Losing sight: Amerindian cosmovisions in translation

Melanie Strasser

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of translation within Amerindian perspectivism. Drawing on Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's claim for an indigenous alter-anthropology informed by perspectivism, multinaturalism, and cannibal alterity, it explores the relationship between anthropology, anthropophagy, and translation. The first part critically revisits the modernist concept of anthropophagy in Brazil; the second part analyzes translation in Amerindian perspectivism, distinguishing it from shamanism; the third part develops a poetics and ethics of translation in light of perspectival thought. The paper asks how an ethics of translation shaped by perspectivism might be conceived and what an epistemology of alterity in translation might entail. By intertwining perspectivism, anthropophagy, and translation, it conceptualizes the encounters with alterity as a process of mutual metamorphosis between self and Other and proposes an ethics of translation rooted in relationality and difference that transcends boundaries between humans and nonhumans.

Keywords: Amerindian perspectivism, anthropophagy, anthropology, equivocation, translating cosmovisions, translation studies

1. Introduction: Seeing otherwise

> Quando você sentir que o céu está ficando muito baixo, é só empurrá-lo e respirar.
>
> Ailton Krenak

Under the banner of re-anthropophagy, Indigenous artists and writers in Brazil are critically revisioning the modernist movement of anthropophagy of the 1920s, which promoted the colonial trope of cannibalism to celebrate the metaphorical devouring of European arts and literature, transforming them into something genuinely "Brazilian." Re-anthropophagy reclaims and subverts the modernist appropriation of Indigenous myths and motifs, particularly the colonial image of the so-called Indian as a savage man-eater (Baniwa 2021; Esbell 2018; Taurepang et al. 2019). By revisiting, repainting, and rewriting (neo-)colonial representations and stereotypes, re-anthropophagy counters ongoing epistemological and political violence faced by Indigenous peoples. Alongside the theoretical discourse that they revive and produce, Indigenous arts and literature become powerful tools of resistance to repression and marginalization. In the words of the artist, activist, and writer Jaider Esbell, Indigenous artists are "artists of transformation" (Esbell 2018, 11).[1] By reclaiming and reshaping narratives, they play a vital role in the ongoing decolonization and resignification of Indigenous cultural heritage.

[1] If not otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author of this article. Original text in Portuguese: "artistas da transformação."

The modernist movement of anthropophagy, labelled as one of Brazil's most significant cultural achievements, and even regarded as a post- or decolonial movement avant la lettre, demands a critical rereading, since it stereotypes or excludes its very own subject: the "Indigenous." Anthropophagy today must therefore be read through an Indigenous lens and within an anthropological framework, as argued by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. As he writes in his *Cannibal Metaphysics*, anthropology has to take on its "new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought" (2014, 40). This mission entails a conceptual shift: moving beyond the watered-down notion of anthropophagy popularized by modernism — canonized as a highly charged national cultural metaphor — and returning to the colonial term *cannibalism*. Unlike its modernist counterpart, the term cannibalism does not obscure the violence of incorporation: it lays it bare. Reclaimed and resignified within an anthropological paradigm, cannibalism becomes a philosophical and analytical tool for decolonization — confronting the European colonial gaze that has shaped anthropology and refusing detachment from ritual and epistemic violence.

Revisiting anthropophagy today does not reject the modernist movement. Rather, it involves re-eating and digesting it from an anthropological and decolonial position that re-centers Indigenous cosmovisions.[2] Cannibalism becomes a method of thought, a way of thinking transformation, or transformative thinking. This rereading moves beyond the modernist pursuit of a national identity reconciled with the universal and beyond viewing anthropophagy as a strategy of transculturation, hybridization, or cultural appropriation. Instead, anthropophagy calls for reading beyond the dichotomy of self and other, of traditional Western epistemology and Amerindian knowledge — which is never exclusively human — as if they were immutable and irreconcilable poles, acknowledging that both comprise a multiplicity of (cosmo-)visions that are partially connected (see Cadena 2015). Such a revision aims to avoid the danger of "internal colonialism" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 19, 63),[3] in other words, the persistence, internalization, and reproduction of colonial power relations and the "idealization and romanticization" of the Indigenous as "a generic 'other'" (Bianchi 2023, 36).[4] As Chandler and Reid (2020, 485) put it: "The reduction of Indigenous lives to the speculative 'other' of Western modernity inherently tends to reify or 'exoticise' Indigenous thought and practices or, as we state, to 'ontologize indigeneity.'"

Can ontologization or reductionism ever be avoided? Any academic discourse about Indigenous life risks producing a chasm between subject and object, severing knowledge from lived experience; any Western research on the Indigenous as a category might reproduce extractivist relations, as writer and activist Ailton Krenak states:

[2] The term "cosmovision" refers to a society's collective, spiritual and holistic understanding of a world in which all existence is related and arranged (cosmos), whilst the term "worldview" points to a set of Western, i.e., more individualized and anthropocentric, assumptions.

[3] Original text in Spanish: "colonialismo interno."

[4] Original text in Portuguese: "idealização e romantização de um 'outro' genérico."

> There is no gap between what we experience in everyday life, what we eat, what we speak, and the culture of Indigenous peoples, their knowledge... The knowledge and technology of Indigenous peoples is appropriated by the market, by white people, without credits. This is biopiracy.(Krenak 2018, n.p.)[5]

It seems impossible to speak (of) the Other without reducing and ontologizing them — an epistemic extractivism that, within Western scholarly frameworks, enacts violence through the citation, translation, and appropriation of Indigenous knowledge.

An approach to resist exoticizing and ontologizing Indigenous lifeworlds and knowledge through the Western gaze is the — originally Indigenous — concept of *Two-Eyed Seeing* (Etuaptmumk) (Bartlett et al. 2012), which "stresses the importance of viewing the world through one eye using the strengths of Indigenous worldviews and with the other eye using the strengths of Western worldviews, to see together with both eyes to benefit all" (Wright et al. 2019, 2). While this perspective articulates a vital ethical and reconciliatory stance, it presumes a balance that may be unattainable without a shared epistemic ground. Following Viveiros de Castro's perspectival anthropology, engaging with Indigenous worlds and peoples requires an epistemology and ethics of translation that preserve, rather than dissolve, unbridgeable difference. The gap between Amerindian cosmovisions and Western scholarship — again, not understood as opposing monoliths, but as intrinsically heterogeneous fields — should be acknowledged as indissoluble rather than resolved.

