gaze is tantamount to a delusional game, called progress and/or historicity, that is disconnected from species life and a redemptive History. The theoretical conflation of the non-human, the Real, and History allows me to compare Western and Amerindian metaphysics and contrast their approach to the (Lacanian) Real. I conclude that a perspectivist metaphysics of becoming *with* the Other as one approaches the Real, is a radical political alternative that can end the impasse of the Western political and historicist transcendence of nature.

KEYWORDS: Animism, perspectivism, performance, anthropocentrism, non-human, nature, Viveiros de Castro, Lacan, the Real, symbolic order, ontology, political ecology, sociality.

Our abortive actions are actions which succeed, those of our words which come to grief are words which own up.
—Jacques Lacan, *Les écrits*.¹

La ventura va guiando nuestras cosas mejor de lo que acertáramos a desear.
—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*.²

The Bee lecture attempts to make a consistent representation or sketch of Viveiros de Castro’s anthropology, and use it as a jumping board for an exploration of performance and some of the implications that perspectivism has for our historical moment of crisis vis-à-vis climate change, mass extinction, and the violent appropriation of nature in the capitalocene (Moore). The persona of the Bee, implicated in these issues, takes advantage of the possibilities that perspectivism opens for interspecies communication, and uses it as a theoretical tool to expose the flaws of our epoch. The Bee is not concerned with the problem of our human empathy towards non-humans, nor seeks to imagine a utopia of ecological human to non-human relationships (Cull Ó Maoilearca; Haraway). It wants instead

to modify paradigms that affect our understanding of sociality. It is therefore concerned with political philosophy. At issue is the question of how a radical political ecology would depend on interspecies sociality and how sociality in general expresses an order of perception of the (human and non-human) Other. Viveiros de Castro’s account of perspectivism puts us at the center of this conversation.

The Relative Native

Viveiros de Castro arrives to his description of perspectivism through an effort to break with the anthropologist advantage vis-à-vis whom she considers the Other. The native’s alterity separates the anthropologist from her ‘object’ of study and, in her willingness to be ‘true,’ the anthropologist ends up knowing “much too much about the native before the game even starts; she predefines and circumscribes the possible worlds expressed by this other’ and her participant observation ends up falsifying primitive participation” (*The Relative Native* 47). Viveiros de Castro’s proposed solution may seem counterintuitive: to engage in a descriptive practice that

translates another's vision in one's own terms, however mundane that description ends up being. This he finds preferable to an exotification that separates the Other from an implied universal and/or scientific subject. Description thus establishes a relationality that can serve as foundation to intercultural mutations, and our own alteration as well. An anthropological description, and that is what perspectivism is, is itself an expression of our relationality to animist and Amazonian cosmivision.

Perspectivism can therefore be conceived as a performative act of encounter and reciprocity. The terms of this encounter are not managed through a logic of correspondence, which would always privilege one's own views and prejudices, but under the umbrella of equivalence. For example, Viveiros de Castro suggests that the "the Amazonian perspective is just as interesting a philosophical challenge as comprehending the system of Leibniz" (50). In this context perspectivism needs to be performed in order to assert and affirm this quality of being taken seriously—only in performance, it seems, can we have proof of its relationality and existence. Viveiros de Castro frames this need within a discussion of the relationship of theory with practice (in his field, anthropology) and the imperative to "think of theoretical activity in a radical continuity with practice, that is, as an immanent [...] dimension of the intellect embodied in action" (51). It is through a communicative practice that theory can circulate. My first performative act will therefore be a citation of the author's own summary of perspectivism's "ideas and practices:"

This cosmology imagines a universe peopled by different types of subjective agencies, human as well as nonhuman, each endowed with the same generic type of soul, that is, the same set of cognitive and volitional capacities. The possession of a similar soul implies the possession of similar concepts, which determine that all subjects see things in the same way. In particular individuals of the same species see each other (and each other only) as humans see themselves, that is, as beings endowed with human figure and habits, seeing their bodily and behavioral aspects in the form of human culture. What changes when passing from one species of subject to another is the 'objective correlative,' the referent of these concepts: what jaguars see as 'manioc beer' (the proper drink of people, jaguar-type or otherwise), humans see as 'blood.' Where we see a muddy salt-lick on a river bank, tapirs see their big ceremonial house, and so on. Such difference of perspective [...] is located in the bodily differences between species, for the body and its affections [...] is the site and instrument of ontological differentiation and referential disjunction (*Relative Native* 58-59).

Through description the anthropologist becomes a "relative native" who can affirm an affinity with the Amerindian cosmology, if only to conceive of perspectivism as a possible World view for the non-native Westerner as well. The Bee performance joins the anthropologist in the perspectivist attempts to solve a contradiction and challenge that anthropology has historically run into: to describe, as 'not other,' societies who appear to western societies as 'other.'

The procedure of this essay/performance is to work with various objects: a) a performance titled "The Bee Lecture," which I first enacted via Zoom in the context of the Border Environment Conference with the help of comic strip slides, and appearing here in their new version (Loayza); b) an anthropological concept, that is, perspectivism, and; c) my own theoretical expansion which draws from Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts and Benjamin's critique of historicity. The Bee Lecture performs an encounter between a bee and anthropocentric humans, represented by an American academic audience gathered at a conference titled Border Environments. I enact the bee, not to tell my 'natural history' or story, nor to induce a suspension of disbelief in favor of a framed reality within a shared ontology of beings, be they human or non-humans. Rather, I take the perspectivist approach of drawing from a shared epistemology to make the audience the subject of my interaction through a "semiotics of 'invention' and 'convention'" (Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* 45). In a sort of "reverse anthropology," I subject my audience to what would be a perspectivist gaze (45). What is at issue in this gaze is what is the social relation that it represents, in the sense of actualization in the instance of encounter. That gaze remains invisible within our lived ontologies, since we know of no 'social' relationship with bees. I will argue that the anthropocentric gaze has somehow invented nature as that which can be seen while being unable to see us.

