

VIRTUALITY OF MYTH AND ONTOLOGY OF THE FUTURE⁽¹⁾ HARMAN, VIVEIROS DE CASTRO

Abstract: Speculative realism seems to be concerned with the future: Meillassoux's and Brassier's thought points its ontological direction to the world without humans either prior to the existence of life, or after the extinction of humanity — a kind of imaginary future that could be thought in terms of virtuality due to its observable effect on the present thought. Precisely this point is targeted by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2017): their philosophy is actually an expression of the angst of future ecological catastrophe. Graham Harman (2020) reacts to this point by separating his position on the ontology of the future from Meillassoux and Brassier. He approaches the thematic of the future not by positing the world-without-us, but by tracing the *Only Exit from Modern Philosophy* and actualizing the problematic of the thing-in-itself. The ontology of the future has to do away with the modern onto-taxonomy, based on the separation of thought and world, a theme which is originally reconceived, criticized and applied in Amerindian perspectivism as well, leading to resembling considerations on non-human sentience. This paper traces Harman's reply to Danowski and Viveiros de Castro by juxtaposing his speculative position and the notion of virtuality of the Amerindian perspectivism.

Keywords: Amerindian Perspectivism, Future, Imaginary of Otherness, Speculative realism, Virtuality.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we attempt to track the path between Amerindian ontology as it is disclosed in Viveiros de Castro's anthropology and Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (in short OOO), or, to put simply, between *Guerrilla Metaphysics* and *Cannibal Metaphysics*, taking into account the first historic steps of reciprocal dialogue between these two philosophies, since recently Harman replied to one of the key points of Danowski's and Viveiros de Castro's critique (Harman 2020: 139). Besides that, observing certain indications towards the topic of the future. Without a doubt there are still many points of intersection to be discussed, but this paper aims to provoke replies from the respective philosophical positions and to survey one of the suggestive points of resemblance between the mentioned philosophies: the thematic of non-human sentience.

Since the beginnings of philosophy in Ancient Greece, myth always played a part in philosophy's self-image by provoking a reflection of philosophical thought's difference from mythopoetic thinking. As it pertains to this current investigation, it essentially boils down to the rules of mediation and moderation in the employment of imagination, where, for philosophy, being, known through reason, has to suggest certain constrains on imagination and, for myth, the constrains are radically different. In thinking about constraints of imagination, Cornelius Castoriadis' idea of the radical imaginary comes to mind, according to Kristupas Sabolius:

[...] the idea that imagination can be conceived as a power of semi-determination was endorsed namely by Castoriadis, who invokes the category of magma as a special metaphor that helps to conceptualize the relation between imagination and the real in terms of determination. [...] Magma is a certain state of the real that cannot be reduced to the sum of its constituent parts, even though it is capable of giving birth to the multitude of defined forms. Which is why, despite being constantly determined, magmas can never be fully grasped through determination and require the relationality of imagination." (Sabolius 2020 (forthcoming))

However, radical imaginary which is radical because it creates *ex nihilo* (Castoriadis 1997: 321–322), is signified, according to Castoriadis, as "creations *under constraints*" (*ibid*: 333).

In myth, thought and world "meet each other halfway" for a resemblance of a spider-web and textile weaving could inspire a myth of the origin of spiders.

This shift from *ex nihilo* in the direction of the ascension of resemblance is a moment when thought reaches out into the world by transferring the familiar (weaving) imaginary onto the alien (spider–web). The tension within the resemblance semi–determines the constraints of mythopoetics aimed towards reality. In other words, one of the “functions” of myth is approaching the incommensurability of thought and world by allowing the mythopoetic imaginary to be inspired, even *attracted* to, yet not completely censured by the world; myth and the imaginary do not necessarily have to be *realistic*, in the sense of the various neo–rationalist attitudes towards reality among the speculative realists (Meillassoux, Brassier), but “realistic” in a sense of resemblance, in the sense of power of attraction that resemblance has for drawing attention that is working in tandem with imagination, functioning as a starting point for mythopoetics. This attraction testifies for the reality of its autochthonous sources “outside of thought” at which point thought can get assured that it reached the radical, transparent limit of nearly going beyond itself⁽²⁾. Our interest here lies in OOO, for it openly welcomes fiction to the ‘*entourage*’ and thus — opens up an interesting discussion within the intersection of philosophical and anthropological discourses on myth as well as the broad philosophical discourse on the thematic of imagination. Of course, assuming the incommensurability of thought and world that myth aims to transgress, the magmatic, virtual character of myth and the imaginary brings about the same problem of one of the possible futures of philosophy that Harman addresses in a recent article:

If we continue to assume that thought and world are the two basic poles around which reality turns, it does not matter much whether we try to separate or combine them. Furthermore, if we claim that the problem is simply that the human side has been overemphasized and that we must now “meet the universe halfway,” as in the title of Karen Barad’s influential book, then we are still accepting the two terms of the modern settlement. For it is philosophically fruitless to encourage two things meet

(2). Similar development happened in the correlationist phenomenological tradition, when Aron Gurwitsch pushed the phenomenology of attention further than Husserl into this direction of autochthonous sources of attraction that are out there in the world and in the phenomenal layout of the field of perception (Gurwitsch 2010: 29). Things that are salient, bright colored, fast moving and distinct in their background seems to draw attention decisively more than the more passive agents. Gurwitsch’s point was that these qualities belong to the phenomenal layout of human experience. He did not push this notion to its extreme point that the things–themselves might be posited as having these competitive relations of drawing attention, like it is with colors of flowers and insects. Some strains of speculative realism would at least carefully consider such points as possibilities for thought to get in tune with the frequency of the things–themselves.

halfway if they are not actually the two basic pillars of the cosmos. Notice that no one is asking reptiles and dust to “meet halfway,” and the same holds for music and toothpaste. (Harman 2020: 134)

Since Amerindian perspectivism is one of the most original philosophical currents, growing in the rupture between “nature and culture”, between “thought and world”, the meeting of OOO and Amerindian perspectivism is one of the inevitable futures of philosophy that has, in fact, already begun. Not to mention that both Harman and Viveiros de Castro are very interested in the work of Bruno Latour. We can imagine an Amerindian perspectivist narrating: “Latour opened up the nature/culture division and through this opening we observed that “out there” some of the ancient or contemporary indigenous nature/cultures has already been operating within this relationist perspective for ages, yet only now, in the face of climate change, such worldview starts to make sense to us, so we can finally begin to understand them on an equal, decolonized philosophical ground; and that reflects in the contemporary rise of self-awareness in anthropology.” This self-awareness is reflected in the observations of the narcissism of philosophical anthropology; we shall return to this further.