Amerindian cosmovisions unsettle foundational Western systems of knowledge, disrupting conceptual hierarchies such as nature and culture, myth and history, materiality and spirituality, subject and object, and, crucially, the opposition between original and translation. Taking Indigenous knowledge seriously entails destabilizing Western ontological assumptions and conceptual binarisms through Indigenous perspectives, while remaining attentive to the risks of translating them into familiar terms. Translation, in this sense, is not a failure to achieve equivalence or to overcome difference, but a productive misalignment that makes conceptual asymmetries visible. This shift reframes how otherness is approached — and raises the question of whether, and how, such difference can be translated without reducing or ontologizing the Other.

Viveiros de Castro conceptualizes this task of translation as *controlled equivocation* (Viveiros de Castro 2004), a methodological and translational stance that rejects equivalence and reconciliation, insisting on the preservation of ontological difference. "Controlled" here does not mean mastery or resolution; it names the acknowledgment that equivocation is inevitable in encounters between worlds and must be rendered visible rather than erased in the name of mutual understanding or commensurability.

[5] Original text in Portuguese: "Não existe um abismo entre o que nós vivemos no cotidiano, comemos, falamos e a cultura dos povos indígenas, os saberes... O conhecimento e tecnologia dos índios é apropriado pelo mercado, pelos brancos, sem crédito. Isso é biopirataria."

Translation, then, becomes both a methodological and an ethical practice of engaging with the Other — one that keeps difference unassimilated.

This understanding of translation is grounded in Tânia Stolze Lima's and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's analyses of Amazonian cosmovisions via *perspectivism* and *multinaturalism* (Lima 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1996). Amerindian perspectivism, as an integral part of these cosmovisions, refers to the idea that in certain Indigenous communities in the Americas — particularly in the Amazon — humans and non-humans occupy the positions of "persons"[6] and can reveal themselves as such (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 57).[7] This comprehensive personhood is not limited to the human species but constitutes a universal condition of subjectivity that defines a being's point of view, whether animal, spirit, or human.[8] Perspectivism posits that all beings share the same subjectivity, or cultural life, whilst they are differentiated by their bodies, affects, and nature. All beings experience the world differently due to their bodily forms, which determine their point of view (Viveiros de Castro 2004; Latour 2009). Against a Western cultural relativism, which presumes one universal nature and many cultures, multinaturalism posits one universal culture and many natures: "a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 56). Multinaturalism, thus, stands in sharp contrast to the mononaturalist and multicultural ontologies prevalent in Western metaphysics (Viveiros de Castro 2012; Wagner 2012). In Amerindian cosmovisions, the body defines the position, not the subjective interpretation: humans and animals see the world in the same way; but *what* they see differs. In Viveiros de Castro's well-known example, what humans perceive as blood is perceived as beer by the jaguar:

> [A]ll beings see ('represent') the world in the same way; what changes is the world they see... But the things they see when they see them like we do are different: what we take for blood, jaguars see as beer; ... what humans perceive as a mud puddle becomes a grand ceremonial house when viewed by tapirs.(Viveiros de Castro 2014, 71)

[6] About the notion of "person," Viveiros de Castro states: "All animals and cosmic constituents are intensively and virtually persons, because all of them, no matter which, can reveal themselves to be (transform into) a person" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 57).

[7] On the relationship between perspectivism and animism according to Descola, see particularly Rivera Andía (2019, 8–14).

[8] Viveiros de Castro explains how he conceives this universal personhood: "Why is it that animals see themselves as humans? Precisely because we humans see them as animals, while seeing ourselves as humans. Peccaries cannot see themselves as peccaries (or, who knows, speculate on the fact that humans and other beings are peccaries underneath the garb specific to them) because this is the way they are viewed by humans. If humans regard themselves as humans and are seen as nonhumans, as animals or spirits, by nonhumans, then animals should necessarily see themselves as humans. What perspectivism affirms, when all is said and done, is not so much that animals are at bottom like humans but the idea that as humans, they are at bottom something else — they are, in the end, the 'bottom' itself of something, its other side; they are different from themselves" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 69).

The representation — that is, the word — is the same, but the object — beer, or blood — differs: "Same representations, different objects; same meaning, different reference. This is perspectivism" (Viveiros de Castro 2015, 256).

Amerindian perspectivism has been pivotal to the so-called ontological turn (Alberti et al. 2011; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017) in anthropological theory and methodology, shifting the focus from different representations of a single world to the coexistence of fundamentally different worlds, each with its own unique ways of being. Difference is not a matter of difference in representation or a difference in worldviews, but rather a difference in — and of — worlds: "perspectivism affirms an intensive difference that places human/nonhuman difference *within each existent*" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 69; emphasis in the original). Crucially, the ontological turn asserts that all these worlds, as distinct forms of being, are equally real and equally valid — a stance with significant political stakes. In this sense, the "turn of the native" for which Viveiros de Castro advocates is an anthropological realignment that seeks to let the Other speak on their own terms:

> Now for the native's turn! Not 'the return of the native,' as Adam Kuper ironically called the great ethnopolitical movement inspiring this reflexive displacement (what Sahlins called 'the indigenization of modernity'), but a turn — an unexpected turning, kairos, thing, or detour.(Viveiros de Castro 2014, 88)

However, this ontologizing gesture that comes along with perspectivism also carries the risk of reducing Indigenous complexity of life worlds and exoticizing otherness. What does it mean to let the native, the Other, speak?[9] Who turns to whom? Who detours? Who translates? Or does the Other speak without being understood — and to what end? Who bears the risk of silence, non-understanding, or violence?

