

Research Article

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Divergences and Convergences of Perspective: Amerindian Perspectivism, Phenomenology, and Speculative Realism

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Abstract: According to Viveiros de Castro, comparison as ontology defines the ontological turn in anthropology. It presents a necessity for philosophy to approach the matter with comparative strategy. Morten Pedersen claims that ontological turn should be interpreted as a fulfillment of an anthropological version of Husserl's method. Thus, phenomenology enters the field of interest along with its critique in Speculative Realism. In this article, we will see clearly why this selection is not accidental but rather unavoidable. Amerindian perspectivism necessitates the philosophical reconceptualization of perspective in general, which is to be taken as a challenge for the established discourses. The need arises to rethink the problematic of Kantian perspectivism and its offspring. Amerindian perspectivism proposes cosmological deictics that hold a spatiality of the perspective of the other, of the in-itself, thus it comes into an opposition to Kant's system. Phenomenological perspective, as one of the Kantian offspring, faces a predicament that is interwoven with the critique of correlationism arriving from Speculative Realisms. The synthetic character of phenomenology allows enough flexibility for it to traverse these recent charges. We will draw a comparative picture of dynamic co-evolution of strains of recent thought, striving for a synthetic multiplicity, permeated by a common perspectival thread.

Keywords: perspective, Amerindian perspectivism, multinaturalism, phenomenology, Speculative Realism, Object-Oriented Ontology

1 Introduction

Among other things, the current pandemic mixed with migration waves of refugees is forcing us to reimagine the point of view of the other and the problematic of perspective. We will attempt to consider and compare a few specific *perspectivist* approaches to the point of view of the *other*, phenomenological and anthropological, in hopes of forming a better understanding of the *otherness* of a nonhuman perspective, which also represents us in a specific way. We will look at Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's position, called Amerindian perspectivism, and compare it to current developments in the phenomenology of perspective, which faces a challenge from Speculative Realism.

Due to the very nature of comparative study – being a comparison that seeks resemblance and difference – there is an inherent deficiency in such a theoretical approach: the division of attention to be spread

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between two or more parallel discourses or philosophical deliberations.¹ It is a disjunctive synthetic articulation of each position in relation to the other, maintaining the difference; however, it suffers from unavoidable superficiality because it does not allow full immersion in one chosen discourse and sacrifices depth for the possibility of an alternative view. The advantage of a thematically unified monographic work is the depth and rigor of analysis; comparative study, though, has an advantage of possibly fleshing out some new perspectives to look at the themes of investigation. Comparative study is itself perspectivist.

The concept of *perspective* is an “invention²” of Renaissance aesthetics, of the great artists, and philosophers of the era (Filippo Brunelleschi, Leon Battista Alberti, and Galileo Galilei) and their articulation of the lawful principles of imitation of depth on a flat surface by drawing from the point of view of the observer. In some sense, it created a modern observer who gazes at the objective world, with the world appearing accordingly: with objects close and distant presented from one side or the other, thus referring to perspectival quality of any appearance. The artists had to distinguish what is genuinely perceived, the side and the position (“facing”) of the object, and what the intended meaning, figure, persona, or symbol of that drawing is. It is no coincidence that Edmund Husserl refers to ideas of the Renaissance as the origin of the identity of modern humanity in his book *The Crisis of European Sciences*³ as well as in the famous appendix *The Origin of Geometry*.⁴

When the thematic of comparative study is current phenomenological and anthropological advances – the so-called ontological turn – the comparative strategy of investigation begets a whole new ontological dimension. A reflection on anthropology led to the proposal of a notion of methodological importance: *ontological delegation*. Viveiros de Castro observes the consequences:

The notion of an *ontological* delegation means that the anthropologist is forced to take his/her own ontological assumptions out of the strongbox and risk their robustness and transportability by letting them be counter-analysed by indigenous knowledge practices, or, to put it differently, he/she defines whatever he/she is studying as a counter-metaphysics with its own requisites and postulates. Anthropology becomes comparative metaphysics even as metaphysics becomes comparative ethnography. And the anthropologist turns into an ontological negotiator or diplomat. To quote the position paper of the recent AAA symposium on the politics of the ontological turn, which I co-signed with Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen: “The anthropology of ontology is anthropology as ontology; not the comparison of ontologies, but comparison as ontology.”⁵

Comparison as ontology defines anthropology and thus presents the necessity for philosophy to approach the matter with comparative strategies. Ontological delegation is also a very interesting concept worthy of application in philosophy. It is up to us to choose which accents demand that corresponding discourses be compared to anthropological advances. Morten Pedersen claims that the ontological turn itself should be interpreted as a fulfillment of Husserl’s transcendental project.⁶ Thus, phenomenological philosophy enters into our field of interest along with its critique in Speculative Realism. Further on, we will see clearly why this selection is not accidental but rather unavoidable. We will draw a comparative picture of a complex and dynamic co-evolution of strains of recent philosophical–anthropological thought while striving for a synthetic multiplicity which is permeated by a common perspectival thread. It must be noted that this discussion considers Amerindian perspectivism in philosophical circles and does not explore the anthropological debates between phenomenological anthropology and the ontological turn in any depth, because this has been done excellently by Pedersen (2020). However, the core statement of the ontological turn’s affinity to Husserlian phenomenology is of utmost importance.

¹ We would also like to observe that the very symbol of “:” signifies a division of attention. A disjunctive symbol that demands we reserve some attention for what is to come next.

² It had drawn heavily from earlier medieval *Perspective* tradition (of Roger Bacon and the Silesian mathematician Witelo) and the theory of optics of Arab polymath Ibn al-Haytham, as well as of the legacy of antiquity.

³ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 8–10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 353–4. Husserl explicitly refers to the depth-problems of geometry and the weight that they have for philosophy. For us, it means a reference to the problem of perspective.

⁵ Viveiros de Castro, “Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf?,” 7.

⁶ Pedersen, “Anthropological Epochs,” 3.

2 Shifts of perspective: Between philosophical and anthropological perspectivism

Els Lagrou summarizes an important aspect in the discourse we are about to explore, the *ontological turn*:

With the advent of the ‘ontological turn’ in Amerindian ethnology and the definition of perspectivism and multi-naturalism (or animism) as diametrically opposed to naturalism (Descola 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998) attention shifted from social relations and kinship studies to human/non-human relations.⁷

This signifies a change of perspective: the rise of perspectivism is notable in its attempt to go beyond the human and pose the question of a nonhuman perspective. Besides works by Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a good example of this tendency is Eduardo Kohn’s book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2013). Kohn introduces us to the forest in a delightful passage:

Settling down to sleep under our hunting camp’s thatch lean-to in the foothills of Sumaco Volcano, Juanicu warned me, “Sleep faceup! If a jaguar comes he’ll see you can look back at him and he won’t bother you. If you sleep facedown he’ll think you’re aich [prey; lit., “meat” in Quichua] and he’ll attack.” If, Juanicu was saying, a jaguar sees you as a being capable of looking back – a self like himself, a you – he’ll leave you alone. But if he should come to see you as prey – an it – you may well become dead meat./How other kinds of beings see us matters. That other kinds of beings see us changes things. If jaguars also represent us – in ways that can matter vitally to us – then anthropology cannot limit itself just to exploring how people from different societies might happen to represent them as doing so. Such encounters with other kinds of beings force us to recognize the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs.⁸

Precisely for this reason, not only jaguars and other beings but today the virus also represents a perspective, it also *looks* at us in some sense, it is a point of view; and a perspective of pandemic among humans is a vast source of anthropological insights, to say the least. Here, however, we will begin by focusing specifically on the approaches that in one way or the other are challenging the incommensurability of thought and world by attempting to go beyond the human.

In today’s philosophical climate, the thematic of the world beyond humans brings forth the context of Speculative Realism which distances itself from forms of realism in both the analytic and continental philosophical traditions. In parallel, Amerindian multinaturalist ontology in Viveiros de Castro’s works presents itself as a reverse image of the Western naturalist worldview. Thus, we will later concisely discuss certain tendencies in the current discourse of philosophy of science that relate closely to the thematic of perspectivism and phenomenology. For example, note how the multinaturalist thesis of the multiplicity of natures differs from Husserl’s phrase: “The objective world is from the start the world for all, the world which “everyone” has as world-horizon.”⁹ Do these statements operate at the same level? Very broadly, Husserl’s phenomenology is concerned with original transcendental subjectivity within the world-horizon, whereas Viveiros de Castro’s ontology is concerned with original subjectivity as such within a multinaturalist picture. Both views are focused on subjectivity with regard to its proliferation across ontological or intersubjective spheres. The system must admit and allow subjectivity *out there*, at least among other humans. In the phenomenological sense, this is a restricted space, but transcendental observations aspire to operate at a level of universality, the scope of which includes all subjects of similar cognitive constitution. Interestingly, in the Amerindian perspectivist view, all possible subjects are of similar cognitive constitution as humans – they share the original ancestral/human subjectivity.