If we take a broader view, the key to Viveiros de Castro’s answer to the problem of the necessity of “thought and world” divide would most likely consist of reference to the *virtuality* as a character of myth, borrowing the concept from Deleuze and then demoting the concepts of thought and human to be subordinated by the Amerindian concept of personhood. The tear in the necessity of the “thought and world” division and the reflection of it appearing in various ways in contemporary academic and popular discourses, is itself a fertile ground for new philosophies, for example, making original use of certain Deleuzian concepts along the anthropological achievements of Levi-Strauss and others. But one would dare to guess that Viveiros de Castro is not yet completely set in his Deleuzian ways and could be tempted by the appeal of OOO or of other interesting recent philosophical advances, such as the ongoing break-through in the continental studies of imagination. That could be one of the imaginary futures of certain currents of philosophy. One of the more concrete possibilities for the future directions of fruitful discussion in a confrontation of OOO and Amerindian perspectivism is a thematic of non-human sentience, which we would like to explore in this paper.

If we push the question of reality, as it is to be understood in various positions of speculative realism, particularly in OOO, towards the “magnetic

field” of myth and the imaginary, certain features related to the fictitious elements of speculation are charged. Among other descriptive factors, speculation involves the domain of the imaginary in a sense, similar, in this respect, to hypothetical thinking, that it attaches itself to the possibility of being verified, but allows itself to move freely, creatively or imaginatively within the space of this possibility. Harman also encourages creation of imaginative, bold philosophical hypotheses (Harman 2008: 4). Among other things, the “free” space within speculation hints to the opening of the problematic of a future. Within this space, some “creative freedoms” are occasionally taken which lead philosophy on an ambiguous path of being an “asylum of strange notions” (*ibid.*: 3). This possibility of verification within speculation is not given present-at-hand, but is anticipated — and in some sense, imagined, — due to the references given by presently evident factors which point beyond themselves and “legitimize” the application of imagination, as long as it operates within the limits of these references. The famous phenomenological concept of presentification⁽³⁾ (or adumbration) constitutes the context of the question of the relation of speculative thought and the world, along with the resembling question of the relation of myth and being. However, for OOO these features indicate the remnants of the modern onto-taxonomy of “basic poles” of reality which need to be abandoned. At a closer look, the question of the qualitative differences of application of potentialities of imagination and variation of fictitious elements in speculation and in mythopoetics becomes particularly important. What does or does not limit the quality of application of fiction in speculation about reality? In short, what is the relation of speculation and reality in speculative realism?

If some of the speculative realists would assume that philosophical speculation becomes qualified for the title of speculative realism when it is *purified* from the “illegitimate” imaginary elements, then, interestingly, Harman points out that the correlationist view also claims to perform such a purification, yet could be keenly interpreted as actually resulting in an even more phantasmal image of reality, precisely due to the purification; according to him, it is notable in Husserl’s phenomenology which itself turns a casual reality into a weird phantasmal world of webs of references, adumbrations, co-presentations and presentifications (*ibid.*, 6) and we should assume that

(3). From the first person perspective, presentification is absence of givenness, however it is pointed out by references arising in directly given presentations. Since the concept has been elaborated in correlationist phenomenology, speculative realism, precisely OOO, could be taken as shifting its meaning towards the sense of speculation about directly absent, inaccessible qualities of things-in-themselves from which the weirdness of reality arises (Harman 2008).

it is done via achieving phenomenologically purified consciousness and lucid description of its acts and contents⁽⁴⁾. It is certainly one of the most original interpretations of Husserl's phenomenology and it actually *celebrates* the fictitious estrangement of ordinary givenness of objects and aims to encourage even bolder attempts to imagine and speculate about reality.

It seems that OOO's realism is ready to embrace at least some of the potentialities of mythopoetics. But the question is: what are the means, limits and merits of purification of the imaginary of otherness at a level of speculation of OOO? The same question could be asked of Amerindian perspectivism. Would they let imagination to run free? What use could both of the positions have from recent appropriations of Castoriadis' notion of the radical imagination? (Castoriadis 1997: 321–322; Sabolius 2020 (forthcoming))

2. Bring the thing–in–itself back!

Harman suggests a rejuvenation of philosophical interest in the history and destiny of Kant's notorious concept of the thing–in–itself (Harman 2020: 139), but not only that, *The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy* resounds as a self–aware, yet bold declaration of philosophy's rightful claim on a certain territory of the thing–in–itself, challenging the modern academic division of labor, according to which the natural sciences occupy the only approach to reality beyond the human. It hints to the possible direction of a certain future of philosophy: having learned from many victories of self–awareness and self–criticism of correlationism, the “new realism” distances itself from the ontological exclusivity of the human, it is preparing to get back to the thing–in–itself while maintaining the inevitability of mediation at the heart of the philosophical approach to reality. The question revolves about the limits and qualities of mediation, thus indicating imagination as a solid candidate to this post. It must be noted that this increasingly self–aware return to the things–themselves evolves as part of a reply to Deborah Danowski's and Viveiros de Castro's critical remark against speculative realism in general, to which Harman, to some extent agrees, nevertheless OOO, according to him, takes a different path from Meillassoux or Brassier (*ibid*).

(4). Of course, phenomenology is very well aware of this movement “against the grain” of attention in phenomenological thinking which is rigorously trained to be directed to the acts of consciousness and resist to be completely or “naively” involved in the contents or objects of these acts. Husserl thinks about that in a paper readdressing the problems of *Logical Investigations* — “The Task and Significance of Logical Investigations.” (Husserl 1977: 197).

To put it concisely, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro observe Meillassoux and Brassier as if they are preparing for the world–without–us, meaning the world consisting of things–themselves only.