I would like to emphasize that this essay never ceases to be a performance, in the sense that it talks at you and refers back to the presence of that Bee who appeared at the conference to 'lecture' its academic audience and took the functions of psychoanalyst and shaman. The practice of putting words in quotation marks are integral to a modality of discourse where some meanings are already becoming something else. The quixotic title of this essay/performance adds another layer of characterization to the bee as it argues and challenges our Western imaginary and demands to be taken seriously. The figure of the Quixote may exist at a liminal space of interchanging gazes between the Bee and its audience. The Quixote may function as a "transitional object," or persona mediating the failure and/or success of this attempt at human/non-human intersubjectivity. The choice of the Quixote as a transitional object, as defined by Winnicott, will become clearer as I advance my argument, and the Quixote is subliminally used by us, for being "part of a shared reality" (118). In the spirit of performance, I declare it opportune to introduce the Bee, with its Brechtian song (figure 1).



Figure 1: *Song of The Migrant Bee.*

The Song of the Migrant Bee presents the Bee, not in a context of encounter with humans, but of its own life of forced migration by commercial beekeepers and the almond cultivation industry. Bees sent to pollinate almonds in California are suffering massive deaths due to pesticides and monoculture while affecting the ecosystem of local bees. These European bees die through the process of mechanization of agriculture, where the activity of being a bee is being deployed and exploited ("Like Sending Bees to War"). The bees do not go on strike, and humans count on the bees' continuous agreement to continue to be bees, wherever they are, in order to incorporate them into a human agricultural activity. Bees do take part in a social relationship with humans, but that sociality is invisible and ignored. The Brechtian aspect of the song lies in the presentation of being a 'good' bee as not 'good' for the bee. The critique extends to the contradictions between means and ends of society. The bees contribute through pollination to the survival of the human species, but if the death of bees is provoked by their pollinating activity, then their bee activity is also threatening the human species. Bees are no different than humans: human migrant workers are forced to come work temporarily in U.S. fields, because they want to provide for their families and are willing to sacrifice with hard work and unfair conditions if it means sustenance and hope for the family's future. Like with the bee, agri-business counts on the migrant workers to be human and make sacrifices, even unfair ones, for their family—it is their perceived human behavior, in the first place, that allows for their exploitation and dehumanization (they are not allowed to strike). The bee allows me as a performer to present the issue of interspecies communication as relevant to 'human' social and political issues, including violence and exploitation.

Setting the scene: challenging the Western dichotomy of culture-nature.

The concept of nature is derivative of an anthropocentric perspective, that separates the human (culture) from the non-human (nature). Once we undo this separation, we may encounter a perspectivist world made of forms of life, each an expression of a particular vitality at their core that creates a world in their own modality. In order to conceive of this "other" cosmology, Viveiros de Castro cautions against an epistemologic understanding of native worldviews which would leave our own ontological traditions and frameworks intact, placing the natives in a different epistemological relation to nature. The modality of being in the world is best perceived from within, as an ontology that potentially destabilizes (as it should) "an absolute ontological monarchy where the referential unity of nature is imposed" (*Cannibal Metaphysics* 54). The Bee lecture-performance attempts to place itself within this ontology of modalities of beings, which can see modalities of being in the Western human, the native, and the non-human modality (of the bee). It is useful to conceive the performance itself as being at the intersection of modalities, while projecting an ontology that challenges Western views.

Nature is an ontological category that corresponds to a belief that human and non-human interiorities are different. This ontology is not universal, as anthropologist Phillipe Descola makes clear in his distinction of naturalism and analogism from animism and totemism. The first two are based on the belief of dissimilar interiorities between beings, while the last two are founded on the premise of similar interiorities between beings (122). The dissimilar interiority of the non-human, proper to the naturalist perspective, erases the gaze of the non-human towards the human and founds a phenomenology of nature as primarily endowed with physicality, as something with no eyes or soul. In the Bee Lecture, nature's gaze must therefore be enacted, or performed by me by seeking a reciprocation of my gaze. The performance qua academic lecture presentation becomes an analogical tool to direct your attention to me, while I introduce myself as... a bee. But I shall not regard this as a performance per se, but an opportunity to have my appearance translate the 'real' that you see as a new kind

of relation. The procedure is an equivocation, that anthropologists like Viveiros de Castro cast as a mode of controlled translation leaning towards the native's perspective— here, the bee wants to be seen as 'human,' not 'a bee' by his audience, because it *is* human (*The Relative Native* 57). Therefore I interpellate my audience as my fellow humans, while appearing recognizably human, with no mask (no apparent contradiction here)— and, as a 'human,' I proceed to 'assent' to my identity of bee for this lecture—I agree that I am indeed a bee, and by putting on a mask, I suggest that it is (the humanity of) the bee that 'my fellow humans' have refused to see. Like in Baudelaire poetic address to his hypocrite readers, I say that there is no need to introduce myself or any Other if I appear to you as your kin, in the most intimate way: "*mon semblable, –mon frère*" [my twin, –my kin] (5). There is agreement because our presence and reciprocal gaze speaks for itself. Once the equivocation performs a discrepancy within a unified perception, I can deconstruct the semantic scaffold that created the illusion of "real" perception and present a truer perception.

The imaginary and symbolic orders

I implied above that the Bee Lecture is not about the Bee but about my audience's naturalistic gaze and phenomenological blindness to the non-human gaze. This intention draws me away from the framing of performance as representation and its appeal to the 'real,' and leads me instead towards the symbolic and imaginary order. In Lacanian terms, we move away from psychology and towards psychoanalysis, that is, the realm of an intervention. How does an analysis progress? asks Lacan, "if not by the interventions that push the subject to objectivize itself, to take himself as object" (*Les écrits* 230). The formation of the subject occurs as a process of developmental interventions like that of the mirror stage, where the subject identifies with their mirror image, and thus objectifies itself in relation to the Other (realm of intersubjectivity) and the world surrounding them. The subject's narcissistic gaze forms an image of an ideal self or imaginary that will inform their incorporation into a language-driven symbolic order. Whereas the narcissistic self will first demand satisfaction from the Other as an extension of itself, language intervenes to impose an intersubjective order and limitations to our desires. The Lacanian concept of the Real refers to what remains unrepresentable within the imaginary and symbolic realms but remains constitutive in the function of our desires and drives (Johnston; Felluga). The absence of a bee gaze in the imaginary and symbolic orders of my staged encounter is what informs my intervention, presenting the Bee in a human image first, and calling myself human, engaging in this way the audience's imaginary.