Crucial to our comparative investigations, to the reasons why we chose to talk of Speculative Realism, phenomenology, and Amerindian perspectivism and why we will turn to Kant, is this retrospective observation of the origins of the ontological turn in anthropology; Viveiros de Castro reflects:

⁷ Lagrou, “Learning to See in Western Amazonia,” 25.

⁸ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 1.

⁹ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 359.

In a well-known collection titled *Thinking through things*, thanks to which the expression ‘ontological turn’ acquired its controversial conspicuousness in anthropology, the editors mention a ‘quiet revolution’ led by authors like Wagner, Latour, Gell, Strathern and yours truly. Rarely has such a mild adjective as ‘quiet’ helped provoke the very opposite of what it means! But what was that revolution about? The editors of the collection describe it as ‘a shifting of focus of questions of knowledge and epistemology to questions of ontology’. This way of characterising the move is referred to in the final paragraphs of my ‘Amazonian Perspectivism’ lectures of 1998. I later came to realise that others far more competent than I had already defined the Modern *philosophical* revolution by precisely the opposite shift, i.e. from ontology (left to the hard sciences) to epistemology (the philosophers’ and later the social scientists’ province). I was not too far off the mark, then. In those paragraphs I observed the profound philosophical debt of our discipline to the Kantian epistemocritical turn, and called for a return of sorts to a ‘pre’-Kantian, pre-modern even, speculative concern with ontological questions when it came to dealing with our ethnographic materials (I remind you that ‘Speculative Realism’ was yet to be born, at that remote epoch).¹⁰

Speculative Realism marks the shift toward ontological problems, as in object-oriented ontology, but Viveiros de Castro demonstrates how the change of perspective in anthropology prefaced or coincided with the speculative turn in philosophy by diverging from Kant. That is why there is a need for a project comparing them all, to get at the conceptual bearing this has for the philosophy of perspective.

However, this is also where it gets complicated, since phenomenological reduction is also a method of bracketing the naïve realist attitude. One of the most talented pupils of Husserl, Aron Gurwitsch, claimed that “The phenomenological reduction – this is one of its reasons for being – throws a gulf impossible to cross between phenomenology and every sort of philosophical anthropology.”¹¹ In this respect, it appears unsympathetic to philosophical/anthropological attempts to return to pre-Kantian concerns with ontological questions. This particular comparative project between phenomenology and anthropology reconsiders “the gulf” in light of recent theoretical developments in anthropology, mainly in the works of Viveiros de Castro. Gurwitsch’s attitude contrasts sharply with phenomenological anthropology in general, which claims to be applying Husserl’s method.

Kohn is particularly critical of phenomenology due to his sympathies for semiotics:

These approaches fail to recognize that signs also exist well beyond the human (a fact that changes how we should think about human semiosis as well). Life is constitutively semiotic. That is, life is, through and through, the product of sign processes (Bateson 2000c, 2002; Deacon 1997; Hoffmeyer 2008; Kull et al. 2009). What differentiates life from the inanimate physical world is that life-forms represent the world in some way or another, and these representations are intrinsic to their being. What we share with nonhuman living creatures, then, is not our embodiment, as certain strains of phenomenological approaches would hold, but the fact that we all live with and through signs.¹²

We would disagree with Kohn precisely on the point of perspectivism: semiotics is the study of signs (*semiosis*) that produce meaning, while phenomenology involves a study of *meaning* as it is originally constituted in transcendental consciousness and world-horizon. That we either pay attention to signs or focus on the meaning involves a meaningful change of perspective, but they do not exclude one another. It is not unlike a shift of attention from the contents of our perception to the meaning-giving constitutive acts themselves: they are in correlation. Kohn’s reference to the body is not accidental, since the body is a kind of gap in phenomenological correlationism. From other perspectives, such as OOO, Kohn’s limitation to semiotics of living things only reaffirms the modern onto-taxonomy. Signification is taken to be something so fundamental that ontology could not be imagined without it.

Viveiros de Castro’s approach is influenced by the philosophies of Leibniz, Nietzsche, Whitehead, Levi-Strauss, Deleuze, and Latour. Basically, the term *perspectivism* comes from a reinterpretation of Nietzsche’s conception of “perspectivism”¹³ and its subsequent reiterations in modern and contemporary philosophies,

¹⁰ Viveiros de Castro, “Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf?,” 3.

¹¹ Gurwitsch, *Constitutive Phenomenology in Historical Perspective*, 103.

¹² Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 9.

¹³ We use quotation marks to signify Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” as a contentious definition of Nietzsche’s philosophy. For a recent discussion, we refer to Berry’s, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, Chapter 4; Hales’ article “Nietzsche’s Epistemic Perspectivism.”

especially that of Deleuze. Viveiros de Castro admits that reading said philosophers gave him the idea of proposing the term *perspectivism* to interpret indigenous ontology.¹⁴ According to Lagrou:

Viveiros de Castro credits Lima with stressing that ‘a point of view’ for the Yudjá is not to be confounded with our classical western cultural relativism. This was an important step in the direction of solving a recurring problem with expressions such as ‘perspectival quality’ and ‘perspectival relativity’, used by Kaj Århem (1990) and Andrew Gray (1996), respectively, to draw attention to this very common phenomenon in Amerindian conceptualisations of human/animal relations. Viveiros de Castro’s demonstration of how perspectivism differs from the relativism of different points of view on a common world has been his greatest contribution to the ongoing debate on the place of the Nature/Culture divide in Amerindian ethnology.¹⁵

A distinction between perspectivism and relativism is especially important in ethnological contexts, but it is also widely discussed in phenomenology and philosophy of science. This distinction is also one of the key questions concerning any kind of perspectivist philosophy or anthropology. For example, Descola, interpreting Viveiros de Castro’s position, notes that

“Perspectivism” thus expresses the idea that any being that occupies a referential point of view, being in the position of subject, sees itself as a member of the human species. The human bodily form and human culture are deictics of the same type as ethnonymic self-designations. But that is not to say that perspectivism is a relativism in which each kind of subject forges for itself a different representation of a material world that nevertheless always remains identical, since the life of nonhumans is governed by the same values as that of humans: just like humans, nonhumans hunt fish and make war.¹⁶

Besides the important point about relativism, Descola also directs attention to deictic understanding of point of view. Referential, relational deictic conceives the *other* as a deictic center. It is an ontological multiplicity of various deictic centers and their interrelations. In this way, it spells out a kind of spatiality of the spiritual and unfolds both layers to grow into each other. In the background of predator–prey relationality, the *nearness* of each is what indicates the deictic quality. It is a tension of nearness/danger and distance/safety that is important here.

It is stressed that Amerindian perspectivism and its deictic view do not entail relativism, as it would probably do in Western philosophical contexts, because there is no assumption of a unified nature, but rather a multiplicity of variations of nature. Descola is not sure if that is sufficient to describe the main aspects of animism: “the human form and culture that Amerindians attribute to animals are, as it were, cosmological deictics that are immanent in points of view. But can this argument be generalized to cover the whole group of animist ontologies?”¹⁷

While considering Deleuze’s idea of rhizomatic multiplicity together with Latour, Viveiros de Castro draws out a perspective taking a thing itself as a *multiplicity*:

Hence a rhizomatic multiplicity is not truly a *being* but an assemblage of becomings, a “*between*”: a *difference engine*, or rather, the intensive diagram of its functioning. Bruno Latour, who in his recent book on actor-network theory indicates how much it owes to the rhizome concept, is particularly emphatic: a network is not a thing because anything can be described as a network (2005: 129–31). A network is a *perspective*, a way of inscribing and describing [...]. Yet this perspective is internal or immanent; the different associations of the “thing” make it differ from itself – “it is the thing itself that has been allowed to be deployed as multiple” (Latour 2005: 116). In short, and the point goes back to Leibniz, there are no points of view *on* things – it is things and beings that are the points of view (Deleuze 1994: 49; 1990d: 173–174). If there is no entity without identity, then there is no multiplicity without perspective.¹⁸

Network, by its very relationality, is a perspective, a way of inscribing and describing development of relationships. Viveiros de Castro concedes that such a dynamic concept of perspective quite accurately

¹⁴ Danowski et al., “Žvelgiant iš poliarinių lokių požiūrio taško,” 306.

¹⁵ Lagrou, “Copernicus in the Amazon,” 142.