As already mentioned, this is true for Brassier and Meillassoux’s conceptions of realism, but is certainly not the case for OOO. The latter current does not seek the in–itself in some temporal region uninhabited by humans, but joins Kant in pointing to an in–itself that exists here and now but still beyond our ability to relate to it. (Harman 2020: 139)

Harman emphasizes that for OOO a thing–in–itself and without–us is, always been and will be right in front of us as well as in front of other things, yet it retains within itself an inaccessible depth. This inaccessibility is not limited to the human approach, but is posited as a limit of relationality in general. In *The Ends of the World*, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro hold that the thought experiment of “ancestrality”, as well as, we should add, the imaginary constitution of the future–after–human–extinction, depends on the derealization of thought (Danowski, Viveiros de Castro 2017: 32–33). However, in such an interpretation, the derealization goes further and it is not only directed at human thought but at any kind of sentience whatsoever. It is a peculiar transition: it supposes and then immediately dissolves the notion of non–human thought. This is the point where we would like to focus in speculating about the possible directions of the future of this dialogue between the two positions. OOO stands on a rather unique ground that maintains the inaccessibility of the in–itself, yet develops a way of inquiring into its sentience.

Now let us take a look, how the Amerindian perspectivism might approach the philosophical problematic of the in–itself. First of all, we pose a question: what do these strains of recent realist metaphysics — particularly OOO — and Amerindian perspectivism hide behind their backs when they approach the objects? To put it otherwise: what subliminal impulse, after all said and done, is the drive that puts the researcher into contact with the object of research? Cannibalism or rebellious spirit? Does one hope of learning something *from* it and satiate a certain “hunger”, instead of just learning *about* it, or does one hope to find means of resisting the oppressing systems of entrenched contemporary philosophies?

Viveiros de Castro contemplates the *philosophical impulse of anthropology* which provides a hint for us to pose the same kind of question to philosophy, among which the speculative realism is of primary concern due to its renewed

efforts of conceiving an approach to objects and due to the in some respect questionable motivating force behind this approach. Just before going further with Viveiros de Castro's observation in *Cannibal Metaphysics*, we should note that speaking about Meillassoux's and Brassier's variants of speculative realism *The Ends of the World* discloses that the motivating force behind the latter positions could be interpreted as the angst of the climate catastrophe which is getting closer and closer, indicating a certain immanent directedness towards—the—future, possibly essential to speculative realism. As Danowski and Viveiros de Castro says in a recent interview: even if the speculative realists don't speak of the Anthropocene, the hypothesis of *The Ends of the World* is that these realist positions of Meillassoux and Brassier actually express it (Danowski, Viveiros de Castro, Sabolius 2020 (forthcoming)). The power and the *need* for such expression could be interpreted as a concealed motivating force behind these realist philosophies. As we have seen, Harman would like to separate OOO's position from the latter two, thus emphasizing the need for an alternative realist motivation.

In *Cannibal Metaphysics* Viveiros de Castro contemplates the motivation of philosophical anthropology:

Because if Oedipus is the protagonist of the founding myth of psychoanalysis, our book proposes Narcissus as the candidate for patron saint or tutelary spirit of anthropology, which (above all in its so-called "philosophical" version) has always been a little too obsessed with determining the attributes or criteria that fundamentally distinguish the subject of anthropological discourse from everything it is not: *them* (which really in the end means us), the non-Occidentals, the nonmoderns, the non-humans. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 43)

Philosophical anthropology and its subliminal drive is depicted in vivid, colorful context of the Narcissus myth: Narcissus who approaches a stream not for the sake of getting to know said object (a body of water in this case) but to admire its own reflection in the marginalized otherness of the object. In other words, as Viveiros de Castro continues this sharp remark: "what is it that the others "have not" that constitutes them as non-Occidental and nonmodern?" (ibid.) For the purposes of tracking the speculative turn, we emphasize in this list the nonhumans or, generally speaking, — objects, at which point the problematic of the in-itself comes into the field of interest. Of course, held behind the back of such a manner of approach is a mirror of self-admiration that comes in handy when one needs not to forget and

to confirm the greatness of what we “have” and they “have not”. In modern philosophy this could be observed in various forms: we have *cogito*, they have *extensio*, we have free will and categorical imperative, they — physical determination, we have intentional consciousness, being-towards-death, interpretative power of hermeneutics, sense and meaning in proficient use of language, semantics of modalities and possible worlds and so on. Perhaps for this reason Deborah Danowski and Viveiros de Castro observes modern philosophy as being stuck in a “narcissistic hallucination” of modern subjects’ ontological exclusion (Danowski, Viveiros de Castro 2017: 31–32) or as Harman has put in his lecture during the symposium “The Agents of the Real” in Vilnius, modern philosophy operates within the taxonomy: “there are humans and there is everything else.” (Harman 2019 6h28–29min⁽⁵⁾) The final step in the evaluation of speculative realism in *The Ends of the World* goes along with Steven Shaviro observations:

We tend to agree with Shaviro (2011) when he points out how Meillassoux’s and Brassier’s presupposition that matter, if it is to exist in itself (outside correlation), must be passive and inert — in the sense of insentient, indifferent, and meaningless — reintroduces the human exceptionalism that it purported to eliminate. The anti-anthropocentric decision at the root of these two versions of the “world without us” theme reveals itself to be, when all is said and done, obsessed with the human point of view. (Danowski, Viveiros de Castro 2017: 35; Shaviro 2011: §26)

The supposed insentience of non-human objects fits perfectly with the reflection of narcissism of philosophy: what we have and they have not. It very well might be that precisely this reflection motivates OOO to open up to the possibilities of non-human sentience, thus bringing about imagination for mediation and speculation about the qualities and characters of different and/or altered states of awareness.

The Object-Oriented Ontology seems to take a step back: what could be admitted to be properties of objects outside of their relation with perceiving subjects, outside of relation in general? If we do not reduce objects to human access, then how to conceive the approach to objects philosophically?