Instead of comprehending this so-called turn as some kind of incommensurability between worlds and speakers, we can follow Tim Ingold and his "art of translation" (2020, 210), which understands the encounter with the Other — and the task of translating — as a continuum: identities and realities are fluid, beings are "partially connected." Translation is thus a relational enterprise shaped by gradual difference and relational fluidity — an incessant movement carried out by both the translator and the Other to be translated. Language is fundamentally unstable; as Jaider Esbell writes, "a continuous act in itself, a transformation" (2018, 15).[10] Meaning emerges not from intrinsic

[9] Regarding the question of "who speaks?" — a fundamental one in any reflection on translation — it is important to acknowledge major critiques of Viveiros de Castro's perspectival anthropology. See especially Romina Wainberg's feminist critique (2023) and Christ Knight's discussion of perspectivism's gender blindless and its neglect of blood relations and kinship in Indigenous communities (2025). Another important point is that perspectivism risks reducing Indigenous complexity and diversity to an elitist gesture. As Alcida Rita Ramos puts it, "as a theory, perspectivism is, at best, indifferent to the historical and political predicament of indigenous life in the modern world" (2012, 489).

[10] Original text in Portuguese: "um ato contínuo em si mesmo, a transformação."

qualities of language, but through the relationship to the being that speaks or sees. In this light, translation becomes pivotal. Or, as the Portuguese-Brazilian anthropologist Manuela Carneiro da Cunha notes: "the general problem of perspectivism ... is the problem of translation" (1998, 17). What would a translation theory and practice grounded in an "indigenous alter-anthropology" — formed by perspectivism, multinaturalism and cannibal alterity look like (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 50)? Focusing on *cannibal alterity*, this paper traces the role of translation in Amerindian cosmovisions by rereading Brazilian modernist anthropophagy and its afterlives as a trope of translation, and drafting an ethics of translating otherness under the sign of Amerindian perspectivism.

2. Afterlives of anthropophagy

> Creio que onde há prazer, o conhecimento está próximo.
>
> Maria Gabriela Llansol

In the wake of Brazilian modernism in the 1920s, the figure of the cannibal returns to the scene. The cannibal's survival in the tropics takes the shape of a trope. The modernist movement of anthropophagy around Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral responds to centuries of colonialism by reclaiming the image of the man-eating savage that had been assigned to the peoples of the so-called New World. The modern Brazilian cannibals playfully devour not only European art and cultural forms, blending them with their own traditions, but also the attribute of the savage man-eater, coined by the colonizers' gaze. The search for cultural independence — that is yet to be proclaimed, as it says in the "Cannibalist Manifesto" (Andrade 1991, 44) — is rooted in the deeply modernist effort to reconcile national and universal, the so-called primitive and modern life, through a new language. Rather than remain a poor translation of Europe — still dominating politics, art and literature in Brazil — it is, a century after political independence from Portugal, necessary to define a non-essentialist cultural and national identity grounded in Brazil's diverse roots, mixing and transforming them into the so-called brasilidade. Modernist Brazilian anthropophagy is itself a cannibal act: essentially performative, it does what it says — it is what it eats.

Oswald de Andrade claims for a "cannibalistic vaccine" (Andrade 1991, 39), an antidote against Western logos which to him is nothing other than a "canned consciousness" (Andrade 1991, 39), a gloomy, cramped consciousness that excludes and taboos everything it cannot grasp. Its contrary is what Haroldo de Campos calls "anthropophagous reason" (Campos 2007a, 157), a visceral, transgressive reason that refuses "to conceive a spirit without a body," as it says in the "Manifesto" (Andrade 1991, 39). Cannibal reason aims at incorporating and transforming into totem what the enlightened reason is unable to grasp: the body, the mystical, the female, the unconscious, madness, ero-

tism, happiness, nonsense — Mr. Galli Mathias[11] who appears in the "Manifesto" and is immediately eaten up (Andrade 1991, 41) — and death. Cannibal reason is the absorption of what does not make sense; the consumption, commitment and identification with the excluded and rejected. Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto" is an outcry against all the great narratives of the conquerors, "Down with the histories of Man that begin at Cape Finisterre" (Andrade 1991, 41), against the History told from the perspective of the victors, against Catholic doctrine, and against European sublimations, "brought here in caravels" (Andrade 1991, 41).

The "Manifesto" is a rattling of *against*: against messianic culture, against patriarchy, against the "Morality of the Stork" (Andrade 1991, 42), and against the law of the father and his system of taboo, which is, according to Sigmund Freud, the condition of all culture. It is against the fossilized, musealized memory ("Down with Memory as a source of custom"), against Portuguese grammar ("Down with Anchieta"), and against Europe's literary canon: "Down with Goethe" (Andrade 1991, 43).

Anthropophagy is a revolt against the principles of identity and accumulation, against the fatal logic of so-called order and progress. It is an outline of a "wild Utopia" (Ribeiro 2014), a social-erotic utopia based upon the promise of happiness (Jáuregui 2008, 418). Two times we find the same nonsensical phrase in Andrade's short "Manifesto": "Joy is the proof of nines" (Andrade 1991, 43). Joy is the guiding principle of anthropophagy, the interruption in the gears of reason, a remedy against resignation and bitterness. The modern cannibals laugh, projecting a future of utopian conviviality found in the precolonial past: "Before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had discovered happiness" (Andrade 1991, 42).

Anthropophagy is a reconfiguration of the colonial discourse, a rereading of the remnants of Pindorama, as it is evoked by Oswald de Andrade (1991, 44), the Indigenous Tupi name for Brazil. Anthropophagy is thus so much more than eating the enemy (cf. especially Jáuregui 2012). It unsettles; it staggers the meanings that sustain official history and power relations. Anthropophagy exceeds concepts such as consumption, transculturation or hybridization. It devours senses. Therefore, Oswald de Andrade would affirm: "Nothing exists outside of Devouring. To be is to devour, purely and eternally" (Andrade 1992, 286).