¹⁶ Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 75.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 110.

captures certain important *perspectivist* characteristics of Amazonian indigenous ontology: the things themselves are points of view. It invites us to rethink the Kantian heritage of the in-itself. As Latour had observed after witnessing a dispute between Descola and Viveiros de Castro:

But what Viveiros criticized was that Descola risks rendering the shift from one type of thought to another ‘too easy’, as if the bomb he, Viveiros, had wanted to place under Western philosophy had been defused. If we allow our thought to hook into Amerindian alternative logic, the whole notion of Kantian ideals, so pervasive in social science, has to go.¹⁹

Latour describes Amerindian perspectivism as a bomb or as something that was transported to Western thought to destroy it from the inside through “a sort of reverse cannibalism.”²⁰ Precisely, the point of their treatment of perspectivism is what, according to Latour and Viveiros de Castro, divides Descola’s and Viveiros de Castro’s positions: for Descola, perspectivism is just a category within a broader typology, whereas for Viveiros de Castro, it is a diffusive, contagious, disruptive force that can potentially implode Western thought by cannibalizing Western perspectivism.

A concept of *synthesis* comes into focus, an advanced, Deleuzian version of synthesis: disjunctive synthesis.

François Zourabichvili, one of the most perceptive commentators on the philosopher, observes that “implication is the fundamental logical movement in Deleuze’s philosophy” (2004[1994]: 82); elsewhere, he underscores that Deleuzian pluralism supposes a “primacy of relations.” The philosophy of difference is a philosophy of relation. Yet not every relation will do. Multiplicity is a system defined by a modality of relational synthesis different from a connection or conjunction of terms. Deleuze calls it *disjunctive synthesis* or *inclusive disjunction*, a relational mode that does not have similarity or identity as its (formal or final) cause, but divergence or distance; another name for this relational mode is “becoming.” Disjunctive synthesis or becoming is “the main operator of Deleuze’s philosophy.” (Zourabichvili 2003: 81)²¹

Here, a *divergence* of perspective in multiplicity is emphasized, a relation of divergence. A relation that keeps the relating apart is perspectival. A synthetic, unifying character of this divergent relation is paradoxical; however, only in this way might it avoid falling into Cartesian dichotomies. The primacy of the relation expressed as a methodological stance allows us to think of Amerindian perspectivism as a disjunctive correlationism. In fact, the primacy of the predator–prey relation in indigenous ontologies had been observed during the twentieth century and today is elaborated by Descola, Kohn, and Viveiros de Castro.²² The predator–prey relation is a relation that does not have similarity or identity as a cause. Analogously, Amerindian perspectivism needs an abundance of other philosophies; thus, it does not need to present itself as the ultimate philosophy. Viveiros de Castro says in an interview with Kristupas Sabolius: Amerindian perspectivism is not in the market for the best ontology.²³ It is relational as it *needs* others.

The most important insight here is that *the divergence of perspective in disjunctive syntheses fleshes out things themselves as points of view*. A divergent perspective does not seek identity, it seeks primacy of distancing, disjunctive relation. Therefore, it portrays perspective as a disjunctive relation that opens up the *otherness* as a point of view: a cosmological *deixis*. In this way, it moves against the brush of Renaissance aesthetics: a distancing or a trajectory of perspective that draws from the center of the other’s point of view, which is of universal subjective structure, into an unknown variety of natures.

Glenn H. Shepard criticized Viveiros de Castro’s theory:

¹⁹ Latour, “Perspectivism ‘Type or ‘Bomb’?,” 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 111–2.

²² Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 164–5; Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 2, 116, 121; Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 57, 59.

²³ Danowski et al., “Žvelgiant iš poliarinių lokių požiūrio taško,” 306.

Viveiros de Castro implies not only divergence between Western and Amerindian ways of knowing, but a nearly perfect, dichotomous inversion. Presenting indigenous ways of knowing as a mirror-image of our own risks simplifying the internal complexity of indigenous knowledge while at the same time reproducing the problematic Cartesian dichotomy (nature/culture, mind/body, matter/spirit) from the other side of the looking glass.²⁴

A reply to Shepard is at hand: if Viveiros de Castro's approach is as divergent (rhizomatic) as it aims to be, then the otherness of indigenous ways of knowing should retain their difference: Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism is a disjunctive synthesis.

These new anthropological perspectives are in some way looking beyond the human and striking at the presumptions of superior human identity and the nature–culture divide. Human exceptionalism is questioned by tendencies of thinking in various forms beyond the human. Speculative Realism, on the other hand, is an overbearing attempt to emancipate all kinds of realism, including scientific realism, from the priority of human–world relation or correlationism. It also starts by diverging from Kant. In this way, it resembles recent anthropological developments. The question is what kind of interpretation and perspective on *realism* is relevant here?

3 Realism and perspectivism

Recently, there has been an attempt to introduce a phenomenological notion of perspective into naturalist ontology.

Scientific realism evolved into a debate between realism and anti-realism that, according to some theorists, is at a stalemate.²⁵ A perspectivist approach suggests itself as a possible solution: Philipp Berghofer offers an overview of the current state of the debate within the philosophy of science and points to the phenomenological tradition:

In current debates, many philosophers of science have sympathies for the project of introducing a new approach to the scientific realism debate that forges a middle way between traditional forms of scientific realism and anti-realism. One promising approach is perspectivism. Although different proponents of perspectivism differ in their respective characterizations of perspectivism, the common idea is that scientific knowledge is necessarily partial and incomplete. Perspectivism is a new position in current debates but it does have its forerunners. Figures that are typically mentioned in this context include Dewey, Feyerabend, Leibniz, Kant, Kuhn, and Putnam. Interestingly, to my knowledge, there exists no work that discusses similarities to the phenomenological tradition. This is surprising because here one can find systematically similar ideas and even a very similar terminology.²⁶

What is surprising here is that Berghofer finds no comparative studies between perspectives of phenomenology and philosophy of science, since any comparative study essentially does precisely that, for example, the works of Dan Zahavi. Of course, discussion on the topic of perspective itself between the philosophical movements mentioned might still need further elaboration. It is not difficult to notice that both phenomenological and scientific perspectivisms present themselves as non-radical or reserved. For example, as Husserl emphasizes: “*To be in infinitum imperfect in this manner is part of the unannullable essence of the correlation between “physical thing” and perception of a physical thing.*”²⁷ This imperfection or inherent incompleteness of perspective is a fundamental characteristic to keep in mind going forward. In addition, at a superficial glance, both positions seem to be limited to be making claims from a human perspective. As Husserl says, the correlation itself is *in infinitum* imperfect, thus any criticism of

²⁴ Shepard, “Spirit Bodies, Plant Teachers and Messenger Molecules,” 78.

²⁵ Philipp Berghofer maintains that these authors witness the stalemate of the realism debate within the philosophy of science: “Chakravartty 2018, 233; Forbes 2017, 3327; Frost-Arnold 2010, 56.” (Berghofer, “Scientific Perspectivism in the Phenomenological Tradition,” 2).

²⁶ Berghofer, “Scientific Perspectivism in the Phenomenological Tradition,” 1.

²⁷ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 94.

correlationism faces a particularly Husserlian reply. Husserl goes on to describe this imperfection in a detailed and transparent theory of horizontal consciousness. Phenomenology incorporates the incompleteness of perspective up to the point where it becomes a rather solid ground for the development of Husserl's famous ideas of adumbration and active and passive synthesis. In Husserl's words:

[...] the perspectival adumbration through which every spatial object invariably appears, only manifests the spatial object from one side. No matter how completely we may perceive a thing, it is never given in perception with the characteristics that qualify it and make it up as a sensible thing from all sides at once... It is inconceivable that external perception would exhaust the sensible-material content of its perceived object... Thus, this fundamental division between what is genuinely perceived and what is not genuinely perceived belongs to the primordial structure of correlation: External perception and bodily "object."²⁸

The inexhaustible horizon of further possible experience is what assures the phenomenologist that there is an external, physical world "out there."²⁹ However, phenomenological reduction allows us to go against the grain of the habituality of experience and distinguish between what is genuinely perceived and what is intended as a synthetic objective unity. This is how the phenomenology of perspective roots itself in the question of the real. For some theorists, the question remained the scope and radicalism of phenomenological reduction: does it methodically exclude external reality or not? According to Maximilian Beck, an early critic:

Husserl, however, turns that matter of fact into this: Through the continuity of agreeing experience concerning the adumbration of things I am always expecting a reverse side of a thing. If such an expectation is verified, it marks an agreement of experience which is meant by the objective reality of things, namely not a real thing independently existing from its experiences, but only that continuity and harmony of experiences. It radically contradicts common sense to believe that subjectivity produces ("leistet") the world. Everyone is convinced that the world is pre-given in itself to all perception of it. Such a world produced by human subjectivity would not be called reality, objectivity, truth by common sense – but rather illusion, deception!³⁰

Similar charges against phenomenology's supposed anti-realism were recently put forward by an enthusiastic speculative realist, Tom Sparrow,³¹ which prompted a harsh reply from Zahavi.³² Against his interpretation of Husserl, which is very problematic, Beck holds a realist position: it is because corporeal things really exist that they are able to present various sides that correspond to an observer's point of view; the lawfulness of this correlation, independent from subjectivity, is what defeats the position of the later phase of Husserl's phenomenology, according to Beck.³³ Sparrow suggests that phenomenology should package itself as anti-realist idealism,³⁴ while Zahavi is sure that Husserl's "anti-realism" is far more elusive if not outright nonexistent and that the realism of the speculative turn itself is questionable:

As Husserl declared in a famous letter to Émile Baudin: "No ordinary 'realist' has ever been so realistic and so concrete as I, the phenomenological 'idealist'" (Husserl 1994, 16). Although the main speculative criticism of phenomenology concerns its alleged failure to be sufficiently realist, although Sparrow insists that speculative realism "returns us to the real without qualification and without twisting the meaning of realism" (Sparrow 2014, xii), it should by now be obvious that the realism on offer is of a rather peculiar kind.³⁵

Developments in particular fields such as anthropology, where the phenomenological method is applied and adjusted to the needs of the specific discipline, discourage such readings as Beck's, although they do give merit to Sparrow's claim that there is a tendency to rigorous and non-rigorous proliferation of

²⁸ Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 39–40.