Harman claims that thing-in-itself is inaccessible not because of the deficiencies of human cognitive abilities, but due to the limitation of relationality in general, thus human-world relation does not stand as a priority for philosophy (Harman 2011b: 171). In other words, it could be

(5). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4wr-_MBEUY

interpreted as questioning the impulse that drives philosophy to competitively compare the advantages of sentient beings with insentient objects. The weighted question of “what do we have that objects have not that constitutes them as non-X?” becomes problematic instead of being smuggled in as a “natural” assumption of the direction that philosophy has to take. As far as understanding of the concept of relation goes, Harman claims: “Rejecting the post-Kantian obsession with a single relational gap between people and objects, I hold that the interaction between cotton and fire belongs on the same footing as human interaction with both cotton and fire.” (Harman 2011a: 9) But what of the outside of relation, of interaction? Will “there” be found something of “what they have not” — the absences that occupy the attention of modern philosophy? What Viveiros de Castro observes in anthropology, becomes the problem for the “new” realism:

All these absences resemble each other. For in truth, taking them for the problem is exactly the problem, which thus contains the form of the response: the form of a Great Divide, the same gesture of exclusion that made the human species the biological analogue of the anthropological West, confusing all the other species and peoples in a common, privative alterity. Indeed, asking what distinguishes us from the others — and it makes little difference who “they” are, since what really matters in that case is only “us” — is already a response. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 44)

It is exactly like that: one already gives a response when one asks of the distinction between the object in relation (to humans, among others) and in-itself. It indicates the absence of X as essential characteristic of the in-itself. But then how to motivate the approach to objects philosophically? As we shall see later it is possible to make use of the anthropological idea of *resemblance* instead of the nihilistic grounding, focused on the absence. What Harman calls the taxonomy of modern philosophy exactly involves itself in such a response: it is occupied with answering what distinguishes humans from everything else by scrutinizing the human access yet somehow forgoing to question the supposed uniqueness of human kind of sentience. The critical efforts of the Object-Oriented Ontology against such “already-response” kinds of philosophical engagements take various shapes, but what is important for the purposes of this paper is the direction of inquiry that would compromise said taxonomy: an investigation of the possibility of the properties of objects that traditionally are attributed to sentient beings: perception, imagination, representation, thought and so on.

As far as OOO is concerned, these attributes are only conceivable when the relations between entities are taken into account; again, the in-itself is directly inaccessible, nevertheless it does motivate and provokes philosophy to approach it. What then are the absences of objects beyond relations? This direction puts Harman's philosophical investigations in direct contact with anthropology of Amerindian peoples propagated by Viveiros de Castro, in which the thematic of sentient relations of various entities and species retains a central focus. The concept of panpsychism comes to mind and with it, the question of how do these interceding lines of thought tackle it?

The Object-Oriented Ontology could be described, among other characteristics, as developing a certain opposition within the context of panpsychism as it is noted by C. J. Davies, according to whom Harman carries on the edge of panpsychism only partly avoiding it (Davies 2019: 101). Harman would rather like to speak of polypsychism in claiming that the thesis of panpsychism is "everything that exists also perceives" while his version would hold that "everything that *relates* must perceive." (Harman 2010: 162) The latter, according to him, *limits* the former in a remarkable way: the entities have psyches accidentally and such a model allows for entities to exist apart from relation thus without capabilities of perception (*ibid.*). But the question of psyches of entities is not really what is at stake, according to Harman it does not solve the crucial problem of human-centered ontology: "[...] it still assumes that cognition is something so poignantly special that ontology cannot live without it." (Harman 2005: 242) At this point *Guerrilla Metaphysics* diverge from *Cannibal Metaphysics*. For the latter, cognition, perspective, sociality and other aspects are truly fundamental for ontology could not be imagined without them.

OOO maintains that objects can be posited as having unassailable inner depth which is not affected by relation that is why certain objects can exist apart from relation, thus diminishing the necessity of the property of cognition for metaphysics. An example could be cotton which in contact with fire remains being cotton. In order to explain the possibility of perception in relation while maintaining the inner depth of objects, Harman formulates a notion of the quadruple object. Following his reading of Husserl, an object is drawn as a tension between sensual (intentional) object and the multitude of its appearing traits (adumbrations); in addition, another tension between real objects and their real qualities is borrowed and extrapolated from Heidegger's tool analysis. The notion of the quadruple object owes a debt to late Heidegger's poetical picture of *das Geviert* — a quartet of earth, sky,

gods, mortals of every object, which sounds, at least at first, quite mythical and resemble some unspecific indigenous metaphysics. Harman “demystifies” and advances this notion to mean a quadruple system of tensions, besides the already mentioned couple, another two are introduced: one between sensual objects and real qualities which he interprets as an heir to Husserl’s eidetic intuition, and another as a tension between real objects and sensual qualities which again takes from Heidegger’s tool analyses. So polypsychism as perception in relation is based on the first tension between sensual objects and their sensual qualities which is extended even to inanimate objects: “Dogs and trees display an excess of carnal detail that shifts in each moment without our viewing them as different objects. This is the very nature of perception, and I will soon claim that primitive perception is found even in the nethermost regions of apparently mindless entities.” (Harman 2011a: 99)

Harman proposes a term of *confrontation* to encompass both primitive and sophisticated modes of perception and implies that in this relation the real objects withdraw from contact and remain in-themselves. Tension — a keyword — is defined as “a term that implies simultaneous closeness and separation.” (Harman 2011a: 104) As we shall see further, this definition brings Harman’s treatment in close yet tense proximity to the anthropological employment of the term of resemblance.

Tracking the speculative turn from a perspective of post-colonial anthropology invites us to dwell on the tension between polypsychism and panpsychism further because multiple Amerindian and other indigenous traditions lean to one side or the other, as Viveiros de Castro observes: “[...] virtually all peoples of the New World share a conception of the world as composed of a multiplicity of points of view. Every existent is a center of intentionality apprehending other existents according to their respective characteristics and powers.” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 55) Besides the corporal intentionality of multitude of perspectives (hence — perspectivism), the notion of objects having essence beyond their individual physical manifestations is also present, such as the concept of “spirit mothers” of species of entities (like the Mother of Smallpox (ibid. 57)). That could be characterized as operating within the boundaries of the imaginary of otherness which is disclosed by developing systems of prosopomorphic / pseudo-anthropomorphic personification. According to one of the central Amerindian myths, humanity as well as other families of entities grew from the same primordial source into multitude of different natures, therefore every type of being or object evolved into its own qualities of different sentience and

corporality yet retained the unity in subjectivity. Viveiros de Castro defines this worldview as multinaturalism:

The new order of this other conceptual map led us to suggest that the term “multinaturalism” could be used to designate one of the most distinctive traits of Amerindian thought, which emerges upon its juxtaposition with modern, multiculturalist cosmologies: where the latter rest on the mutual implication between the unicity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures — [...] — the Amerindian conception presupposes, on the contrary, a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies. “Culture” or subject as the form of the universal, and “nature” or object as the particular. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 56)

He also signifies multinaturalism of Amerindian thought as an unsuspected partner, a dark precursor of certain contemporary philosophical programs, such as speculative realism (ibid. 49). So how exactly the Object–Oriented Ontology and its polypsychism engages Amerindian multinaturalism? Would OOO subscribe to a thesis of unity of mind / cognition and multiplicity of natures of objects? How does the imaginary of otherness come into play with the ontology of objects which are speculatively liberated from the influence of relations? A hint could be a notion of an object as a form of particular: for OOO, objects conceived within the limits of relationality could be analogous to “culture” for there they display relatively universal intentional qualities; and the in–itself — to “nature” which coincides with an inaccessible, indescribable core of objects’ individuality. That could be said only to be complicated right away by OOO’s rejection of the “two basic poles” of reality. But what if one of the poles — “nature” is posited as a multiplicity scoped by most general relationality?

In the Amerindian context we have to think also within the boundaries of the ontology of predation. The pray and predator relation is the essential explanatory scheme according to which all the possible relations are positioned. Viveiros de Castro thinks that:

In fact, one of the fundamental aspects of perspectivist inversions concerns the relative, relational status of predator and prey. The Amazonian metaphysics of predation is a pragmatic and theoretical context highly favorable to perspectivism. That said, there is scarcely an existent that could not be defined in terms of its relative position on a scale of predatory power. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 57)

An important characteristic of this relationality of predatory power is that it is not fixed, it is precisely relativistic and stretched within a tension of ethnocentrism and animism (ibid. 58). At the same time, predation is in itself a tension within an inherent relationality: someone's prey is another's predator. This tension reveals, according to Viveiros de Castro, a relational positioning of the concepts of personhood and humanity:

The fact that the condition of the person (whose universal apperceptive form is human) could be "extended" to other species while "denied" to other collectives of our own immediately suggests that the concept of the person — a center of intentionality constituted by a difference of internal potential — is anterior and logically superior to the concept of the human. (*ibid*)

The same could be said about Harman's position according to which perception could be extended or denied to objects depending upon whether they enter into relations or exist outside of relations. In this case perception and relation are the anterior and superior concepts. We come upon another tension concerning polypsychism (the first one being with panpsychism) — it is a tension between the poles of the imaginary of otherness separated by a difference of internal potential. On the one hand, we trace the western metaphysical fundament of otherness and its objectivity that distils human subjectivity: "The form of the Other is the thing." (ibid. 60), an object, an in-itself beyond relation to humans, on the other hand, OOO's polypsychism brings about the otherness of objects into kinship with Amerindian view: "The form of the Other is the person." (ibid. 61) (Accidentally capable of perception; confrontation) Hence the field of the imaginary of otherness as potentiality is a path or a bridge between the worlds of *Guerrilla metaphysics* and indigenous, non-modern mythopoetics, *Cannibal Metaphysics* — between the schemata of *otherness of the thing* and the *otherness of the person*, both of which could be freely applied to sentient and non-sentient beings. Here we trace a pliant, non-rigid structure of imagination as power and potentiality of different polar and accidental attitudes towards objects as well as virtuality that playfully could be alienated either to the "physical" or "psychical" poles. The other, as it is given to the already-prepared, virtual schemata of the imaginary, invokes either "objective" or "subjective" anticipatory images, unleashes either ethnocentric, anthropocentric attitudes or metaphysical distancing, opaqueness, alienation, the mesmerizing depths of the inaccessibility of the in-itself. These depths of the in-itself in some way are also appropriated into the schemata of the

imaginary and becomes either objectified or personified and even if they violently resist, splash and tug, they too are fished out and dragged as close as possible to the boat of relationality, caught by the hook, bait and line of imagination, as in when we posit together with Kant that the in-itself might be thought but not known — a thesis to which OOO soundly objects. The availability of the scheme of the in-itself is dragging its inaccessibility into the relation of *resemblance to accessibility*, without transgressing their boundaries. Interestingly, Viveiros de Castro notes that:

This is nothing more than an application of the classic structuralist precept that “resemblance has no reality in itself; it is only a particular instance of difference, that in which difference tends toward zero” (L.-S. 1981: 38) Everything hinges on the verb “to tend,” since, as Levi-Strauss observes, difference “is never completely annulled.” We could even say that it only blooms to its full conceptual power when it becomes as slight as can be: like the difference between twins, as an Amerindian philosopher might say. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 59)

Thus for OOO, being beyond relation (in-itself) is being as close to relation as conceivable even though the difference is never completely annulled (and that is the point and goal of the OOO — to maintain the difference between these poles of imaginary of otherness; speculative materialism, conversely, aims to transgress the boundaries and conceive the inaccessible as in specific ways accessible). As noted before, Harman’s definition of tension is itself in tension with this anthropological precept of resemblance which hints at a possibly fruitful comparison. If relation is accidental, as Harman claims, then being outside of it resembles being accidental as well, as it is contingent whether the object is personified or objectified within the play of the imaginary, however this resemblance also blooms when the difference becomes “as slight as can be.” It follows that the inaccessibility of objects is never completely annulled and that is the fundamental limit of relationality in general which becomes clearer and heftier as it is dragged to its edge. Maintaining the optimal distance within the polarities of otherness at all costs is the strife of the Object-Oriented Ontology which motivates the notion of the quadruple object.