After being swept away by a childhood's disease and decades of silence, anthropophagy resurfaces amid the civil-military dictatorship and political repression. In 1980, Haroldo de Campos describes anthropophagy variously as transculturation, transvalorization, appropriation and expropriation, and dehierarchization and deconstruction. In a cannibal manner, he states: "Any past which is an 'other' for us deserves to be negated. We could even say, it deserves to be eaten, devoured" (Campos 2007a, 160). Anthropophagy becomes a framework for critically re-evaluating tradition. By unsettling the relations between identity and alterity, original and translation, the cannibal trope becomes a poetological model — a paradigm for literature and

[11] fr. *galimatias*=nonsense, hodgepodge, gobbledygook.

translation. And indeed: incorporating the Other, transforming it into one's own, traces the movement of translation.

"Tupi or not tupi, that is the question" (Andrade 1991, 38). With this famous formula from his "Cannibalist Manifesto," Oswald de Andrade ironically transfers the deepest expression of European *weltschmerz* to the Brazilian tropics. Hamlet's existential doubt becomes an affirmation of the Tupi, Indigenous groups historically linked to ritual cannibalism. Oswald de Andrade's devouring of Shakespeare — in which he does not obey even the most basic law of translation, to switch from one language to another — can be seen as an example of a translation that would later be labeled, decades after the "Manifesto," Brazilian "cannibal translation" (see particularly Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; Vieira 1994; Strasser 2023).

Cannibal translation is an irreverent act of liberation from a sacred original and its creator. It is not only a re-reading of the European canon; it incorporates and transforms one's own literary tradition. As Haroldo de Campos argues in "Translation as Creation and Criticism" (2007b), translation becomes critique — a transtextual strategy for articulating what could be called brasilidade. In Haroldo de Campos's Brazilian rendering of Konstantinos Kaváfis' poem "Waiting for the Barbarians" (2012, 19), we can clearly hear the voice of the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade; Augusto de Campos's John Donne comes upon famous samba lines; and Haroldo de Campos's Goethe encounters Glauber Rocha's legendary movie *Black God and White Devil*.

Cannibal translation overturns the traditional hierarchy between original and translation, challenging the historical melancholy imposed upon translation. Instead, translation becomes "transcreation" (Campos 2007b, 315): a creative transformation that rejects the translator's invisibility. To translate, in this sense, is to devour, digest, and transform. Cannibal translation not only alters the Other, but also the self, one's own literary heritage — a process of mutual pervasion, mutual metamorphosis.

Anthropophagy is a critique of Reason with a capital R, a method to engage with what has been repressed and forgotten — a thinking of the trace. In a late text, Oswald de Andrade postulates "an Erratic, a science of the erratic traces" (Andrade 1978a, 88),[12] an archaeology, a Benjaminian reading of ruins — relics of a past still alive yet legible only through its traces. It is a reading beyond the factual, the seemingly insignificant, the non-present. Erratic means to err in double meaning: to stray and to be mistaken. As Gonzalo Aguilar puts it: "To read is to err in any sense: to miss, to digress, to go astray" (Aguilar 2010, 28).[13] Anthropophagy, as a science of the Erratic, is a method — not as a path to a predetermined goal, but a route that is perpetually interrupted, carrying the risk of never arriving. Erratic is the science of erring, of losing oneself.

[12] Original text in Portuguese: "uma Errática, uma ciência do vestígio errático."

[13] Original text in Spanish: "Leer es errar en todas sus acepciones: no acertar, divagar, andar perdido."

In the "Cannibalist Manifesto," the word *roteiros* (itineraries, logbooks, directions, or routes) is repeated seven times in a row: modern cannibals sail under the flag of Utopia; adrift on open seas, exposing themselves to the unknown. They choose the routes, a navigation to a place they know they will never reach — the opposite of a voyage of conquest and colonization. Rather, it is a "destinerrance," as Jacques Derrida (1984, 29) calls such erratic wandering, a navigation on detours, a tour, a turn that is not written in the stars: destiny's erring. Anthropophagy's locus is utopia, a non-place, an origin that has always been lost. The encounter with the Other requires self-sacrifice. Haroldo de Campos closes his essay on anthropophagous reason: "Alterity is, above all, a necessary exercise in self-criticism" (Campos 2007a, 177). Near the end of his life, in 1950, Oswald de Andrade writes, in a short text on anthropophagy, "the sentiment of the other might be called alterity, that is, to see the other in oneself, to realize within oneself the disaster, the mortification or the joy of the other" (Andrade 1978b, 141).[14] The "disaster" evokes, again, what is not written in the stars. It is a maritime experience to perceive the Other within: witnessing their death and joy, and recognizing oneself as Other, as difference.

In an epiphantic moment, Clarice Lispector's protagonist, who instead of a name bears only two letters, finally consumes — after some time of tense conviviality — the white inner mass of the cockroach in her bedroom, declaring that she was, in fact, eating none other than herself (Lispector 2012, 88). The boundaries between the human and the non-human dissolve:

> Finally, finally, my casing had really broken, and without a limit I was. Through not being, I was. To the ends of whatever I was not, I was. Whatever I am not, I am. All shall be within me, if I shall not be; for 'I' is just one of the instantaneous spasms of the world. My life does not have a merely human meaning, it is much greater — so much greater that, as humanity goes, it makes no sense.(Lispector 2012, 122)

The rite of eating the Other while recognizing oneself in and as Other is a nameless, transgressive experience. Anthropophagy exceeds logic and economy: it is waste, expenditure, loss — a confrontation with non-knowledge, with non-sense. The Other cannot be devoured without the self being simultaneously devoured in turn. Anthropophagy embodies radical involvement, reciprocal transformation: every devouring is, at the core, self-devouring. Going beyond the human, being more-than-human, means transforming oneself until being indistinguishable from the Other, where all boundaries blur, leaving nothing but difference.