²⁹ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 358.

³⁰ Beck, "The Last Phase of Husserl's Phenomenology," 488–9.

³¹ Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*, 3–5.

³² Zahavi, "The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism."

³³ Beck, "The Last Phase of Husserl's Phenomenology," 489.

³⁴ Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*, 12.

³⁵ Zahavi, "The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism," 301.

phenomenologies.³⁶ Viewed from a department of philosophy, there seem to be non-rigorous phenomenologies in anthropology. For example, Hrvoje Čargonja holds that “One does not have to know about phenomenology to practice it.”³⁷ Tim Ingold maintains that he goes to great lengths in his phenomenological anthropology to refute the notion of human or nonhuman as a closed-in subject that is bombarded by sensory stimuli from external environment.³⁸ He describes an adaptation of perspective of a researcher doing fieldwork – a training of attention to the *other’s* customs of attending,

In reality, of course, this dilemma is readily circumvented by means of participant observation, which allows the ethnographer to access other people’s ways of perceiving by joining with them in the same currents of practical activity and by learning to attend to things – as would any novice practitioner – in terms of what they afford in the contexts of what has to be done. This communion of experiences establishes a baseline of sociality on which all attempts at verbal communication subsequently build. It is what makes anthropological fieldwork possible.³⁹

It is the phenomenal/practical engagement with perspectives – ways of attending – of the others (human or nonhuman) that allows for the phenomenological approach upon which the anthropological description is founded. Interestingly, there is a reciprocal relationship between descriptive phenomenology and descriptive anthropology: as a “comparative metaphysician” – anthropologist – describes a meeting of ontologies (i.e., indigenous and Western), she/he thus describes a phenomenologist at work. It is an anthropological description of the practice of phenomenology in the world. The anthropologist observes how the phenomenologist engages in the world and the phenomenologist describes how the anthropologist constitutes meaning within the horizon of a general phenomenological theory of science.

Berghofer continues by suggesting that the phenomenological tradition proposes a well-elaborated theory of science that has many fundamental similarities with scientific perspectivism: “the analysis of perspectival approaches in the phenomenological tradition can help us to achieve a more nuanced understanding of different forms of perspectivism.”⁴⁰ To summarize, his view is that phenomenology holds within itself a possibility of, and an actual version of, scientific perspectivism. This prompts a question about the definition of such phenomenological perspectivism. Our general research interest aims at a comparative analysis of phenomenological and Amerindian perspectivisms, thus this recent suggestion of the possibility of breaking the realism/anti-realism stalemate by introducing phenomenological perspectivism into the debate shows the general importance of studies on various perspectivisms and their interrelations.

Berghofer goes on to claim that

In recent debates, a new version of realism has emerged that is distinct from traditional versions of realism as well as from new versions of selective realism. This is perspectival realism or *scientific perspectivism*, in short, *perspectivism*. Its focus is not on certain parts of scientific theories (as it is the case for selective realism) but it aims at rethinking the nature and scope of scientific theories and models. The main works promoting perspectivism are Giere 2006, Massimi 2012, 2018a, 2018b, and Teller 2001, 2011. Proponents of perspectivism typically view their position as a *via media* between objectivist realism and all forms of anti-realism. However, there is no unified picture of perspectivism; different proponents of perspectivism differ in their respective accounts.⁴¹

It simply cannot be overlooked that the current state of positions of scientific perspectivism displays their essential perspectivist presumption: dissolution of a unified theory of perspective. These different forms of scientific perspectivism are themselves a ground for further perspectivisms, for example, as pertains to the question of the possibility of a unified account of perspective. The latter question alone divides the perspectivists into at least two possible schools of thought. It means that there is a slippery slope of exponentially proliferating perspectivisms, not unlike what Sparrow observed about phenomenologies. A theorist of

³⁶ Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*, 5.

³⁷ Čargonja, “Bodies and Worlds Alive,” 34.

³⁸ Ingold, “Worlds of Sense and Sensing the World,” 314.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Berghofer, “Scientific Perspectivism in the Phenomenological Tradition,” 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

scientific perspectivism, Ronald Giere, admits that “Thus, in the end, my own claims must be reflexively understood as themselves perspectival.”⁴² The problem with this tendency is that one can say barely anything about perspective (or anything else, for that matter), because it is just a drop in the ocean of different, possibly valid theories. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl observed and rejected an analogous problem in his critique of psychologism, which he identified as skeptical relativism.⁴³ Berghofer notes that Ronald Giere’s depiction of scientific perspectivism seems to be closest to the one that is disclosed in the phenomenological tradition.⁴⁴ According to Giere:

In common parlance, a perspective is often just a point of view in the sense that, on any topic, different people can be expected to have different points of view. This understanding is usually harmless enough in everyday life, but it can be pushed to the absurd extreme that every perspective is regarded as good as any other. In the science wars, scientific objectivists liked to portray their enemies as holding such a view, thus making perspective a dirty word. I therefore need to make it clear at the start that a *scientific* perspectivism does not degenerate into a silly relativism.⁴⁵

Just like in the anthropological context, the need to firmly delineate perspectivist position from relativism is evident. According to Giere, in everyday life, the conflation of perspectivism with relativism is more or less harmless but, as we have seen, it is not harmless at all when considering the everyday life of the indigenous, which is why Amerindian perspectivism, an anthropological concept, is an advantage: because it precisely merges perspectivism with corporeality of point of view. It does not subject itself to Giere’s framework. *Frame* itself is perspective, as is an *advantage* – a vantage point that allows us to see Western perspectivism as not nearly perspectivist enough. And this is what Viveiros de Castro’s and Danowski’s philosophical project allows for: it offers a perspective.

“Silly relativism” is the naïve version of what Husserl had called a radical skeptical relativism, the problem with which is that it obviously negates the scope of its own universal validity. Berghofer quotes what he thinks is the key statement of Giere’s position:

I will be arguing that there is a kind of realism that applies to scientific claims that is more limited than this full-blown objective realism. Thus, in the end, I wish to reject objective realism but still maintain a kind of realism, a perspectival realism, which I think better characterizes realism in science. For a perspectival realist, the strongest claims a scientist can legitimately make are of a qualified, conditional form: ‘According to this highly confirmed theory (or reliable instrument), the world seems to be roughly such and such.’ There is no way legitimately to take the further objectivist step and declare unconditionally: ‘This theory (or instrument) provides us with a complete and literally correct picture of the world itself.’ (Giere 2006, 5f)⁴⁶

Note the refusal to admit the achievability of a *complete* picture of the world, which hints at the incompleteness of perspective, as pointed out by Husserl. The perspectival realist position is precisely the perspective of Husserl’s critic Beck, who really misunderstood the later developments of Husserl’s thought that were broadening the conception of perspective by introducing the horizontal dimensions of experience.

A noticeable convergence between anthropology and phenomenology occurs at this point:

However, it would be mistaken to think that the Indians of Amazonia, the Australian Aboriginals, or the monks of Tibet can bring us a deeper wisdom for the present time than the shaky naturalism of late modernity. Every type of presence in the world, every way of connecting with it and making use of it, constitutes a particular compromise between, on the one hand, the factors of sensible experience that are accessible to us all, albeit interpreted differently, and, on the other, a mode of aggregating existing beings that is adapted to historical circumstances. The fact is that none of those compromises, however worthy of admiration some may be, can provide a source of instruction valid for all situations.⁴⁷

⁴² Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, 3.

⁴³ Husserl, *Logical Investigations I*, 75–82.