Objects need not be natural, simple, or indestructible. Instead, objects will be defined only by their autonomous reality. They must be autonomous in two separate directions: emerging as something over and above their pieces, while also partly withholding themselves from relations with other entities. Instead of radical attempts to reduce

reality to some more basic root, whether it be particles, the *apeiron*, images in the mind, bundles of qualities, or pragmatic effects, the object turns out to be *polarized* into two irreducible segments. (Harman 2011a: 21–22)

3. Virtuality of Myth

Interpreting Viveiros de Castro's work, McKenzie Wark arrives at a conclusion that:

Myth is a time (out of time) before objects and subjects became distinct. Myth is about what Deleuze called the virtual, and its transformation into the actual. [...] Myth is a passage from some sort of primal nature into culture. But Amerindian myth reverses a western assumption: it is not that the human is differentiated from the animal in myth, it's the reverse. The common condition, the virtual, the primordial — is humanity, not animality. (Wark 2017: §8)

These characteristics of myth — virtuality in particular — puts it directly in front of OOO's program. For OOO is seeking a way out of modern onto-taxonomy (of object and subject) into the future of philosophy and myth lingers in the eternal "before" of objects and subjects becoming distinct. Due to the *nearly* complete lack of distinction between the two, myth allows certain resemblances to be carried away into broad explanations about the character of otherness of in-itself. Thus myth operates within the imaginary of otherness. As Viveiros de Castro explains it, denoting the inner, relational realm of the concepts of perspectivism and multinaturalism:

The two concepts emerged following an analysis of the cosmological presuppositions of "the metaphysics of predation" [...]. We found that this metaphysics, as can be deduced from Levi-Strauss' summary of it, reaches its highest expression in the strong speculative yield of those indigenous categories denoting matrimonial alliance, phenomena that I translated with yet another concept: *virtual affinity*. Virtual affinity is the schematism characteristic of what Deleuze would have called the "Other-structure" of Amerindian worlds and is indelibly marked by cannibalism, which is an omnipresent motif in their inhabitants' relational imagination. Interspecific perspectivism, ontological multinaturalism and cannibal alterity thus form the three aspects of an indigenous alter-anthropology that is the symmetrical and reverse transformation of Occidental anthropology [...]. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 49–50)

The imaginary of otherness, as it concerns the metaphysics of predation, is determined by metamorphosis and by sociality of all possible beings which also implies a certain flavor of panpsychism and/or polypsychism. Here we also must trace the irreducibility of polarization concerning qualities and non-rigid identities which is the underlying theme of Amerindian mythopoetics of otherness. According to Viveiros de Castro: “Mythic discourse registers the movement by which the present state of things is actualized from a virtual, precosmological condition that is perfectly transparent — a cha-osmos where the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of beings do not yet conceal each other.” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 65–66) A couple of things here are of note: an ambivalent virtuality of the mythic precosmological condition from which the present state of things is actualized and the irreducibility of polarization of chaos and cosmos and of corporeal and spiritual which indicates a resemblance to polypsychism.

Far from evincing the primordial identification between humans and nonhumans commonly ascribed to it, this precosmos is traversed by an infinite difference (even if, or because, it is internal to each person or agent) contrary to the finite and external differences constituting the actual world’s species and qualities. (*ibid*: 66)

It is evident that in Amerindian myth the irreducible character of polarization is posited as internal to each person and agent, while according to OOO, this also should be extended to objects in general — identity beyond particular comprising qualities and identity in withholding from relation. The thematic of metamorphosis comes to the fore due to its peculiar appropriation within the state of pre-cosmic polarization and its present actualization. Before going after it, we should remember Harman’s idea of distortion of objects in relation (Harman 2011a: 45): in a way this distortion resembles metamorphosis and the actualization of the primordial, virtual polarity of object’s autonomy. Object in relation is object in metamorphosis towards “personhood”, while anterior to relation, the object is in an undetermined state of ambivalent autonomy.

Whence the regime of qualitative multiplicity proper to myth: the question, for example, of whether the mythic jaguar is a block of human affects having the form of a jaguar or a block of human affects having a human form is strictly undecidable, as mythic “metamorphosis” is an event, a change on the spot: an intensive superposition of heterogeneous states rather than an extensive transposition of homogenous states.

Myth is not history because metamorphosis is not a process, was not yet a process and will never be a process. Metamorphosis is both anterior and external to the process of process — it is a figure (a figuration) of becoming. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 66)

The strictly undecidable ground of metamorphosis is a key: it is not a process, it is a polarized, both identical and distorted, figuration of becoming. It reveals a tension of polarities resembling that of the multitude of tensions within the OOO's quadruple structure of the object.

For example, an individual jaguar is a member of a jaguar state comprised of all jaguars as well as holding the essence of a jaguar in general. The same goes for other entities, including humans. The relations of beings work as a peculiar diplomacy between members of such states where the common ground is the pre-cosmic indeterminacy of their virtual ancestry and their present actualization. This diplomacy also involves metamorphosis: the human hunter becomes the jaguar, the jaguar becomes the hunter in mutual inter-relation, yet the essence of each type of beings is retained, “withdrawn” within their original ontological society even if their members switch sides on a daily basis and even if their mythical origin is submerged in irreducible polarity.

Employing Harman's claim that: “[...] all relations translate or distort that to which they relate: even inanimate relations” (Harman 2011a: 45), Amerindian view could be defined by a thesis that objects cannot relate or come into intimate contact with each other if they remain strictly fixed in-themselves. Only through temporary metamorphosis may they enter into mutually influential relation while having their original essence anchored in their home-species society. The peculiar feature that differs from OOO here is that the in-itself must partly betray its original identity in order to enter into relation which is unavoidable in the context of the metaphysics of predation. In the spirit of spy thrillers, all agents here tend to be double-agents (triple-agents, etc.). This is where shamanism as inter-species, exospecific diplomacy comes into play (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 60). The Object-Oriented Ontology, in its incentive of polypsychism — sentience of objects in relation, — could be thought of as analogous yet not identical to such an indigenous Amerindian view. Only a distorted or translated object is in necessity to be sentient — “must perceive.” Does it entail a metamorphosis of perceiving sentience / consciousness? The question is does OOO consider metamorphosis somehow possible anterior to relation, as an anticipation of relation (“readiness for betrayal”) thus involving itself in the problematic of

the future — directedness to possible future relations? Does it allow to think of anterior influence at all or of anticipatory metamorphosis of consciousness as in the attitude of rejection of correlation? Kristupas Sabolius observes that: “Speculative realism talks about the possibility of a radically non–correlated reality, and this approach manifests not merely as an act of thought, but rather as an act of metamorphosis of consciousness itself.” (Sabolius 2016: 63)

As Harman puts it:

The failure of both theory and praxis to exhaust the things of the world is not some tragic mental feature of humans and a few smart animals. Instead, it is a limitation of relationality in general. Objects withdraw from each other in the case of inanimate causation no less than in the human use of tools. Rain striking a tin roof does not make intimate contact with the reality of the tin any more than the monkeys on the roof or the impoverished resident of the tin–roofed shack are able to do. Let it be simply added that the withdrawal of objects from one another in causal relations turns causality into a serious philosophical problem. For if objects cannot touch directly, then how do they influence one another at all? (Harman 2011b: 174)

The OOO puts a restraint on relationality in general which diverges its view from the virtuality of the myth and turns influence of relation into a philosophical problem. For us it means the rising of the question of how then the objects distort each other into metamorphosis of being capable of perception. Where and when does the polypsychism begin? Harman’s answer is making use of the distinction of sensual (intentional) and real objects and the relative tensions between them and their qualities. Harman claims:

If contact in the realm of the real is utterly impossible, but contact in the sensual realm is an absolute requirement, then obviously the sensual realm of experience must be where all causation is triggered. The real objects that withdraw from all contact must somehow be translated into sensual caricatures of themselves, and these exaggerated profiles are what must serve as fuel for the causal relations that are impossible between concealed real things. Somehow, the events that occur in the sensual sphere must be capable of a retroactive effect on the reality that lies outside all experience. And I will claim later that not all experience is of the human or even animal kind. (Harman 2011a: 72)

In the case of Amerindian ontology, the influential interaction is possible through shamanism that practices metamorphosis and prepares, anticipates

relations through such metamorphosis. It is important to note that shamanism as a function of relationality is not limited to human or even animal species. Everything within the polarities of corporality and spirituality is involved in this diplomacy. Jaguar shamans meet human shamans, human shamans may encounter jaguars, who are human shamans in metamorphosis and jaguars may run into humans who are jaguars in metamorphosis and same thing could be said about spirits, inanimate objects and so on. The limitation of relationality is scoped by the imaginary of otherness with its polarities of personhood and thingness: one has to personify the object and turn oneself into a kin of that object in order to relate, but also one must retain both the object's otherness and otherness of self to be open to limitless further personifications. Thus the virtuality of the mythical condition is actualized and returned to virtuality again. As Viveiros de Castro states, the object is an insufficiently personified subject (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 62). Personification here is not to be taken as a finite act, but as continuous becoming, drawing upon the inexhaustible depth of either of the polarities. Thus an objective or subjective profile of an entity, taken apart, is a sort of masquerade because it is in flux and it appears as inexhaustible variation of possible approaches of its cognition, however its subjective social essence always is anchored in the original universal species which in turn is virtual and indeterminate. Hence the shamanic metamorphosis is not equivalent yet resembling Harman's distortive power of relation — shamanic metamorphosis actualizes and preserves the original specimen for its return to itself as well as prepares it for the coming influence of diplomatic communication with other entities, while in OOO's terms this seems to be a one-way trip even if the depths of the in-itself remains unchanged. That is what is indicated by the "retroactive effect on reality."

Harman glances over a similar surface following a Husserlian path of eidetic intuition: "Instead, we need only agree that there is a distinction between the wild masquerade of a thing's surface appearance and the deeper, enduring apple-qualities that the apple must retain for as long as we acknowledge it to be this very apple." (Harman 2011b: 175) To put it in contrast, Amerindian shamanism entails that one could turn into an apple or be possessed by an apple in order to approach its otherness within the polarities of imaginary, remain withdrawn to oneself at the same time and then return to a state of being unaffected by an apple. It seems quite weird in the case of an apple, but if one considers the ceremonial psychoactive plants that shamans are dealing with, such as *salvia divinorum*, the situation is clearer: *salvia* does take possession of the poor subject that inhales it and for a while there is only the

dominating will and consciousness or personality of *salvia* that is present in this type of relation. As it concerns shamanism it is enough of an indication of a true metamorphosis and truly influential relation. *Salvia* perceives — dominates the shaman and the shaman perceives as, and through *salvia*. Most importantly, the temporality, limited duration of the effect brings evidence that even in the deepest fervor of metamorphosis the anchor of the specific origin retains its power and eventually draws a subject back to its objective form — human or other kind of shaman. Thus shamanism approaches the otherness of an object of its real and unreal givenness as imaginary through personification that goes multiple ways: personification of an object and socialization or *personification of relation* (metamorphosis as a diplomatic alliance), while the Object-Oriented Ontology indicates personification (psyche) of an object *in relation* and *objectification of relation* and leaves it aside when relations are not taken in to account. As Harman says: “For in fact, my perception of a tree does meet the criteria for an object. It is definitely unified, for it is one perception.” (Harman 2011a: 112) For the OOO personification should entail distortion on both sides, yet Harman seems to avoid it in saying that: “If I perceive the tree, it can probably perceive me in turn. But this must occur as part of a different relation, not as the reverse side of the same one.” (ibid. 73) The multiplicity of objectified relations within what appears as a same instance of interaction is the yielding trait of OOO’s polypsychism; it could be named multirelationism in contrast to Amerindian multinaturalism of multiple natures within a same interaction.

In the case of indigenous worldviews, personification is established within the mythical ancestral setting that is co-present in the current moment of shamanic trance — not an ordinary state of being but rather the underlying flux of potentiality, of myriad of possibilities out of which diplomatic metamorphosis grows out. This resonates with Harman’s line of thinking: “[...] the kingdoms of real and sensual are now linked by a strange sort of bridge, crossing between shadow and light: a rigorous scientific phenomenology generating the sort of strange communicational infrastructure between real and unreal that might be found in a fairy tale.” (Harman 2011b: 175) In the Amerindian indigenous contexts the fairy tale takes place in the broader mythic setting where the real and unreal is strictly undecidable and is conceivable as being in virtual potentiality which can be actualized by virtue of the powers of imagination.

Broadly speaking, Harman replies to Danowski and Viveiros de Castro by actualizing the philosophical inquiry into the thin-in-itself, redrawing

its limits beyond correlationism, beyond relation in general and giving the reasons why the in–itself is not to be automatically taken as constantly inert, insentient, indifferent or meaningless.