As I proceed to expose my credentials of being a 'Bee' lecturer, invited to participate in the conference, I recur to the symbolic order of intellectual and institutional exchange in the university system to sustain my presence. My scientific species name and my bee mask are then donned as objects of equivocation, introducing my bee gaze as legitimate or intrusive at best, or as fraud or laughingstock at worst. The performance's success would be measured according to higher instability or wavering of the equivocation, in which case the interaction of the three realms in the "borromean knot" of the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real could be sensed or detected (Johnston; Felluga). Another measure taken from a psychoanalytic context would be the realization of an instance of transference on the part of the audience—a consciousness that results, according to Lacan, from a release of its resistance in realizing "suddenly the fact of [the bee's or the analyst's] presence" (*Les écrits* 51). It is not a matter of objective presence but of the presence of intersubjectivity, and all the mysteries that this phenomenology might entail. The presence of the actor, in this case, mediates between a readily accepted performer audience transaction and a repressed truth potentially revealed in recognition of the presence of a 'bee' as a *human* Other (figure 2).



Figure 2: *Invitation Accepted*.³

I am hinting that recognition, in the psychoanalytic process, is a step towards a cure. In this hypothesis, we are treating a symptom affecting all of modern humanity, and therefore related to a dysfunctional symbolic order, and the need to go “beyond nature and culture” (Descola). In his book, Descola delves into anthropological and philosophical suggestions towards a redescription of nature and culture and the continuities between the two that could undermine their distinctions. I decide to rather expand on my framing of a Western symbolic order as in need of psychoanalytic intervention and a cure.

A symbolic order without nature

Western ontology does not *recognize* the non-human because its imaginary symbolic order has a built-in blind-spot. We understand this blindness as an inability to see an Other of the subject beyond the human species. This occurs in the realm of a symbolic order that names an entity with no gaze towards the human species; this eyeless entity is ‘nature.’ Much like in the scopical drive described by Laura Mulvey’s account of the male gaze towards women in film narrative, the concept of nature *screens* our perception of the non-human Other to allow for a privileged contemplation of the world as an infinite physical remainder, a leftover or debris of what would be its actual presence in a perspectivist ontology. The wasteland of ‘nature’ leads, for example, to a belief that nature can absorb the waste of our modern industries. Nature is a mythical depository of matter and animality from which humans can feed their demand much like in the narcissistic imaginary during the subject’s development. Nature as leftover, or surplus physicality, is ultimately responsible for our demands. If we look at how thinkers of the Enlightenment conceived human nature, we can define some of the modern demands on nature accordingly. Following Corning’s summary: human nature is imagined as selfish and power-hungry by Hobbes, as individualistic yet cooperative by Locke, and as benign and community-oriented by Rousseau (23-24). These differences do not alter their anthropocentric imaginary. Nature is a necessary myth for the anthropocentric view, because it creates an essence of the human as having the property of a ‘natural freedom’ which is a precondition for the articulation and measure of freedom in modern societies. Nature is therefore the realm of the not-yet-social human being whose freedom is incomplete or disordered before he adapts to the sociality of an exclusively human political State. In this context, the Western symbolic order walls up nature as an alternate or fake Other with no presence that could justify intersubjectivity between this ‘nature’ and ‘humanity.’

The anthropocentric freedom that this nature allows is the mythical foundation of the freedom of the modern State. This freedom may thus be considered primordial in modern identity formation, and in the discourse, language, and sociality that sustains it. The semantic opposition between culture and nature serves as the matrix of modern sociality, founded on a multiplication of exclusions of alternate Others who are dehumanized, which is equivalent to being semantically ‘naturalized.’ The signifier ‘nature’ institutes culture (and, I would argue, science as its subset) as the privileged signifier that multiplies a position of advantage or freedom in relation to more passive and objectified Others. Descola remarks that Montaigne was a rare dissident from the consensus among philosophers of the Enlightenment about the superiority of human agency. Montaigne asserts that “there is [...] no rational likelihood that beasts are forced to do by natural inclination the selfsame things which we do by choice and ingenuity. From similar effects we should conclude that there are similar faculties” (Montaigne 29; Descola 175). The argument rests on the extent that humans and non-humans are free from instinctual or automatic responses, and on the old question of conscience and soul. From a psychoanalytic perspective, one may turn the question around and make it an argument about the rationalization of sociality and its protection from human instincts. The modern symbolic order builds its own protection against a feared human nature, “that old Western oxymoron” (Descola 178). The very sign of ‘nature’ is the mark of a repression, the exchange of a freedom imagined as uncontrollable, because instinctual, for a new kind of freedom. This new freedom deploys power structures (which should not be confused with authority) based on who controls an expanded field of resources (nature) amassed by individuals, classes, or states. In this symbolic order, the language of power and exclusion proliferates (figure 3).