⁴⁴ Berghofer, “Scientific Perspectivism in the Phenomenological Tradition,” 2.

⁴⁵ Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁴⁷ Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 195.

Descola's points are valid, stemming from a non-radical perspectivist position. However, with Latour, we think that Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism goes further. But how about phenomenology? Phenomenology is aimed at a unified theory of imperfect perspective that would incorporate and make use of the various possibilities opened up by adopting different imperfect perspectives. In this way, it strives for the assumption of one and many perspectives, of particular, yet universal subjective attitude. Phenomenological reduction is a method of achieving transcendently pure descriptions of contents and acts of consciousness. As Husserl says:

Indeed, what makes so extraordinarily hard the acquisition of the proper essence of phenomenology, the understanding of the peculiar sense of its problems, and of its relationship to other sciences (in particular to psychology), is that, for all this, a new *style of attitude* is needed which is *entirely altered* in contrast to the natural attitude in experiencing and the natural attitude in thinking.⁴⁸

It is also this quality that makes it difficult to rigorously import the method into anthropology. However, for the phenomenological attitude, to a certain degree, various perspectives might be available. It itself is a change, a reversal of the ordinary, everyday disposition toward the world into a phenomenologically pure observation of intentional acts of the transcendental ego within the world-horizon. That means that it can be originally reversed back to the natural attitude – it is originally mutable, thus it is a non-radical version of perspectivism. The method of phenomenological reduction supposedly gives us clear access to the description of the transcendental structure of phenomenological perspective as such, which Husserl defines as a *primordial structure of correlation of external perception and bodily object*. It means that phenomenology is always to a certain degree perspectivist – as it is aware of its own point of view in correlation, it is *about* the perspective. However, it also aims at a transcendental description from a point of view that would rise above the unessential differences of myriads of perspectives and would present a description of the fundamental general constitution of perspective of a subject. What is called an anthropological or ethnographic *epoché* differs from its philosophical counterpart on account of its accidental, non-willful character.⁴⁹ How can we be sure that it is phenomenological in the Husserlian sense?

How can phenomenology offer a constitutive explanation of other types of perspectivisms? We see a couple of philosophical approaches that could be applicable here: that of comparative study and/or of dialectic method. The point is that Amerindian perspectivism challenges the scope and ambition of transcendental phenomenological perspective blatantly – by its very existence – indicating the failure of its pretense to be a universal theory of subjectivity and, respectively, of perspective. Phenomenology, as it maintains its perspectival limitation to human standpoint, seems to be fundamentally insufficient to explain multinaturalist Amerindian ontologies, where personhood is a central ontological idea but is available to various other forms of beings besides humans. However, we want to stress that phenomenology only *seems* to be lacking. We do not claim that it is actually so, our aim is only to register the challenge. Maybe phenomenology could answer with a more radical multi-horizon theory, which would ontologically admit a multitude of world-horizons and would allow horizontal consciousness to nonhumans. Some think that there is a way to restate phenomenology as non-correlationist philosophy or as hyletic phenomenology.⁵⁰

If we take a step back, we can see groupings of two major tendencies of contemporary scientific, philosophical, and anthropological perspectivisms: the first group of perspectivisms is concerned with the elaboration and critique of *human* perspectival capabilities, which are aimed at a supposedly unified

⁴⁸ Husserl, *Ideas I*, xix.

⁴⁹ Čargonja, "Bodies and Worlds Alive," 34; Throop, "Being Open to the World," 205; Pedersen, "Anthropological Epochés," 2.

⁵⁰ A good point by Patrick Whitehead is that the critique of correlationism hits its mark, but identifies a battle that no longer needs to be fought: the battle against nineteenth and probably early to mid-twentieth century's brands of mechanical realism. Free from defensive posturing against primitive scientific realism, phenomenology can explore the world beyond its emphasis on human experience. According to Whitehead, hyletic phenomenology allows for ontological reversibility and recognizes non-human elements (Whitehead, "Phenomenology without Correlationism," 1). The question remains, does it really allow for a nonhuman perspective?

objective reality; the other group of perspectivalisms generally holds adamantly that it is insufficient to account only for the human perspective. Perspectivalism limited to the human point of view is determined by its own principle that we can make claims only from our own perspective, but it does not do justice to its fundamental condition of accounting for *multiple* perspectives. Even scientific perspectivalism as a philosophical position has to consider the *possible worlds* where nonhuman entities would be objectively described as having perspectives. The requirement of an elaboration of the *multitude of perspectives*, including those of a nonhuman variety, would sound absurd in the circles of traditional analytic/continental philosophies (with some important exceptions), but would be a completely legitimate question in the contexts of Speculative Realism and anthropology.

Aiming to prove that phenomenology survives the criticism of correlationism, Patrick Whitehead states:

I outline a phenomenological ontology that takes into consideration the criticism levelled by speculative realism. However, rather than arguing that phenomenological ontology must undergo a radical transformation in order to satisfy the recent demands of continental philosophy, I maintain that all that is required is a broadening of emphasis. This is to say that speculative realism has rightly identified that the continued emphasis on the human subject – an emphasis that was particularly important in response to the psychologism of the early 20th century – is no longer necessary.⁵¹

Since we have discussed how contemporary scientific perspectivalism is holding fast against “silly relativism,”⁵² how its proponents take care to defend their position against such critique, and how it resembles Husserl’s efforts to refute psychologism, we will have to disagree with Whitehead and state that with the rise of scientific perspectivalism, along with the context of climate change, the response to relativist tendencies becomes increasingly important for phenomenology, and an emphasis on the human subject does not go away that easily, because climate change itself can be understood as responsive to human agency. Berghofer introduces phenomenological perspectivalism into the scientific realist debate, thus again making the question of skeptical relativism prominent. Zahavi responded differently:

It might be tempting to accuse the correlationists of committing hubris, by defining reality in terms of what we can have access to. But as Braver has pointed out, one might also reverse this particular criticism (Braver 2012, 261–262). Not only do the speculative realists make claims about that which transcends us, but they (at least some of them) are also the ones who aspire to absolute knowledge. It is no coincidence that Meillassoux’s book is called *After Finitude*. By contrast, correlationism might be a way of acknowledging the finite and perspectival character of our knowledge.⁵³

Correlationism portrays itself as a modest and sincere perspectivalism and opposes that to the brazen speculative stance. However, speculative thought is speculative for the very reason that it attempts to go beyond *finitude*, knowing full well the price for this transgression. Graham Harman thinks that it is futile to shift emphasis from human subjects, or “meet universe halfway,” as in the title of Karen Barad’s book, since the two fundamental pillars of reality are still taken to be thought and universe.⁵⁴ Only when we abandon this onto-taxonomy of thought and world, according to Harman, do we enter into a new phase of philosophy. Harman’s position also refutes Patrick Whitehead’s argument about the “broadening of emphasis”: hyletic/noetic phenomenology still operates within the modern onto-taxonomy. Harman invokes the Kantian problematic of the thing-in-itself. Zahavi finds it puzzling how Harman holds to the inaccessibility of the in-itself and then proposes various claims about it,⁵⁵ as if he proposes a form of radical skepticism and then betrays its very principles. Perhaps that is what is needed of speculative thought: a two-step movement of creating systematic conceptual boundaries and then calculatedly transgressing them. It makes the question of perspectivalism and delineation from relativism particularly important for OOO. The last canonical refuge of Whitehead’s position is the carnal philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. But Harman, with DeLanda, here makes an entertaining and valid point:

⁵¹ Whitehead, “Phenomenology without Correlationism,” 1–2.

⁵² Giere, *Scientific Perspectivalism*, 13.

⁵³ Zahavi, “The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism,” 302.

⁵⁴ Harman, “The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy,” 134.

⁵⁵ Zahavi, “The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism,” 297.