That is to say, the usual manner of trying to get beyond Kant is along the lines of German Idealism. “Kant was a great genius, except for his naively traditional and self–contradictory and vaguely Platonic or Christian bit about the thing–in–itself. But he can be forgiven, since he did so many other important things, and luckily his successors cleaned up the thing–in–itself problem for him.” These admiring critics of Kant are no less taxonomical than the master himself. As we saw earlier, whether or not there is a “gap” between thought and world, the real problem is that thought and world are taken as the two basic terms in the first place. The only way to escape this assumption, *the only exit from modern philosophy*, is to cease conceiving of the thing–in–itself as something “unknowable to humans,” and to reconceive it as the excess in things beyond any of their relations to each other. (Harman 2020: 139)

We may speculate that the in–itself may be approached as if it was virtual for it seems to be real in its multifaceted effect on philosophy: post–Kantian thinkers worked hard to get rid of it, culminating in German idealism; later on, the topic, with some exceptions, became shunned by the established schools across the analytic / continental divide; further, it is again picked up by Harman’s version of speculative realism. Because of that, for now OOO’s position remains unscathed by the criticism explicated in *The Ends of the World*. Nevertheless, a directedness to the future, characteristic to Brassier’s and Meillassoux’s versions of realism, can also be traced, however, in different form, in OOO. Harman himself admits that “philosophies of the future” is one of his favorite themes (Harman 2020: 141). One might think that it is quite natural for a relatively new philosophical movement to be at least a little inclined towards the future. Novelty, “newness” of things points to the future, as in the popular slogan: “the future is now.” Yet OOO’s realism could not be appropriately interpreted as stemming from the panic of climate change and the angst of the future catastrophe, as well as it is not concerned with temporal zones without humans. It is particularly careful in speculation about the non–human object’s sentience, in so far as allowing to conceive such sentience in terms of limits of relationality in general. However, relationality comes back to face OOO’s direction when OOO inspects the constraints of the imaginary of otherness, of the inaccessibility of the in–itself, which sort of explains OOO’s affinity to fiction. Sabolius argues that:

[...] the project of the return to the problem of real necessarily passes through the radicalization of imagination, which, technically speaking, is performed as the perspectival change in anamorphosis. In my view, this procedure invokes the third meaning of correlation: Being is always related to the subject, but never determined or subordinated by it. In this light, the radical imagination aims to maintain an emancipatory meaning — the call to a constant anamorphic procedure, to the gestures of constant re-determination, by cultivating the change of perspectives, without any pretense to totality. (Sabolius 2020 (forthcoming))

If OOO's speculation introduces certain imaginary, fictitious factors, it might be considered as performing a radicalization of imagination and thus it is faced again with the topic of relationality: this gives way to speculative notion of polysychism. In fact, OOO goes so far as to arrive at an opposite, yet parallel trajectory to Amerindian perspectivism which is also focused on relationality of the metaphysics of predation. The resemblance, the tense and irreducible distance between the two positions blooms when they diverge on these aspects: OOO — objectification of relation / Amerindian perspectivism — personification of relation; OOO — multirelationism / Amerindian perspectivism — multinaturalism. Next to that, we should add the juxtaposition of virtuality of primordial, mythical times that is actualized at present times and speculation characterized, among other things, by directedness into the future taking shape today. The latter trait also hints at a virtuality of the future that is real in its effect today. This brings myth and speculation into a tense parallel.

Together with OOO and Amerindian perspectivism, that is, drawing upon the parallel of virtuality of myth and certain possible future directions of speculative thought, we assumed that the in-itself is sentient. However, this sentience can only be posited ambiguously as stretched between the tension of the fundamental poles of personhood and thingness. As we have seen, person is a more fundamental and antecedent concept, to which the concept of humanity is subordinated. Can these poles be abandoned, taking *The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy*, leaving the thought and world division behind? The most important difference between Amerindian perspectivism and OOO boils down to this point: whether ontology is possible without personhood (cognition)? It would seem that Amerindian perspectivism would say: 'no'; and OOO, on this point, would be rather slippery, but lean to the side of 'yes' — speculatively torn apart from relations, objects and ontology of objects might be posited without referring to the concepts of personhood, sentience,

cognition, perception and so on. But in doing so, the ontological investigation comes into a close proximity to alter–epistemology, what reflects in Harman’s attention to the problematics of panpsychism and polypsychism.

If the directedness to the future, characteristic of the “new” realism, is, among other things, defined by speculation’s attachment to the possibility of verification. Then, if we were allowed to put a Deleuzian twist, together with Viveiros de Castro, on this point, it would turn out to mean that the possibility is subordinated to virtuality and verification — to actualization. From this perspective, because virtual is in some sense real, speculation in speculative realism might be defined as carrying out its task *as if verification/actualization is realized already*. It is assured by its virtuality. Harman’s sure tone, felt in his deliberations, strongly hints to such virtuality of speculation.

Conclusions

Directedness to the future, observable in various forms within the movement of speculative realism, provokes the question of the motivation of speculative realism which is taken up by Danowski and Viveiros de Castro: is it motivated by the angst of uncertain future of humanity in the world of climate change? Harman’s answer is explicating OOO’s motivation as a return to the reality of things–in–themselves, even if continuing to withhold from reducing this thematic to problematic of human access. After this initial confrontation, both positions seem to be drawn by the problematic of panpsychism / polypsychism.

The concept of polypsychism as a certain quality of sentience in relation or absence of it apart from relation, the limits of relationality in general, could be applied in tracing the shift in the meaning of the relation of presentation and presentification: how to think or speculate of something that is not directly accessible, but is hinted to by various relations; how relation in general hints towards the absence of relation and *vice versa*. Also the notion of polypsychism might be useful in defining the means by which the otherness of things enters into the realm of the imaginary or myth: constitution of poetical resemblance as the “method” of transgressing the absence of direct relation.

The Object–Oriented Ontology’s thesis of polypsychism resembles the Amerindian mythopoetics: the former’s multirelationism nears the latter’s multinaturalism and both are characterized by a polarization of the imaginary of otherness. However, as Viveiros de Castro notes, resemblance entails a dif-

ference that is never annulled completely and this difference gets to its bloom when it approaches being as slight as possible. The OOO's use of key term of tension within polarities of otherness further nourishes this blooming.

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