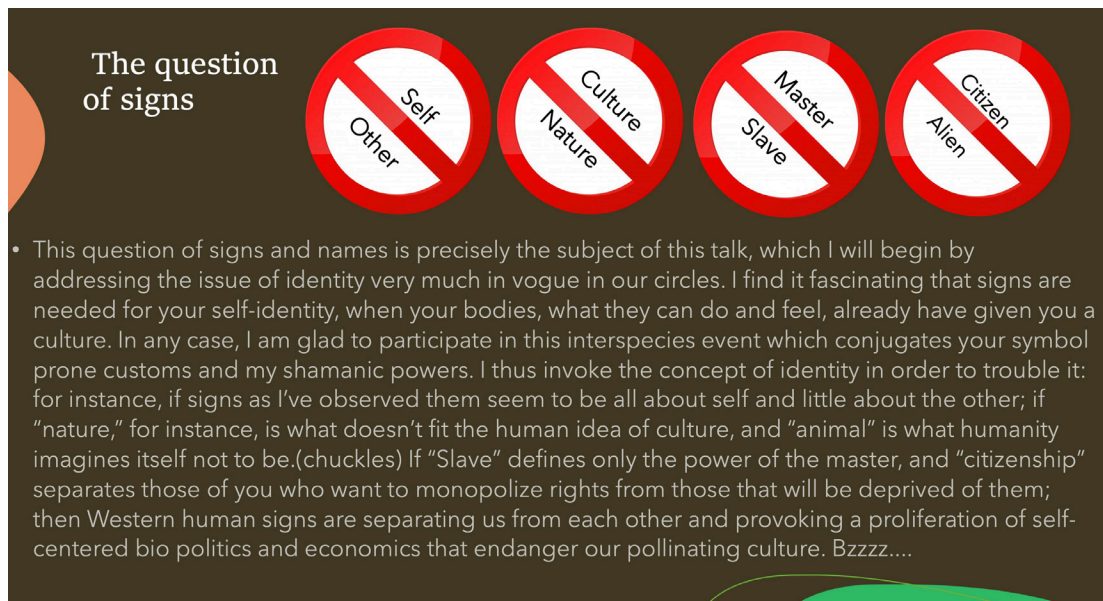


Figure 3: *The Question of Signs.*

The Falling of the masks

The dualities and oppositions that constitute our discourse carry today the symptoms of a historical crisis since the opposing terms already provoke a reaction of shame, anger, defensiveness, or sadness. The narrative and struggle for the rights of forgotten humans and non-humans are as much an expression of shame as a desire for change and a more 'just' society. What a Lacanian psychoanalysis explores is what is on the other side of these emotions and the way to name or characterize what we find there without falling into a subjective reification of affections and moral imperatives (*Les écrits* 238-239). In figure 3 the opposing terms are presented within a sign of interdiction, as if saying 'do not be the master of a slave' or 'do not be the citizen that dehumanizes the alien.' This allows me to locate shame in the term at the top of each opposition: shame or defensiveness at being a master, a citizen, a human subject, as opposed to the non-human 'subject.' I propose that this is not a moral or existential shame but a confrontation with the gaze of these 'Others' who have seen our masks of 'culture' and 'citizenship.' What lies on the other side of shame (or of a reactionary scandal) is the sketching of another imaginary, a different form of identity where I can see myself without a mask, the way that the 'Other' already recognizes me, and under a different name. The performance must engage language in order to gage the limits of our symbolic order in a time of crisis. The semiotic display of oppositions allows us to stage the shameful masks (like two scandalized Ensor masks) that will have to be dropped for our interspecies encounter to occur, and to reveal the gaze lurking behind them. In that desire to remove our masks, we may say that we are all animists (figure 4).

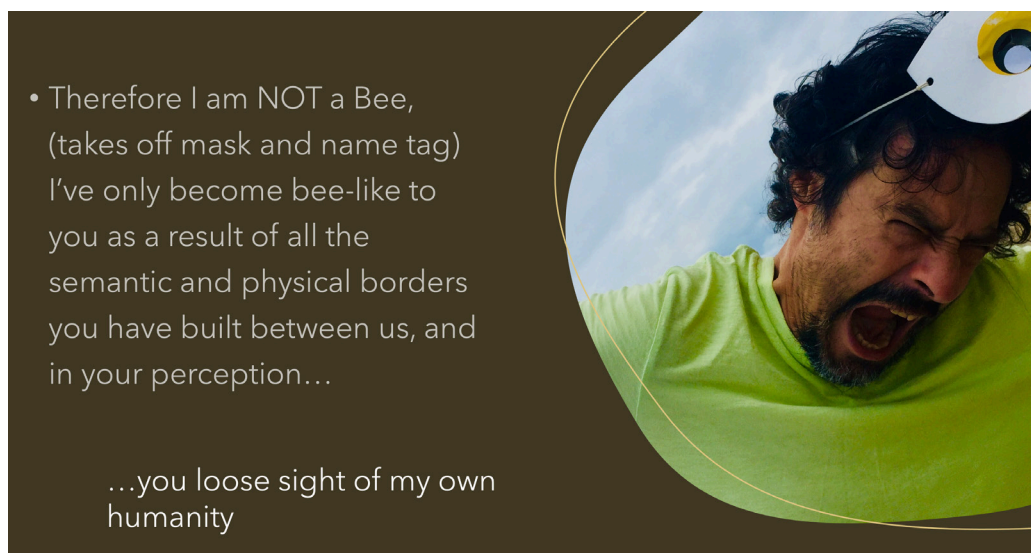


Figure 4: *Removing the Mask.*

History and historicity

The encounter of masks and the recognition of shame results in a need to quiet our language, because language has been seen to build the symbolic order that masks us, to form the imaginary wall that separates humans from non-humans and from human 'Others.' With the masks down we are left with the underside of the oppositions, become multiple and pointing to our shame: a multi-others world, or a multi-slaves world, or multi-natural world, only for lack of a better word. The sociality repressed by the symbolic order returns with inadequate and painful language. What or who was considered non or anti-social multiplies now and socializes itself under the sign of survival, still clamoring for a place as subjects in a society that objectifies them. 'For lack of a better word' in the existing symbolic order translates into 'for lack of a better world' or the inadequacy of the symbolic order itself. To lack a world, or to have the rug of words taken from under our feet means first that we seize to be masters, citizens—and we do not have a culture. Donna Haraway's 'Camille Stories' are an example of the liminality of this moment of mask dropping leading to:

a genre fiction committed to [...] possible futures, and implausibles but real nows. Every Camille Story that [she writes] will make terrible political and ecological mistakes; and every story asks readers to practice generous suspicion by joining in the fray of inventing a bumptious crop of Children of Compost (136).