And as outré as Merleau-Ponty sounds in certain pages of his unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*, with his ostensibly scandalous notion that the world looks at me just as I look at it, this is really just Descartes' two terms observing each other reciprocally without anything else being added to the mix. Even "the body," Merleau-Ponty's theoretical bread and butter, is little more than a version of "meeting the universe halfway" in Barad's sense. DeLanda said it best when he called the body "a kind of token material object, invited to [non-realist] ontology just to include one member of a minority."⁵⁶

A token material object – the body – is exactly the exception that flaunts the correlationist rule. Kohn remarked that phenomenological anthropology attempts to go beyond the human by pursuing the shared experience of embodiment, which according to him is a wrongheaded direction. However, by developing a synthetic perspectivism for a phenomenological point of view, we suggest that embodiment could be taken as a qualifying description of perspective, and a thematic of perspective is a broader way to go beyond the human, because it readily involves *multiplicity* of perspectives, even those without embodiment that anthropology encounters in shamanism. Whitehead demonstrates how Husserl and Merleau-Ponty were aware of the problem of correlationism and how they attempted to solve it. He makes an interesting statement:

Given the apparent integration of the two categories – subject and object, mind and body, ideal and real – the position of correlationism is often taken as a positionless position. The benefits of each position of the categorical dualities listed above are preserved by binding them together into a unified whole. Moreover, this solution seems to have typified much of continental thought. Whether the glue that binds the dualisms be consciousness (as per continental philosophy) or language (as per analytic philosophy), the result is the same: an indivisible human link between the real and the ideal.⁵⁷

Phenomenological correlationism, described this way, appears as a synthetic multiplicity and converges at this point with Viveiros de Castro's appropriation of Deleuzian perspectival concepts, the difference being that phenomenology unifies (real and ideal), whereas a rhizomatic, divergent approach maintains the difference in a specific tension of proximity or resemblance. The notion of a "positionless position" of continental thought contrasts sharply with perspectival cosmological deictics. Amerindian perspectivism is, in fact, an actual version of a non-relativist yet relational perspectivism, but it is not portrayed as a "positionless position." Whitehead's indication of the synthetic, unified, and unifying nature of correlationism should lead to a proposal of a possible version of non-relativist perspectivism that could be named synthetic perspectivism, unified by self-aware critical efforts against the problems faced by correlationism. Perspectivism is in general an apt outlook for bracketing human–world correlationism as only one perspective among many. According to Whitehead:

The unity of subject and object in human perception signifies the actuality of an event of human experience, but it must be understood that the constituents precede the event's actualization. Before becoming differentiated as subject and object in the event of experience, the as yet undistinguished entities may be understood as Husserl's *hylé*. As *hylé*, it is recognized that a particular entity has the capacity for becoming either an object or a subject – "they might also be entitled formless materials or material forms" (1913/2002, p. 175). *Hylé* refers to the status of an as yet undistinguished ontological entity: it is ontologically neutral, haunting the events of the world as a possible subject or object.⁵⁸

This is a point of convergence at which several fruitful interpretations are possible. (1) To understand the *formless material* or *hylé* as *virtual*. Here, a parallel between phenomenological and Amerindian perspectivisms is drawn: the undistinguished states of spiritual and corporeal are what Viveiros de Castro defines as a mythological, *virtual* pre-cosmologic state of being, borrowing the term from Deleuze: "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."⁵⁹ For example, the emergence of Gaia from Chaos in Hesiod's

⁵⁶ Harman, "The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy," 142.

⁵⁷ Whitehead, "Phenomenology without Correlationism: Husserl," 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁵⁹ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 65–66.

Theogony marks the moment when something determined emerges from the primordial indeterminacy. If phenomenology is approaching the primordial indeterminacy of *hylé*, the phenomenological perspective as such should reflect this indeterminacy due to the reciprocal nature of correlation. In *Ideas I*, Husserl refers to the above-mentioned indeterminacy of phenomenological perspective: “Necessarily there always remains a horizon of determinable indeterminateness, no matter how far we go in our experience, no matter how extensive the continua of actual perceptions of the same thing may be through which we have passed.”⁶⁰ This means that the phenomenological perspective could be described as transparent yet indeterminate: it does not conceal the corporeal dimension, but it does pick up indications from perceptual givenness that point outward to further exploration of the object. Husserl further elaborates this notion of indication in *Analyses*:

They are, however, not single indications, but entire indicative systems, indications functioning as systems of rays that point toward corresponding manifold systems of appearance. They are pointers into an emptiness since the non-actualized appearances are neither consciously intended as actual, nor presentified. In other words, everything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being intertwined and permeated with an intentional empty horizon, that is, by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness with respect to appearance. It is an emptiness that is not a nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled-out; it is a determinable indeterminacy.⁶¹

Genuine appearance emerges from an indeterminate empty horizon. The phenomenological notion of perspective reflects and includes this indeterminacy. In this direction, phenomenological perspective could form, as already sketched out, a type of synthetic perspectivism that would be determined neither by the priority of human–world relationship, nor by euro-anthropocentric tendencies.

(2) To take the hyletic indeterminacy in perception not as a limitation or flaw of human cognitive abilities, but as a limitation of relationality in general, as Harman suggests.⁶² Such a line of thought opens up the question of the interaction of nonhuman objects. This is where it gets interesting, because one is tempted to ask how and if phenomenology would explain the difference between the Kantian terms of the thing-in-itself and *noumenon*. Would these terms be taken as synonyms? For the purposes of analyses of perspectivism, the point to make here is that thing-in-itself and *noumenon* constitute the same concept viewed from two different perspectives (and we will see Kant describing such a perspectival approach to concepts in general), but since it remains indeterminate, it is to be taken as a disjunctive multiplicity, a network – a point of view. On the one hand, thing-in-itself is supposedly completely unknowable, while *noumenon* is already a kind of knowledge, for it is identified as essentially being not a phenomenon or not an appearance. *Noumenon* signifies the unknowability of the thing-in-itself as its main feature, and thus represents a possibility of forming predicative statements. On the other hand, for Kant, it seems that *noumenon* is required as a limiting concept that has one leg in the realm of the knowable and the other in the realm of the in-itself. The shift of perspective between the aspects of *noumenon* and the thing-in-itself is subtle and, indeed, transcendental. Note that for Husserl the inexhaustible depth of possible further perspectives on the “same” thing, the determinable indeterminacy, is the only indication for something out there that is forever out of reach of human or any other kind of perception. As Berghofer reads Husserl:

This means that perception always “implies a *plus ultra*” (Husserl 2001, 48). According to Husserl, the perspectival character and horizontal structure of perception is not simply a result of the imperfection of human beings but an essential property of perception. Not even a god could change that perceptual experiences present their physical objects always in perspectives (Husserl 1982, 95).⁶³

At this point, we can compare Harman’s notion of the limitation of relationality in general with such an interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology, according to which the horizontal, perspectival structure of

⁶⁰ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 95.

⁶¹ Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Active and Passive Synthesis*, 42.

⁶² Harman, “The Road to Objects,” 174; Harman, “The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy,” 137.

⁶³ Berghofer, “Scientific Perspectivism in the Phenomenological Tradition,” 9.

perception is not a result of the imperfection of human perception, but an essential property of perception in general. We think that Harman is more interesting in this case, because his concept of relationality goes further and is more general and ontological than the concept of perception: perception is only a kind of relation.

4 Kant's perspectivism: Speculative and perspectivist approaches

Only from the human standpoint, therefore, can we speak of space, of extended beings, etc. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can – viz, as far as we may be affected by objects – acquire outer intuition, then the presentation of space means nothing whatsoever.⁶⁴

In the transcendental aesthetic, the human standpoint could be interpreted as a human perspective, thus a perspectivist reading of Kant is at least possible, if only to show its incompatibility with some of the core Kantian principles (we are not committing to such claim). The distinctive feature of the Kantian perspective is its systematicity – the order of subordination of perspectives toward a unified transcendental perspective; in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant wrote:

We can regard every concept as a point that serves as the standpoint of an observer and thus has its horizon, i.e., there is a multitude of things that can be presented and – as it were – surveyed from this standpoint. Within this horizon there must be a multitude of points that can be indicated ad infinitum, each having in turn its own narrower purview. I.e., every species contains subspecies, according to the principle of specification, and the logical horizon consists only of smaller horizons (subspecies), but not of points having no range (individuals). But for [several] different horizons (i.e., genera) determined by equally many concepts, a common horizon can be thought as drawn, from which those different horizons can one and all be surveyed as from a central point. This common horizon is the higher genus. And so on, until finally we reach the highest genus; this is the universal and true horizon, which is determined from the standpoint of the highest concept, and which comprises under itself all manifoldness as [its] genera, species, and subspecies.⁶⁵

Even if this characterization happens in the context of the analyses of logical concepts and their relations, a similar systematicity is reflected in Kant's transcendental aesthetic of space and thus of perspective in general. The emphasis on the concept being a point of view, a perspective within a horizon is a theme that would draw the attention of a phenomenologist. Amerindian perspectivism proposes cosmological deictics that hold a spatiality of the perspective of the other, of the in-itself, thus it comes into an opposition with Kant's system which claims that space makes sense only from a human standpoint.

In this passage from Harman's recent article, all of the lines of inquiry of the previous sections intersect in Kant:

There is also the interpretation of Speculative Realism given by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in *The Ends of the World*. Ignas Šatkauskas reports that according to these authors, “Meillassoux's speculative materialism... lays the theoretical groundwork for a world-without-us, while offering metaphysical schemes that would be appropriate for the cognition of such reality.” 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.⁶⁶

The critique from Amerindian perspectivism, mediated by a reading of *The Ends of the World*, prompts Harman to present an interpretation of Kant and distance OOO from other Speculative Realisms – yet another divergence of perspectives within Speculative Realism. Would Harman agree that his reading of Kant is perspectivist – that it interprets particular ideas from the perspective of Kantian philosophy as a

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 81 (A 27/B 43).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 630 (A 659/B 678).