To know, to see, to be — Tupi — means absorbing the point of view of the Other, to metamorphosize: becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari 2007); becoming-jaguar, like the jaguar-hunter in João Guimarães Rosa's (2001) short story. As the hunter

[14] Original text in Portuguese: "Pode-se chamar de alteridade ao sentimento do outro, isto é, de ver-se o outro em si, de constatar-se em si o desastre, a mortificação ou a alegria do outro."

transforms into a jaguar, his speech disintegrates: it crumbles, it stammers, it rattles. Language itself jaguarizes.[15] In Tupi cosmovisions, the jaguar epitomizes the cannibal.[16] Cannibalism is the desire of the self to be no self, to be more than one self: the answer to the question "[t]upi or not tupi" (Andrade 1991, 38) is tupi *and* not tupi, to be-come, to trans-form, to tupi, tupi-ize: to become-Other.

3. Translations of alterity

> Their words, too, fit to eat.
>
> Rosmarie Waldrop

Amerindian perspectivism, according to Viveiros de Castro, is "a concept from the same political and poetic family as Oswald de Andrade's anthropophagy." In other words, it "is the resumption of Oswaldian Anthropophagy under new terms" (Viveiros de Castro 2007, 129).[17] What does this political and poetic family look like, this kinship between a cannibal and a perspectivist polis and poetics? What are the "new terms" that redefine these relations? Do they not suggest a kind of re-anthropophagy? As Denilson Baniwa puts it: "To re-anthropophagize is to review — to see again — what has not been seen... [It] means to be no longer the food, but to also be the one who feeds on what they have made of us" (Baniwa quoted in Itaú Cultural 2022, n.p.).[18] Re-anthropophagy is a way of seeing, a seeing of the unseen: the Indigenous answer to anthropophagy, an eating-back — a literal re-membering — of those who have been exoticized, stereotyped, and ultimately, excluded by modernism (Esbell 2018; Taurepang et al. 2019). Anthropophagy's new terms entail a new way of seeing. In its modernist configuration, the cannibal trope ends in aporia: repeating the violence which it originally stood up against. This becomes particularly evident in the subject of anthropophagy: the figure of the so-called Indian, cast as a phantasmatic, exoticizing projection to constitute an own identity by appropriating and transferring the Indian's

[15] In his analysis of Rosa's narration, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls the linguistic transformation of the jaguar hunter's speech "linjaguar," a play of words with "linguajar," the way of speaking (Viveiros de Castro 2018, 26).

[16] See, for example, Hans Staden's account of his encounter with Cunhambebe, the chieftain of the Tupinambá people, who, while biting into a loose human leg, introduces himself as a jaguar (Staden 2008, 91). From this scene, Viveiros de Castro will extract what he calls the "cannibal *cogito*": "I eat humans, therefore I am a jaguar" (Viveiros de Castro 2018, 20). For the role of the jaguar in today's Indigenous cosmovisions, see for example Fausto (2007; 2020), Costa and Fausto (2019), and Vander Velden (2023).

[17] Original text in Portuguese: "vejo o perspectivismo como um conceito da mesma família política e poética que a antropofagia de Oswald de Andrade... O perspectivismo é a retomada da antropofagia oswaldiana em novos termos."

[18] Original text in Portuguese: "Reantropofagizar é rever — ver de novo — o que não foi visto... Querer reantropofagizar é deixar de ser apenas o alimento e ser, também, aquele que se alimenta com o que fizeram de nós."

force and power to the eater, the European. Read within an Indigenous or anthropological framework, however, the cannibal rite figures not as a unilateral strategy to strengthen one's own identity, but as a mutual transformation of self and Other — with all the violence such an act entails. In the world of the Tupi-Guarani, identity does not play a major role, as James Clifford (quoted in Viveiros de Castro 2011, 18) has shown. The Amerindian paramount value is exchange. Incorporating the enemy is not a gesture of triumph: there is no need to constitute oneself as a subject. There is no subject that annihilates, in a parricidal gesture, the origin to assert one's own strength. In translation, seen from Amerindian perspectivism, there is no negativity, because the subject's condition is becoming-other, as Álvaro Faleiros (2013, 116–117) notes. Nor is the Indigenous cannibal ritual about resignifying the past, or recuperating an original, idealized time: "The rite was the Great present" (Viveiros de Castro 2011, 69). Additionally, contrary to Brazilian modernist celebrations of matriarchy as a golden vision of utopia, Tupi peoples did not know matriarchy.

Read through the lens of Amerindian perspectivism, modernist anthropophagy reveals the act of incorporation in its "potency of alterity": a radical, more-than-human transformation. Anthropophagy becomes a way of seeing beyond the separation between subject and object, moving beyond the categories of self and Other. As Alexandre Nodari writes: "The Other does not matter because it is able to strengthen the proper, it matters because of its alterity, because it allows for a new perspective, an actualization of the possible" (2009, 124).[19] Anthropophagy is not about appropriating the Other to affirm subjectivity: it rather shows that this self does not exist, that the Other is already within. This announces the becoming of the Other: not as a destination, or destiny, but as a continuous play of possibility and impossibility, of being and not being at once. It is a play of reading the Other, knowing that they can never be completely decoded — legible only "in the aporia of unreadability" (Hamacher 1999, 192). Anthropophagy is trans-creation that risks failure, silence, loss; rather than producing a stable identity, it dissolves everything that could be called a self into a radical dispossession. The cannibal ritual is reciprocal devouring, with all the *horror vacui* that is caused by such a double metamorphosis. For there is no boundary between the self and the Other; they are interchangeable. To incorporate the Other is to let go of oneself: the self is permeated by the unrecognizable, the Other resists total devouring. There remains an indissoluble, an indigestible. An untranslatable, perhaps, that is not, according to Barbara Cassin, what cannot be translated, but "rather what one keeps on (not) translating" (2014, xvii).[20] The untranslatable haunts us. Hence the desire for difference and transformation, for the thinking of the Other. "Because

[19] Original text in Portuguese: "[O] Outro não interessa porque pode fortalecer o próprio, mas pela sua alteridade, pois permite uma nova perspectiva, permite atualizar uma possibilidade."