In spite of a break in our imaginary, we struggle to re-invent our image and re-establish words and language in the linearity of time and history, in order to connect our past mistakes with our present and future healing. There is a persistent anthropocentrism in considering that it is *our* history that is at stake, even while, as in Camille's example, there is a communal impulse to "work with human and non-human partners to heal these [ruined] places [...] and] reshape terran life for an epoch that could follow the deadly discontinuities of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Plantationocene" (137). Such narrative betrays a persistent prejudice, that it is the Human who is at the helm of his history, and that he must continue to colonize and expand the field of his 'responsibility.' What I want to propose here is that the non-human can interpellate the human because they were the first to know about the human. Humans need to *perceive* that they are being seen and known by the non-human. What if the non-human bee really sees through the human, and can tell us that the Homo Sapiens' 'instinct' is to make itself a history, like a dwelling in time?

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin would name this dwelling (in time) historicity, which encloses itself in a mythical totality of a linear progress, and an identity with the 'victors.' This historicity, that Benjamin associates with social democracy and fascism, has a discriminatory perspective on the past,

taking only what fits its narrative, which results in a "weak" messianic power: the only happiness or 'progress' history ultimately celebrates is the one lived in the present. Historicity gives an illusion of the future but is blind to what actually connects humans to their destiny. Counter to this 'history' Benjamin proposes a messianic conception, aligned with the oppressed and described with his own view of historical materialism, that is, one that does away with its false teleological impulses. This effort is an attempt to deconstruct the symbolic dualism of history/barbarism, which parallels the culture/nature opposition shared even by a vulgar Marxism, which fails to recognize the exploitation implied in "the mastery of nature" (258-259). What interests us in relation to our discussion of perspectivism, is where, in Benjamin's view, does a redemptive history originate? Redemptive history cannot have its source in a positivist conscience because it does not have the power to grasp the "infinite complexity" of past and present species life (Schwebel 52). Our perception is further weakened by a conformist dwelling in the continuum of space-time, and a faith that the horrors of history will come and pass. Counter to this sad indolence (acedia), Benjamin proposes the image of a gaze coming from the "angel of history" who, as he looks into our past, perceives the image of "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (257). Still, this encounter is accompanied by misrecognition. Both catastrophe and misrecognition are elements of our state of emergency which Benjamin wants us to grasp with the figure of a storm: "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm [...] irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (258). The storm corresponds to the symbolic order that pushes our appointment with a redemptive history towards an indefinite future which we mistakenly and tragically await from our idea of progress. The implication is that an encounter with our actual History will occur only if we can meet the gaze of the angel without the distraction of expectant 'future' given by the ideology of progress.

The meeting of gazes is what arrests the continuum of time and enables a different perception of our destiny. Benjamin would like us to exercise a monadist discipline of grasping the human condition in a fleeting image that is imprinted in our senses and body as by a meeting with this angel of history. The fleeting image, I propose, points to something beyond representation. This something corresponds to the Lacanian Real, while the fleeting image produces a sensation akin to a tragic, perhaps cathartic experience of human life. Lacan observes that from the point of view of species life we as individuals and societies are already dead, and beyond signification (*Les formations* 464). In this context, progress and its fascisms are a symbolic game, a way of not being seen forging a future without regard for the space-time of species life. The ruse of progress is to treat 'nature' as what is only 'past-perfect,' (what has been) and in that sense without history. In this symbolic order, we are hiding from view hoping to not be found in our game (*Les écrits*

248-251). Perspectivism can or would restore at least an acknowledgment of the game humans are playing with themselves and, at best, engage in new forms of intersubjectivity and symbolic order where the gaze of nature, who can 'see' our game, can modify the stakes of our society. In the grander scheme of life in general, what *has* a future is the non-human, and there lies the human condition, its ultimate historicity, which it only escapes in moments of perceptions of a gaze that reminds us of the traps of the symbolic order.

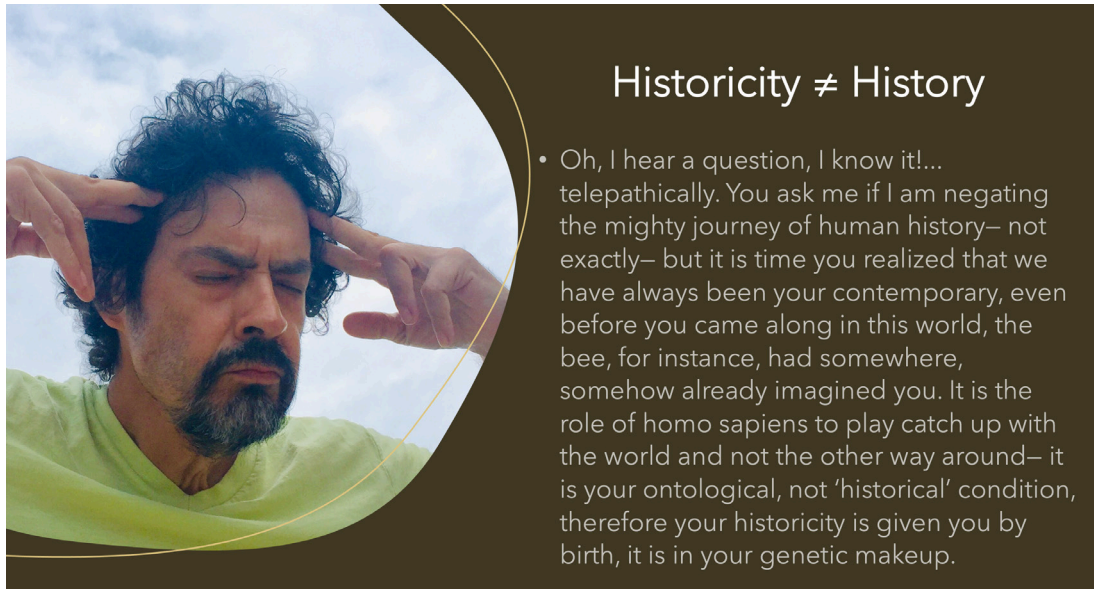


Figure 5: *Historicity ≠ History*

The imaginary of Amazonian perspectivism helps humans engage in intersubjective relations with what we call non-human, and in this way avoid certain traps of the symbolic. According to Amazonian genesis, "in that time there was nothing, but people already existed" (Viveiros de Castro, *Relative Native* 175). This anthropomorphism serves as a reminder that we cannot hide from 'nature' and that 'nature' is engaged in a similar symbolic order with similar rules of the game: we have been known by 'nature' from the beginning, and for that reason it is in our advantage to know 'nature' as well. In fact, it is 'nature' only that can grasp our human condition.