⁶⁶ Harman, “The Only Exit from Modern Philosophy,” 139.

whole? Isn't that a hermeneutic perspective? There could be another perspectivist view on this: by diverging from Brassier's and Meillassoux's readings of Kant, by "doing it differently," implying that "they interpret that way and we interpret this way," Harman is unavoidably taking a perspectivist position toward Kant. However, Speculative Realism in general could be interpreted as a critique of the whole transcendental perspective. When Viveiros de Castro reflected on the ontological turn of anthropology, it appeared as a precursor to Speculative Realism. The dialogue between these positions is of both philosophical and historical importance and points to Kant.

Margarita Vázquez Campos and Antonio Manuel Liz Gutiérrez – major contributors to the contemporary philosophical study of perspective – define transcendental perspective as the point of view that encompasses all possible points of view.⁶⁷ They trace the origin of such a perspective to a discussion between ancient thinkers: Parmenides and Heraclitus. Parmenides suggested the possibility of a point of view of reason from which it was possible to pierce the veil of appearance and grasp being through a concept. Heraclitus denied any stable reality behind appearances and professed a certain kind of "perspectivism," which is not to be confused with Protagoras' relativism. Campos and Gutiérrez make a valid point that both these ancient thinkers – Parmenides and Heraclitus – held to the assumption that we are able to know how our points of view relate to what is real, which is the philosophical origin of transcendental perspective.⁶⁸

The so called "Kantian Turn" can be understood as the (transcendental) assumption that there is no access to the world that does not consist in the adoption of a certain point of view. We cannot have access to the world such as it may be "in itself." There is a world in itself, Kant assumes, but we cannot absolutely know anything about how it is. The Critique of Pure Reason can be taken as an analysis of the general structure of our epistemic points of view, from sensibility to understanding, and from understanding to reason. The other two major Kantian works, The Critique of Practical Reason and The Critique of Judgement can, also be seen as offering analyses, respectively, of the general structure of our practical and moral points of view, and of the general structure of our teleological and aesthetic points of view.⁶⁹

Such a perspectivist interpretation projects Kant as balancing between the Parmenidian perspective of reason and the Heraclitian perspectivism of unknowability of any reality behind appearance.

What also interests us is a phenomenological reading of Kant, offered by Husserl, because it supposedly falls within the critique of transcendental perspective as correlationism. In the *Crisis*, Husserl prepares to elaborate the primordial sources of world-consciousness and at this point hints that one should go further than Kant into perspectival transcendental subjectivity. He suggests that Kant's system was based on an unexpressed presupposition about the surrounding world.⁷⁰ For Husserl, the true value of Kant's system is that it had prepared the ground for major phenomenological discoveries without really drawing them out of concealment.⁷¹ He concedes that,

An example of a great discovery – a merely preliminary discovery – is the "understanding" which has, in respect to nature, two functions: understanding interpreting itself, in explicit self-reflection, as normative laws, and, on the other hand, understanding ruling in concealment, i.e., ruling as constitutive of the always already developed and always further developing meaning-configuration "intuitively given surrounding world." This discovery could never be actually grounded or even be fully comprehensible in the manner of the Kantian theory, i.e., as a result of his merely regressive method. In the "transcendental deduction" of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant makes an approach to a direct grounding, one which descends to the original sources, only to break off again almost at once without arriving at the genuine problems of foundation which are to be opened up from this supposedly psychological side.⁷²

The genuine problems of foundation are opened up from the *phenomenal side*, or what it means for us, according to our interests, from the *phenomenological perspective* that originates in said primordial sources. It is from these sources that the phenomenological perspective extends outward, inherently drawn by the

⁶⁷ Campos and Gutiérrez, *Temporal Points of View*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁰ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 103–4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

surrounding world.⁷³ Phenomenological correlationism – a Kantian offspring – is a more developed form of transcendental perspectivism; it points its trajectory to the primordial subjectivity of world-consciousness, subjectivity that originates in the world as surrounded by and included in the world, intentional subjectivity that is *about* and *toward* the world.

The continuation of the Kantian bloodline really shows in Husserl's phenomenology in the overwhelming, all-encompassing strive for systematicity. Husserl is an avid believer in the possibility of a unified picture of a scientific worldview, in which every part is systematically and normatively situated to connect to and to ground and explain the other parts; statements representing the system's constitutive relate to one another according to absolute logical necessity; sub-principles follow from general principles and so on.⁷⁴ Within the same unified worldview, the fundamental side of transcendental subjectivity must be articulated in theory with a systematic link to a general idea of philosophy as science because, according to Husserl, this world-consciousness is the ultimate presupposition upon which rests the *necessarily* naïve realist scientific attitude. This presupposition is a genuine problem for philosophy and for phenomenological philosophy, to which we are being introduced in the *Crisis*. Pure phenomenology is the rigorous methodological ground for phenomenological philosophy, which is concerned, among other themes, with broader ontological questions, verging on or transgressing the field of metaphysics. The same point is made by Lorenzo Girardi as a reply to speculative realists' critique of phenomenology as a refutation of metaphysics.⁷⁵ It has a trajectory of involvement not only with the world or the objects that capture attention naturally, but always directed and aware of the constitutive acts of world-consciousness itself. Phenomenology is defined by a specific *synthetic* perspective. What Husserl sees as a problem in Kant is his "regressive method," which is, if we may speculate like this, too analytic and not synthetic enough. However, it is obvious that Kant himself is the founder of the concrete modern philosophical meaning of the very terms "synthesis" and "analysis." Husserl is fully aware of this debt and that only after the ground prepared by Kant could a phenomenological venture into transcendental perspectival subjectivity be possible. The problem with phenomenological anthropology is analogous: if, as an everyday scientific practice, it also operates in the necessarily naïve attitude, then how does it also manage to be focused on the genuine problems of foundation as phenomenology? As Cheryl Mattingly has put it, one of the key problems in phenomenological anthropology is the question of how to problematize the very concepts that ground phenomenology.⁷⁶

To a certain degree, perspectivism is *the* approach to Kant's philosophy. In a book called *Kant's System of Perspectives*, Stephen Palmquist maintains that,

But if, as is too often the case, the proponent of one school takes its methods to be the *only* valid way of doing philosophy, or even to be *sufficient* as tools for interpreting a philosophical System such as Kant's, fallacies and misjudgements almost inevitably result from its use. This is especially important to keep in mind when interpreting Kant, since, as we shall see [e.g., in IV.2], Kant regards both analysis and synthesis as essential to the task of doing philosophy.⁷⁷

Palmquist's idea of the incorporation of multiple attitudes and the refutation of a singular correct approach hints at a perspectival interpretative position inherently similar to the phenomenological perspective. Today, next to analytic and phenomenological approaches, those of Speculative Realism and Amerindian perspectivism must be added to the development of the notion of perspective and the rethinking of the Kantian heritage, since Kant is the point at which all these branches of philosophy divide into different perspectives. According to Palmquist,

In spite of the widespread recognition of the importance of the transcendental perspective as the touchstone of Kant's Critical philosophy, the full significance of the 'perspectival' approach (which it entails) is rarely appreciated. To

⁷³ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 363.

⁷⁵ Girardi, "Phenomenological Metaphysics as a Speculative Realism," 342–8.

⁷⁶ Mattingly, "Defrosting Concepts, Destabilizing Doxa," 2–3.

⁷⁷ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, Part One: I, 1.

counteract this neglect, I will argue that the general transcendental assumption which guides the Critical method implies most fundamentally a thoroughgoing “perspectival revolution” in philosophy [Kt1:x–xvi]. For the Transcendental Perspective in general includes within it several levels of subordinate perspectives, which are equally important in guiding the development of the various systems and subsystems which compose Kant’s System.⁷⁸

The *perspectival* revolution in philosophy: the turn from ontology to epistemology is being quietly reversed in the *perspectival* revolutionary turn from epistemology to ontology in anthropology that preceded or arose together with Speculative Realism. Divergence from Kant’s perspectivism is what unites them, even if just for a moment, before they diverge again. It is a synthetic moment which presents a speculative possibility of absorbing these various divergences into a unified perspective of comparative investigation: comparison as ontology. At this primordial perspectival level, comparative study is an opening for a phenomenological metaphysics enriched by ethnic, indigenous, oriental, and other perspectives precisely due to its featuring as comparative ontology. The identity of pure phenomenology is not threatened by inclusion of these various perspectives into *phenomenological philosophy*.