[20] In his contribution on dealing with the tension between the translatable and the untranslatable within a context of translating texts from the humanities and social science, Rafael Schögler shifts the focus away from the loss and supposedly inevitable shortcomings of translation, focusing instead on its "creative power" (Schögler 2020, 139).

only the Other thinks, and only the thinking as a potency of alterity is interesting. That would be a good definition of anthropology. And of anthropophagy" (Viveiros de Castro 2007, 118).[21] Therin lies their kinship: anthropology and anthropophagy are both experiences of alterity, involvements with the Other. They produce a difference that goes beyond the human, that multiplies the desire of the Other, and, thus, of the transformation of the self:

> If the Europeans desired the Indians because they saw in them either useful animals or potential Europeans and Christians, the Tupi desired the Europeans in their full alterity, ... [as] an opportunity for self-transfiguration, ... and they were therefore capable of expanding the human condition, or even going beyond it.(Viveiros de Castro 2011, 30)

Isn't the desire of the Other a desire of translation? Isn't translation the stuff that the political and poetic family of an anthropology of perspectivism and a poetics of anthropophagy is made of? Isn't "potency of alterity" another name for translation? Going out of oneself, passing through the Other, carrying them — the enemy — within oneself, letting them go through oneself, in order to finally return to oneself, with all the difference that the traces of the Other have inscribed in it: is this not the movement of translation?

Amerindian perspectivism, conceived in its entanglement with the anthropophagic rite, frames translation as a radical practice of alterity. The endeavor of an "indigenous alter-anthropology" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 50) cannot be conceived without the notion of translation that underlies it:

> Anthropology, as we sometimes say, is an activity of translation; and translation, as we always say, is betrayal. There is no doubt about it, but it is all about knowing who you are going to betray.(Viveiros de Castro 2007, 122)

Who is 'betrayed' in translation?[22] Not the Other, the so-called source language, but oneself — one's own tongue. "Good translation succeeds at allowing foreign concepts to deform and subvert the conceptual apparatus of the translator such that the

[21] Original text in Portuguese: "Pois só o outro pensa, só é interessante o pensamento enquanto potência de alteridade. O que seria uma boa definição da antropologia. E também uma boa definição da antropofagia."

[22] The notion of betrayal is a common and deeply rooted concept in the history of translation. The saying of translation as a form of betrayal goes back to a patriarchal image of translation as something inferior in view of the sacred original linked with creative power, reflected in the traditional hierarchy between man as the creator and the woman as the passive, receptive creature. The equation of women and translations reaches its culmination in seventeenth-century France, when the phrase of the *belles infidèles* was coined in order to suggest that translations are either faithful and ugly or unfaithful and beautiful. On the gendering of translation, see in particular Arrojo (1994) and Chamberlain (1988). Here, the notion of *betrayal* refers to this melancholic — and misogynist — history of translation, seeking to resignify it as a productive form of a co-creational, collaborative act of cannibal transformation.

intentio of the original language can be expressed through and thus transform that of the destination" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 87). This reminds one of Walter Benjamin's invocation of Rudolf Pannwitz: to translate means "to let one's own language be violently (*gewaltig*) moved by the foreign language" (Pannwitz quoted in Benjamin 1991, 20).[23]

One's own language is rattled and transformed by the encounter with another language — at times to the point of being unrecognizable. In his translation of Goethe's *Faust,* Haroldo de Campos strained Portuguese to its limits, making it seem almost German through radical substantivization (Campos 2008). Similarly, Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles exemplifies the "deepening" and "widening" of the target language "by means of the foreign language" (Pannwitz quoted in Benjamin 1991, 20).[24] Benjamin famously referred to Hölderlin's translation as "abysmal" (*bodenlos*), a language stripped of its ground, a shaken language. Such is translation under the sign of radical foreignization: letting the Other enter and transform oneself.

This gesture can be also found in Anne Carson's rendering of Sophocles's *Antigone*, which received the title *Antigonick* (Carson 2015), and is populated by a new figure, Nick, who does not speak, but measures things, along with Hegel, Brecht, and Beckett.[25] To translate is to repeat an original shattering: "to convey a move or shock or darkening" (Carson 2012, n.p.). This shattering — a radical opening toward the Other — marks the "opportunity for self-transfiguration" as sought in Amerindian perspectivism. And in anthropophagy. Cannibal alterity recognizes this "shock," this "darkening": it involves letting oneself be thought by the Other (Viveiros de Castro 2007, 119); or, perhaps, letting oneself be translated by the Other.

When one's conceptual worldview is disrupted and shattered by the Other, translation encounters resistance — moments of failure and doubt — or, as Anne-Christine Taylor writes, "when the work of translation begins to falter, when it comes up against knots of conceptual obscurity, tangles of non sequiturs and zones of pronominal confusion" (Taylor 2022, 100). In such moments, the hinges of our certainties become perceptible, and our implicit assumptions begin to waver. It is in these moments of unsettlement that anthropology enters the stage: "anthropology kicks in when translation fails" (Taylor 2022, 100).

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[23] Original text in German: "durch die fremde Sprache gewaltig bewegen zu lassen."

[24] Original text in German: "seine Sprache durch die fremde erweitern und vertiefen ..."

[25] Confronted with the allegation that her text is more a rewriting of Sophocles than a translation, Anne Carson states: "To be honest, I don't see any 'rewrite' going on. Everything I've done in the translation is an attempt to convey a move or shock or darkening that happens in the original text. This doesn't always mean reproducing the words and sentences of the original in their same order; but a play is (note etymology of 'drama' from Greek DRAN 'to do or act') a collection of actions or doings, this is what needs to be rendered from Greek into English. It's true Sophokles doesn't mention Hegel on the first page of Antigone, but he does refer to the long tradition of A's catastrophic family in order to remind his Greek audience of the legend and for us, in 2012, the Antigone legend includes Hegel" (Carson 2012, n.p.).