The Lacanian Real and the Real in Perspectivism

In the current state of climate crisis, mass extinction, and fear that our modernity may not continue 'the way it was' and be sustainable, there is a tension between a desire to engage with the "deep world" of nature/culture cooperation and a wish to maintain the privileges of our modernity where we feel 'protected' from 'nature' (Harvey). That tension cannot be released without a reciprocal gaze and a dropping of the masks. A reciprocal unmasking is not a mundane event, for it implies an encounter with the Real, which is not representable yet presents itself as a limit of what can be represented. I borrow Lacan's concept of the Real which he defines as what lies beyond language and the symbolic yet has a role in subjectivation: the Real provokes the lack that makes the subject to be supposed by the Other (symbolic order and regime of sexual difference), and reciprocally makes the subject suppose the Other, as supplement for his lack. In this process the subject finds objects for his (death) drives and search for knowledge (imaginary realm).⁴ Colette Soler indicates that the Real outside of the symbolic ex-sists "on the side of the living being. This is a living being about which we have no idea, which cannot be imagined and about which the symbolic knows nothing—despite the life sciences" (4). We do encounter the Real in the form of trauma or *Tuché*, described by Lacan as a missed encounter with an indescribable intemporal sufferance that constitutes our awaken state, as if still haunted by a dream (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 52-56). The missed encounter is related by Lacan to the human drive to repetition (registered by language), considered an anti-vital phenomenon connected to the perception of death as destiny. Furthermore, repetition is a sign or factor of maladaptation of the human species to its environment resulting in an automation that contrasts with the harmonious relationship of animals to their environment. Jacques Alain Miller, referencing Lacan, remarks:

For instance the way the fly owns a world to itself by apprehending from the environment significant spaces to which it appears gloriously adapted. Adaptation culminates there in harmony. Therefore adaptation, fitting, or, as Lacan argues in "L'étourdit," trait by trait rapport between the Umwelt and the Innenwelt, between the exterior world and the animal's interior world. Thus, a perfect inside/out between the organism and its milieu.

The dropping of masks may be seen as a miss-encounter with the terror of this difference between humans and non-humans. The “perfect inside/out” cannot fit in the Western symbolic order. Experiences of the uncanny, described and observed by Freud, may be related to both the terror of this difference and the human sense of maladaptation that humans must conceal from themselves. Within perspectivism the terror of this difference is not repressed but mitigated by the existence of a mythical event from which the body/soul instabilities of speciation originate. The perspectivist myth leans on the side of the Real by bringing it into the actuality of the present state of things rather than inventing a space-time wall between our ‘natural’ origin and ‘us’ (figure 6).



Figure 6: *Cannibal Metaphysics*

Viveiros de Castro specifies that in perspectivism “mythic discourse registers the movement by which the present state of things is actualized from a virtual, precosmological condition that is perfectly transparent—a chaosmos where the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of beings do not yet conceal each other” (*Cannibal Metaphysics* 67). In the myth, difference is internal to events of metamorphosis from one form of being to another arising from the quality of their virtuality, “their being constitutively irreducible to essences or fixed identities, whether generic, specific, or even individual” (67). The version of an original ‘nature’ that perspectivism presents here is one of “intensive difference that places human/nonhuman difference within each existent” (69). In this chaosmos, which I will call a ‘One nature’ of intensive difference, there is no question of adaptability or animal/human difference.⁵ The mythic movement from ‘nature’ to ‘culture’ will have a different symbolic function (than in Western humanity). It goes from a chaotic One nature to a division of the modalities of nature itself in such a way that while “every mode of existent is human for itself, none of them are human to each other” (69). The resulting ‘one culture’ affirms the humanity or human soul of ‘nature’ in its virtual multiplicity while making humans *relatively* more animal, therefore more adapted. For instance, in this multinatural world, one can conceive of *one* culture consisting in navigating the equivocations of perception and knowledge, where one sees (or knows?) that there is a “mud puddle” and knows (or sees?) that same puddle to be a “grand ceremonial house when viewed by tapirs” (71). Equivocation does not point towards the relativity of perception but towards the weight that our (social) affects and habitus have on our (human) identity. There is no independent self or (self) conscience that can guarantee or confirm our humanity, there is only a conscience of what the body perceives as pertaining to our human sensibility and sociality. The body gives a point of view, but this perception does not represent a difference between humans and non-humans, it is only a difference that lies “in the specificity of the body” (72).⁶ Our own sociality is objectified as a relation of ‘specific bodies’ when (our) bodies are virtually perceived as Other by our own perception or knowledge. For instance, “there is no X that would be blood to one species and beer to another; just a ‘blood/beer’ that from the very start is one of the characteristic singularities or affections of the human/jaguar” (73). In perspectivism, then, the Real, what escapes the symbolic order, is internalized by our own gaze, and is inherent to what the body sees and does, precisely because of what equivocation in our perception says and does not say about our humanity.

In the perspectivist world “appearances deceive because one can never be sure whose or which is the dominant point of view. One can never be sure, that is, which world is in force when one interacts with the Other” (*Relative Native* 182). The Real, therefore, is immanent within the body and is the source of our becoming in a multinatural world. As in the Lacanian Real, the perspectivist Real is signaled by a terrifying limit to the symbolic order, in a missed encounter signaled by the mythical image of the chaosmos of One nature. The missed

encounter is part of our becoming which produces, in our imaginary, the virtual possibility of an *irreversible* becoming non-human (109-110). Since we are always already human, we do not need walls or masks. The world reveals the humanity of our life because we have a body, but, who knows—perhaps our bodies and affects are not human anymore and the world loses its human soul?