A transcendental perspective subordinates other perspectives in a systematic way; thus, it should incorporate a diffused version of relativism in a way that would constrain relativism from reaching its radical self-refuting conclusion. And as a general theory of perspective, it has to be able to explain and subordinate any perspective. Precisely, this point was attacked by Nietzsche.⁷⁹

As the main reason why a perspectivist interpretation of Kant has not been widely or frequently suggested, Palmquist expounds the German word *die Perspektiv*, which is employed by Kant only once and as an adjective. According to Palmquist, a large number of Kant’s interpreters use the term, but usually only in passing, and they do not take a broader look at Kant’s philosophy as a whole from the point of its inherent perspectivism. Another reason is that Kant never states the principle of perspective, yet refers to it on many occasions.⁸⁰ He often uses the term *standpoint* (*Standpunkt*).

Since Palmquist’s approach is perspectivist, one should expect a perspectivist outlook to be taken to the topic of the thing-in-itself and that it will be shown how the difference between Kant’s concepts of the thing-in-itself and *noumenon* are a consequence of a particular change of perspective.

In this light, the very problematic of the in-itself is a consequence of the structure of the transcendental perspective. The perspectivist reading of Kant necessarily leads to this problem:

The Kantian approach is explicitly transcendental. We cannot know reality in itself, but we can know how we are epistemically related with it. We can know it by “critical” reflection. That way, we can discover that any knowable reality has to be shaped by the structures of our subjectivity. From that transcendental point of view, we have to adopt an idealist position. From an empirical point of view, however, we can only be realists. Our thoughts have to respond to the contents of our sensible experiences. This combination of “transcendental idealism” and “empirical realism” is one of the most important aspects of the Kantian heritage.⁸¹

We can know how we are epistemically related to the in-itself: even if it is not cognizable, it can be posited as a limit of understanding; this limit is designated by the term of *noumenon*. Can noumenality be posited as a limit of any possible understanding? Could this perspective go even further? Borrowing from Harman with a fair amount of interpretative liberty, we could hold that noumenality marks the limit of any relation whatsoever. But this would breach the boundaries of the Kantian transcendental perspective: noumena would designate parameters of the relationship of the things-themselves. Leaving that aside, we may ask, what about appearance? What is the status and structure of appearance? This direction of inquiry points directly to Husserl’s phenomenological perspective that attempted to go beyond Kant in the direction of the subjectivity of world-consciousness. The exclusion of a more extensive treatment of Husserl’s phenomenology is a major drawback of Campos’ and Gutiérrez’ study. The fact that the position of Amerindian

⁷⁸ Ibid., Part One: II, 1.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 18–21.

⁸⁰ Palmquist, *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, Part One: II, 2.

⁸¹ Campos and Gutiérrez, *Temporal Points of View*, 11.

perspectivism is not included in any major philosophical studies of perspective is not surprising, since it is a rather new development (although one that already took place in Viveiros de Castro's works a few decades ago); and only after the publishing of *The Ends of the World* did it really start to attract philosophical interest. So, we cannot hold it against Gutiérrez and Campos that they did not include this perspective, even if it really overturns the whole Western perspectivist tradition, but the exclusion of Husserl's phenomenological developments on the topic is truly surprising.

At this point, we can see very clearly how Amerindian perspectivism cannibalizes the offspring of Kantian perspectivism: "Like absolutism, perspectivism assumes that there are some stable ways in which reality is in itself. However, like relativism, it also assumes that there are other non-reducible ways in which reality is dependent on our points of view. Perspectivism draws something from absolutism and something from relativism."⁸² According to Campos and Gutiérrez, perspectivism can be coherent only if it holds to these theses: (1) our scientific, philosophical, and other descriptions are incomplete and do not exhaust every aspect of reality; (2) the points of view we have about reality do not entail a relativist position.⁸³ Amerindian perspectivism, with its reversal of the universality of nature and the particularity of culture, directly attacks the absolutist leg of perspectivism: there are no stable, unified, identical ways in which reality is in itself; there are a multiplicity of different corporeal variations – realities to which the universal subjective perspective may be directed. So, multinaturalism affirms the second thesis in being a non-relativist perspectivism precisely by denying the unified realm of objectivity. It cannibalizes transcendental perspectivism because it disrupts the hierarchy of subordination of perspectives established by Kant. It makes no sense to speak of a transcendental perspective – a perspective of all perspectives – when a multiplicity of variations of realities are out there and any possible subjective perspective relates to any of these variations. If, according to Western perspectivism, all perspectives, at least in principle, are valid since they are directed to a unified objective nature – reality – then allowing Amerindian cannibal perspectivism in their midst creates a contagious possibility that all traditional perspectivist statements proposing to include various *other* perspectives refer to altogether different realities. Another deeper implication is that it fleshes out the general limit of *theory as perspective* for it provokes the question of whether such perspectivism can be allowed within the modern project of humanity, which began, in no small part, by forming an aesthetic theory of perspective. It grasps the modern project by its epistemic-colonial tentacles, by the claim to totality that is masquerading behind the perspectivist attitude. Think about how Amerindian perspectivism would be translated into geometry as a theory of space and an aesthetic theory of perspective as drawing an illusion of distance and depth on a flat surface.

For phenomenology, the interest lies in the many questions that relate to the phenomenal experience of an indigenous person, whose life-world is constituted by a radically alternate ontology that is saturated by what we would like to call pharmakognosis – knowledge attained by learning under "plant teachers."⁸⁴ What is it like to experience shamanic metamorphoses? How is a systematic description of the virtual realm within indigenous imaginary possible? These questions are engaged in vastly increasing discourses on indigenous and modern (therapeutic, recreational) pharmakognostic (psychedelic) practices. There are numerous phenomenological analyses of psychedelic consciousness as well.⁸⁵ But it is also evident from previous considerations that phenomenology faces challenges from Speculative Realism and the ontological turn in anthropology. It may seem that phenomenology is pushed to its limits if prompted to provide descriptions of realities of indigenous shamanism where metamorphosis to and communication with non-human, even non-corporeal entities or intelligences, are commonplace. For now, however, phenomenology is capable of addressing these challenges.

⁸² Ibid., 73.

⁸³ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁴ Shepard, "Spirit Bodies, Plant Teachers and Messenger Molecules in Amazonian Shamanism." We use the term of pharmakognosis with a "k" instead of "c," to retain ties to the spectacular, deep, and philosophically notorious concept of *pharmakon*.

⁸⁵ To name a few: the works of Patrick Lundborg that propose a unified psychedelic theory on the basis of phenomenology such as *Psychedelia*; an article by Szummer et al. "The Hyperassociative Mind."

It is also interesting to speculate if and how phenomenological, scientific, and other Western perspectivism may incorporate Amerindian perspectivism into their own systems and how all of these themes would look from perspectives of Speculative Realism. What does philosophy have to say about the ontological turn of anthropology?

5 Conclusion

Amerindian perspectivism necessitates the philosophical reconceptualization of perspective in general, which is to be taken as a challenge for established discourses. The need arises to rethink the problematic of Kantian perspectivism and its offspring. As we have seen, Amerindian perspectivism proposes cosmological deictics that hold a spatiality of the perspective of the other, of the in-itself; thus, it comes into an opposition to Kant's system, which claims that space makes sense only from a human standpoint. The phenomenological perspective, as one of the Kantian offspring, faces a predicament that is interwoven with the critique of correlationism arising from Speculative Realisms. However, the synthetic character of phenomenology might allow just enough flexibility for it to gracefully traverse these recent charges.

If we maintain that perspectivism can be coherent only if it holds to theses that (1) our scientific, philosophical, and other descriptions are incomplete and do not exhaust every aspect of reality, and (2) the points of view we have about reality do not entail a relativist position, then Amerindian perspectivism, with its reversal of the universality of nature and the particularity of culture, disqualifies the first statement: there are no stable, unified, identical ways in which reality is in itself; rather, there are a multiplicity of different corporeal realities to which a subjective perspective may be directed. Multinaturalism affirms the second thesis in being a non-relativist perspectivism precisely by denying the unified realm of objectivity. It disrupts the hierarchy of subordination of perspectives that was established by Kant. How does this impact phenomenology? Phenomenology is faced with a necessity to speculate, still upon the rigorous grounds of pure phenomenological method, about multiple corporeal variations of reality and of transcendental non-human subjectivity. It is no surprise that these themes already appear in phenomenological developments as well as in phenomenological anthropology.

We propose an idea of synthetic perspectivism: hyletic phenomenology introduces perspectivism (determinate indeterminacy) that is *relational* and has Amerindian and other possible perspectivisms in its immediate horizon. The latter are coextensive, layered upon the phenomenological perspective. It is a project of a philosophical apparatus that allows us to switch between different perspectivisms and various combinations of perspectivisms while maintaining certain basic principles of relationality and comparative metaphysics. This would be a possible direction for further development of philosophical perspectivism.

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