In response to this experience of translating across different worlds, Joanna Overing advocates experimentation — an anarchic unlabelling of notions:

> What would happen if when we come upon a strange, 'unreasonable' ritual or a statement that ignores our empirical judgements about the world we used the term 'ontology' (what is considered real in the world or cosmos) or 'epistemology' (theories of knowledge about understanding the reality of that world or cosmos), rather than 'magic' or 'symbol', to lead the questioning about the 'unreasonable'? ... When there is an incompatibility between the utterance and the world as we view it, it is creativity, experimentation, and the suspension of belief that we need: once the alien world is understood, we can then make final decisions, moral or otherwise, about the appropriateness of labels, those that would enable us to communicate best about that world.(Overing 1987, 84–85)

It is a plea for the ludic dimension of translation, for its creative potential rather than its failure, deception or falseness, and calls for the courage to fill the gaps instead of falling into them by relinquishing the illusion of a secure and stable worldview. The strength of anthropology lies in its capacity to unsettle the grounds of reality, exposing the seeming naturalities of our own world while revealing those of another, and adding a further layer of uncertainty to the conversation between native and ethnographer (Taylor 2022, 100). This shattering of certainties in encounters with the Other is central to the role of translation in Amerindian perspectivism. The Brazilian translation theorist Helena Martins emphasizes that "Amerindian Perspectivism is a way of life that is permanently penetrated by the gesture of (foreignizing) translation" (Martins 2012, 145).[26] Such a foreignizing translation resists taming and domestication: it surrenders to the Other, allowing difference to transform the self. As Martins states, this way of life is determined by shamanism. The shaman is the one who sees differently, negotiates with the spirit world, and translates its hidden, internal qualities. As Viveiros de Castro (2014, 60) explains, shamans are "capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in the trans-specific dialogue and, even more importantly, of returning from their travels to recount them." They thus transcend ontological boundaries and render this experience communicable. Shamanic knowledge entails taking the point of view of non-humans — becoming-Other. In this sense, the shaman, as mediator between spiritual and physical worlds, embodies the figure of the translator par excellence. Accordingly, shaman and translator have often been put on the same level, both understood as travelers between different worlds (Carneiro da Cunha 1998; Martins 2012; Korak 2024). The Brazilian anthropologist Pedro Cesarino writes that translation is "the task and defining condition of shamanism" (2008, 94).[27] The shaman exemplifies

[26] Original text in Portuguese: "o perspectivismo ameríndio é um modo de viver permanentemente atravessado pelo gesto da tradução (estrangeirizante)."

[27] Original text in Portuguese: "A tradução, tarefa e condição definidora do xamanismo."

the perfect translator not only because they mediate between two worlds but also because they become what they translate. Indeed, Amerindian perspectivism allows to read translation as a shamanic practice, serving as a starting point for a "shamanic poetic of translation," as Álvaro Faleiros (2019) suggests.[28] Yet, as they move across incommensurable worlds, the shaman "carefully refrains from naming what he sees" (Carneiro da Cunha 1998, 13). Ordinary language falls apart, words are "twisted," and this twisted language is necessary to "see [things] clearly," whereas normal language would "crash into things" (Townsley 1993, 460). Carneiro da Cunha links this with Benjamin's task of the translator: original and translation shall be recognizable as fragments of a vessel, of a greater language (Carneiro da Cunha 1998, 13).

Yet, isn't the task of a translator precisely to linguistically crash into things, to glue together the fragments — producing a language that, unlike the jaguar's in Rosa's short story (2001), enables understanding, reconciles and repairs instead of falling apart?

Shamans can be understood as a kind of translator. Yet the translator is not a shaman. Translation is always interpretation, not a privileged access to an otherwise closed sphere, nor a claim to "see clearly." While translation invariably involves transformation — and may also transform the translator — the translator does not cross ontological barriers. Unlike the shaman, the translator's work is inherently interpretive, constrained by subjectivity and by the impossibility of inhabiting the Other. In perspectivism, however, the way of seeing — whether one sees blood or beer — is not a matter of interpretation, but a matter of the body (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 72).

4. Towards a Poetics of Perspectivism

> Une patrie, comme une langue, 'ça n'appartient pas'.
>
> Barbara Cassin/Jacques Derrida

To underscore the centrality of translation in Amerindian cosmovisions — and its pivotal role in an Indigenous alter-anthropology — Eduardo Viveiros de Castro introduces the notion of *equivocation*. This concept proves more apt than shamanism for grasping the work of translation within a perspectivist framework. In his *Cannibal Metaphysics,* Viveiros de Castro affirms:

> So to translate Amerindian perspectivism is first of all to translate its image of translation, which is of a 'controlled equivocation' ('controlled' in the sense that walking is a controlled way of falling). Amerindian perspectivism is a doctrine of equivocation, of referential alterity between homonymous concepts. Equivocation is the mode of communication between its different perspectival positions and is thus at once the condition of possibility of the anthropological enterprise and its limit.(Viveiros de Castro 2014, 87)

[28] Original text in Portuguese: "uma poética xamânica do traduzir."

Perspectivism is permeated by the question of translation. Equivocation is not a mere misunderstanding or a failure in communication, but "the very foundation of the relation it implicates" (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 11). It refers to the idea that distinct species perceive the world in the same way, yet do not see the same world. In Amerindian perspectivism, when all beings see themselves as humans, *culture* — having a language and practicing rituals — becomes "a generic, universal feature" (Taylor 2022, 95), while what varies — what makes for the difference — is *nature*. Anne-Christine Taylor recounts that the Amazonian people she worked with were astonished by her interest in their customs and rituals:

> [O]ne of the main reasons for their perplexity rested in the fact what while we anthropologists seemed to think that their particularity lay in what they thought and in the reasons for their practices, they assumed that our particularity as Whites lay in the nature of our bodies.(Taylor 2022, 95)

This echoes the anecdote recounted by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* (1961), in which Indigenous people drowned Europeans to see whether their bodies would putrefy just as theirs. Lévi-Strauss concludes: "whereas the white men took the Indians for animals, the Indians were content to suspect the white men of being gods" (1961, 80).