The human condition carries a metaphysical stake, for in our being and body we either continue becoming the world or what we become is a dead 'human' world. This stake is shared by a multinatural culture since all beings identify themselves as human while perceiving 'other' species beings as non-human bodies. What is at stake is the maintenance of the reciprocal gaze between beings, whether the interchange of gazes occurs externally, or it is internalized by equivocation, transformation and/or becoming. Survival within the perspectivist symbolic order depends on this metaphysics. Unlike life in the Western symbolic order where survival puts culture against and away from nature—"Good fences make good neighbors" (Frost)—in perspectivism, survival counts on the cultivated affinities between multiple natures. Therefore "every difference is political (because every relation is 'social')" (*Cannibal Metaphysics* 63)-- (figure 7).

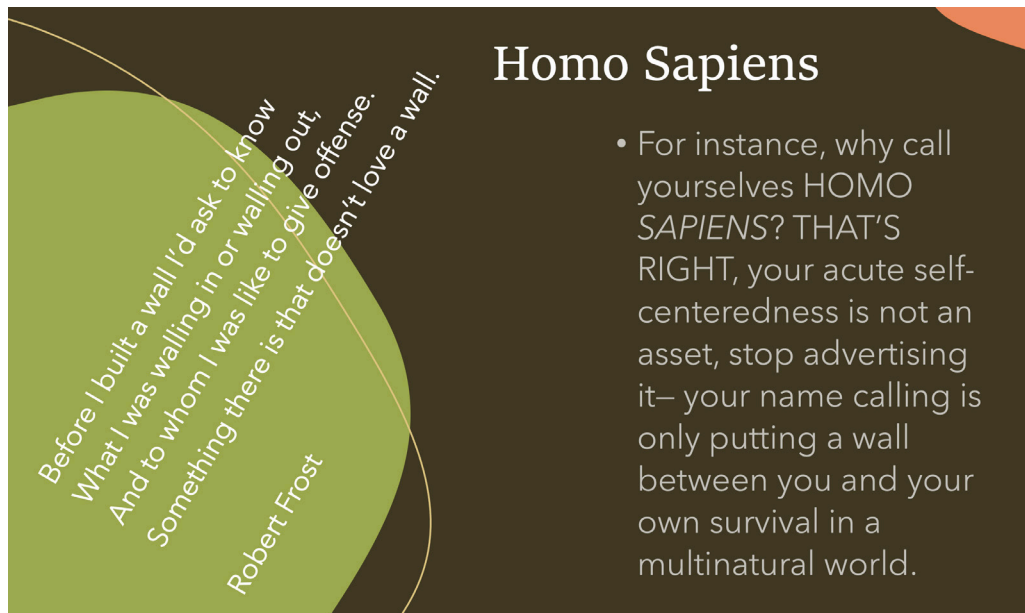


Figure 7: *Homo Sapiens*

One can see, in this Lacanian account, how the perspectivist symbolic order stays close to the Real and works with an intimate difference lurking within and outside. This explains also a reliance on the singularity of ritual and performance to stage and buffer an encounter with the Real and actualize the metaphysics of that symbolic order (figure 8).



Figure 8: *How Do I See You Right Now*

Cannibal metaphysics in parallax

An articulation of the Western symbolic order and the symbolic order of perspectivism through the concept of the Real confirms Lacan's affirmation that the Real cannot be represented. In the Western symbolic order we find an approximation in the impossible inside-and-out symbiosis of the animal and its environment. Perspectivist myth provides the image of chaotic transformations in the chaosmos of 'One nature.' Both images are suggestive of reversible cooptation of one part by the other, in a sort of devouring that is also potentially reciprocal. Whereas the Western order decides to transcend animality as well as its immanence, perspectivism maintains the immanence of potential becoming 'other' in its metaphysics. Viveiros de Castro describes the fear that permeates this metaphysics by comparing the limit case of the Jaguar for the Piro people, who cannot trust the Jaguar because it will kill with disregard for its kinship with humans. This logic of predation, which arises in all encounters with the other, makes fear part of the immanence of being in perspectivism. Interestingly, Viveiros de Castro compares this fear to the one felt by interpellation (in the Althusserian sense) by the police or the State (*Relative Native* 182-184). This leads him to argue that for the Westerner the State is the absence of kinship and is the one that threatens the most, with its gaze of surveillance and laws, to de-humanize him. Practices of ritual and/or symbolic cannibalism by Amazonian groups are ways to control potentially dangerous encounters or reversals of point of view by incorporating the potential antagonist perspective in one's body. It is a form of becoming and appeasement of the Other by creating affinity between bodies: one becomes what one eats. The State and its various molar structures, be they legal, economic, bureaucratic, or mediatic, may limit experience to what is defined in the giant confinement of molar aggregates (Deleuze and Guattari 198). On the other hand, the practice of politics and democracy may be seen as a cannibal practice within the Western symbolic order, where nature has been exiled to an apolitical and non-human realm. In politics one assimilates the State and is able to alter it as well. It is not difficult to see from this analogy how the Western State threatens to dehumanize us whether we are devoured by it or attempt to make it more akin to humanity, since politics lead us to become more like the State itself! Both utopias and dystopias, not to speak of the dreams of conspiracy theories, or post-apocalyptic futures reflect this contradiction, and therefore become nightmarish and soulless—images coming today from climate alarmists themselves (Wallace-Wells 204-16)! If the State has swallowed our nature, we need to take it back, that is, take our bodies back from the State. By way of a culture-nature divide, the Western symbolic order has erected a diminished approach to the Real, mediated by the State. It is the State that comes to haunt us, like an uncanny automaton or a ghostly return of the repressed Real. This demands a different form of politics, one that seeks to be exposed to the gaze of 'nature,' to the Real, with a gaze that can alter the symbolic order sustained by the State (figure 9).