Equivocation — which points to a multiplicity of worlds, and, consequently, a multiplicity of perceptions, conceptions, and visions — can be associated with a model of translation in which difference is not an obstacle, but the very condition of signification. To translate, then, is to produce difference, to make non-identity visible. Translation does not build bridges; it entails losing ground, sailing on the open sea:

> Therefore, the aim of perspectivist translation ... is not that of finding a 'synonym' (a co-referential representation) in our human conceptual language for the representations that other species of subject use to speak about one and the same thing. Rather, the aim is to avoid losing sight of the difference concealed within equivocal 'homonyms' between our language and that of other species, since we and they are never talking about the same things.(Viveiros de Castro 2004, 7)

To not lose sight of the difference is to acknowledge that there is no common ground for meaning. As Krista Brune observes, a perspectivist approach to translation "does not fall into the tired dichotomies of fidelity and infidelity, literalness and innovation, word-for-word and sense-for-sense, or translatable and untranslatable." Instead, "perspectivist translation represents a possible way of relating to and negotiating the untranslatable" (Brune 2021, 34–35). And isn't the untranslatable precisely what haunts every act of translation — the inherent, incommensurable difference embedded in the Other's speech? While Western worldviews tend to discard differences in favor of

similarities, and to give preference to identity, within Amerindian cosmovisions, "the opposite of difference is not identity but indifference" (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 19). Here, identity is understood as the absence of difference — and without difference, there can be no relationship. In this framework, equivocation emerges as the true opposite of equivalence, which reflects the relentless pursuit of sameness: the attempt to produce identical effects across languages. In Amerindian worlds, the highest value is not sameness or subjectivity, but relation. As Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2017, 73) note: "There is no being-in-itself, being-qua-being, that does not depend on its being-as-other; every being is being-by, being-for, being-relation. Exteriority is everywhere."

In Amerindian cosmovisions, there is no concept of substance or fixed self: there is only relation. This principle extends to language: words such as *mother* or *blood* carry the same relational status. Just as someone can be both mother and aunt, something can be both blood and beer:

> The problem for indigenous perspectivism is not therefore one of discovering the common referent (say, the planet Venus) to two different representations (say, 'Morning Star' and 'Evening Star'). On the contrary, it is one of making explicit the equivocation implied in imagining that when the jaguar says 'manioc beer' he is referring to the same thing as us (i.e., a tasty, nutritious and heady brew). In other words, perspectivism supposes a constant epistemology and variable ontologies, the same representations and other objects, a single meaning and multiple referents.(Viveiros de Castro 2004, 6)

The jaguar, therefore, does not speak of the same thing.[29] Translating within Amerindian perspectivism means preserving the abyss: an operation that transforms not only the Other but also one's own ground and language. In this sense, translation can be read — analogous to anthropophagy — as a relational practice of reciprocal transformation.

In contrast to post-Cartesian traditions that position humans as the ontological apex, Amerindian perspectivism foregrounds "humanity as a condition" rather than "man as a species" (Descola 1999, 30).[30] Boundaries between humans, animals, plants, and spirits are not abolished but permeable: if everything can be human, then nothing is human anymore. The similarity of the soul does not imply identity or homogeneity; difference remains absolute because it passes through the self: every being is, at its core, other to itself (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 69).

[29] On how the jaguar speaks and how their speech is translated and interpreted in Amerindian cosmovisions, specifically among the Waorani people in Ecuador, see Korak (2024, especially 178–182).

[30] Original text in French: "n'est pas l'homme en tant qu'espèce, mais l'humanité en tant que condition."

All beings share the same cultural regime; all beings are people. Even the hunted animal — the Other to be consumed — appears as "an alter ego in a position of exteriority" (Descola 1999, 39).[31] Humans, plants and animals are social subjects, defined not by abstract essence or substance but by the relational positions they occupy: "The identities of human beings, both living and dead, and of plants, animals, and spirits are altogether relational and are therefore subject to mutations and metamorphoses depending on the point of view adopted" (Descola 2013, 10–11). In other words, "the identity of beings and the texture of the world are fluid and contingent" (Descola 2013, 23). Identity is variable, shaped by perspective and relation. The only constant, then, is difference — the condition of exchange and of relation.

An ethics of translation drawn from such cosmovisions might reject the image of the translator as a mediator and traveler between worlds, akin to a shaman, and instead — recalling Walter Benjamin — envision the translator as one who allows themselves to be violently shaken by the Other: to be devoured by the Other until they, too, become-Other.

Such an ethics of translation privileges relation over equivalence, embracing the Other's incommensurable difference and keeping equivocation at play.

> To translate is to situate oneself in the space of the equivocation and to dwell there. It is not to unmake the equivocation ... but precisely the opposite is true. To translate is to emphasize or potentialize the equivocation, that is, to open and widen the space imagined not to exist between the conceptual languages in contact, a space that the equivocation precisely concealed. The equivocation is not that which impedes the relation, but that which founds and impels it: a difference in perspective. To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate by differences, instead of silencing the Other by presuming a univocality — the essential similarity — between what the Other and We are saying.(Viveiros de Castro 2004, 10)

A translation model grounded in equivocation proposes a mode of translating and communicating through difference — making difference even more visible — rather than presuming similarities or identities. Its aim, as Marisol de la Cadena puts it, is "[a]voiding the univocal" (Cadena 2015, 214).

To sustain difference is to keep relationship possible. Translating into and through difference neither negates the Other in their otherness nor dissolves the Other into the self. Rather, it calls for the self to be unsettled, shaken, and transformed by the encounter. It inhabits a tension hovering between violent incorporation and tender rapprochement;[32] a controlled equivocation at the hinge of translatability and untrans-

[31] Original text in French: "un alter ego en position d'extériorité."

[32] *Liebend* (lovingly) is the term Walter Benjamin uses when describing how a translation should approach the original, resisting the urge to tame it and the impulse to make itself conform to the originals' sense (Benjamin 1991, 18). It is, in effect, a delicate, tender, and unending process of approximation.

latability. Translation is incessant becoming: a metamorphosis that refuses to silence the Other by presuming that they are translatable, yet persists in incorporating and speaking the Other precisely because they remain untranslatable.

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Melanie Strasser
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orcid.org/0009-0001-9414-9273
Author Affiliation: University of Vienna
Address for correspondence: Melanie Strasser, University of Vienna, Gymnasiumstrasse 50, Vienna 1190, Austria. melanie.strasser@univie.ac.at