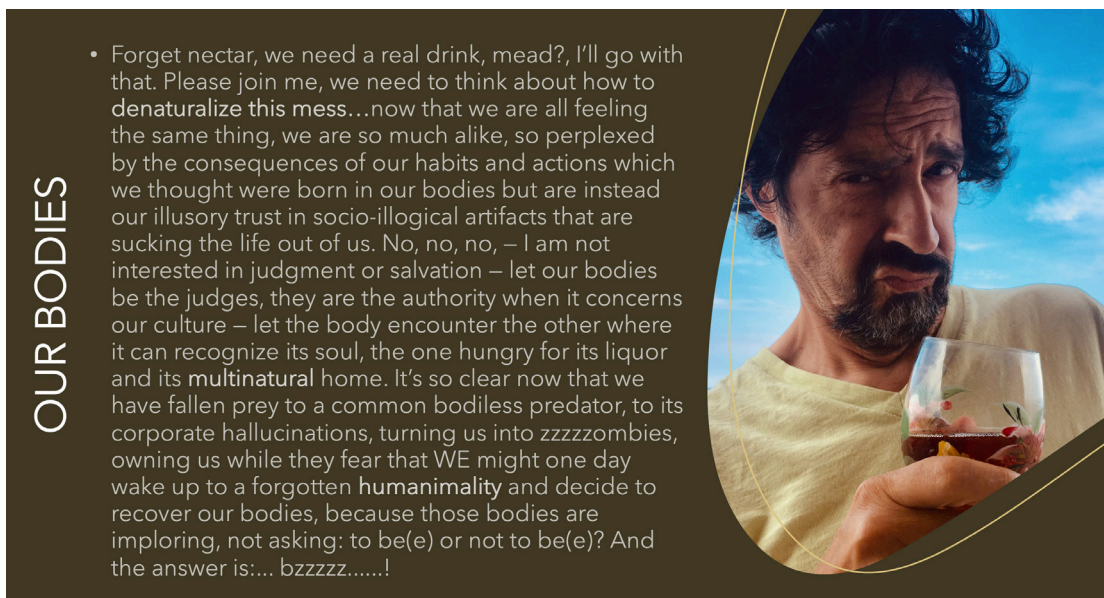


Figure 9: *Our Bodies*.

Conclusion

The Bee Lecture concerns the need for a new politics and therefore stages a human and non-human encounter in search for re-negotiation of sociality. It invokes perspectivism by staging various forms of a gaze that can suspend, if for a fleeting moment, the habits of self-concealment from, and blindness to that same gaze, within the Western symbolic order. Viveiros de Castro's anthropology of descriptive equivocations provides an avenue to relate perspectivist intersubjectivities to the present need to engage the non-human differently as we face climate change and the ravages of the capitalocene. Equivocation gives the Bee performer a performative method to make the audience reciprocate the non-human gaze, and engage in semiotic invention and convention, particularly regarding the culture-nature divide.

The gaze of Benjamin's angel of history helped to establish a link between the historicist ideology of progress, and a Western avoidance of the Real. The Lacanian concept of the Real, as what is unrepresentable, that is, what is sensed as a terrific unknowable 'nature' in the symbolic and imaginary realms, serves to locate the possible approaches or signs of the Real in Western and Amerindian cosmologies. The mode of approach to the Real is identified as crucial to the different ontologies governing the symbolic orders in Perspectivism and the West. A sketch of the mythical origins of na-

ture/culture and human/non-human ontologies reveals a Western illusion of transcendence in relation to the Real that contrasts with an Amerindian internalization of the Real. Western symbolic order seeks to transcend nature as non-human, and establish an alternative dwelling safe from animality, represented by the State. The metaphysics of 'freedom' that pervades life within the State have a weak redemptive power, as noted by Benjamin, because it sets humanity in a historicist and hence entropic race with himself. Viveiros de Castro recognizes in Amerindian cannibal metaphysics a more intimate fear of the Other while opening paths of becoming while looking towards the Real. This approach to the Real, represented in the mythical image of an original chaosmos, frames a different politics with the high stakes of encounters with the Other. Perspectivism, if it were to affect a Western political practice, could begin by recognizing the existing cannibal metaphysics of democratic politics and its performative elements, and then raise the stakes of encounters with the Other beyond the walls of the State. It would be a performative politics akin to "a theatre of insecurity," as proposed by Alain Badiou, that contradicts our epoch's lack of courage and "existential miserliness" (Badiou 107). The Bee as psychoanalyst, as shaman, as Don Quixote, not only addresses us, it looks back at us with a challenging gaze. Politics cannot be less than a radical psychoanalysis capable of altering our cosmovision and ontology on a path to become a being more in tune with our multi-species destiny.

NOTES

¹ See *Écrits* 292. Translation of quote is by Bennet Schaber (1).

² [Luck appears to guide our interests better than the objects of our wishes.]

³ Photo credits for all images are Sasha Loayza

⁴ In Lacan, the concept of Other has a different meaning than the usual acception related to the perception of difference or alterity in intersubjective relations. The Other in Lacan is the one who we feel interpellated by through language and the law. This big Other is thus related to the symbolic order.

⁵ I name this chaosmos 'One nature' in anticipation of its becoming a multinatural world in the genesis of the Amerindian myth.

⁶ Viveiros de Castro warns that the point of view "agencied" by the specificity of the body does not amount to "Cultural relativism, which is a multiculturalism, [and] presumes a diversity of partial, subjective representations bearing on an external nature, unitary and whole, that itself is indifferent to representation. Amerindians propose the inverse: on the one hand, a purely pronominal representative unit—the human is what and whomever occupies the position of the cosmological subject; every existent can be thought of as thinking (it exists, therefore it thinks), as 'activated' or 'agencied' by a point of view—and, on the other, a real or objective radical diversity. Perspectivism is a multinaturalism, since a perspective is not a representation" (*Relative Native* 72).

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