

Imagination and Potentiality: The Quest for the Real

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Where is the Great Outdoors of Meillassoux's Speculative Materialism?

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Abstract: Quentin Meillassoux's speculative materialism aims to define access to reality of the natural world apart from its givenness to sentient subjects. This world apart is designated by Meillassoux as the "Great Outdoors" which was marginalized as a topic of philosophy after Kant's critiques. The question of the incommensurability of human subjects and physical objects is taken up by Meillassoux and addressed by allowing mathematizable properties of physical objects to be referred to objectively in mathematical statements. In this paper we follow the discussion with speculative materialism conducted by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in *The Ends of the World* (2017). These authors show that Meillassoux's conception of the "Great Outdoors" includes, yet insufficiently explores, the notion of ancestral humanity in Amerindian myth – and intimately related to the practice of hallucinogenic trance – as the means to address the problem of said incommensurability.

Keywords: speculative materialism, post-colonialism, Amerindian shamanism, hallucination, incommensurability

1 Introduction

[...] every individual capable of reasoning is a philosopher, a potential "friend of the concept," likewise every individual capable of dreaming is a shaman, "a friend of the image."¹

The current tendency of speculative thought is to address the question of the relation between human agency and the natural or non-organic world. Quentin Meillassoux, an invoker of speculative materialism, has paved the way for a reconsideration of the status of the "Great Outdoors." In broad terms, Meillassoux's position aims to approach the question of reality of the natural world by rethinking the primacy of the relation between perceiving subjects and the world which might be given to perceive, but exists in its own right beyond any possible form of perception. The term "Great Outdoors" marks the "absolute outside" that had drawn the pre-critical thinkers only to lose the attention of philosophers after the publication of Kant's Critiques.² However, Meillassoux's pursuit of the possible ways of positing this thematic, which mainly involves the objectivity of mathematical observations of the qualities of physical objects, leaves certain important factors and characteristics of the "Great Outdoors" insufficiently explored. First of all, the question of the inhabitants of the "Great Outdoors" – the indigenous and their corresponding

¹ Viveiros de Castro, "The Crystal Forest," 16.

² Meillassoux, "After Finitude," 17.

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worldviews, including their understanding of the relation between humanity and nature – has yet to be investigated in greater detail. Precisely this point is targeted by recent critiques of speculative thought performed in post-colonial anthropology and subsequent philosophy by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.³

Furthermore, Meillassoux seems to be positioning his perspective in opposition to religious mysticism, among which the animist worldviews could be placed. In an interview he has said: “[...] materialism is rationalism [...] in that it is always an enterprise that, through skepticism, opposes an activity of knowledge and criticism to religious appeal, to mystery, or to the limitation of our knowledge.”⁴ Further on, he identifies the latter group as the enemy of reason, and this point could be taken as a hint of Eurocentrism. That is why the challenges from the eco-oriented philosophy and the anthropology of animism is painful for Meillassoux's materialism. In the same interview, he claims as follows: “1. Being is separate and independent of thought (understood in the broad sense of subjectivity). 2. Thought can think Being. Thesis number 1 is opposed to any anthropomorphism which seeks to extend subjective attributes to Being: materialism is not a form of animism, spiritualism, vitalism, et cetera.”⁵ The interesting question here is whether recent post-colonial studies of animism and shamanic cognition through hallucinatory trance, and the critique of Meillassoux's position performed by anthropologists and philosophers concerned with these topics, would affect Meillassoux's treatment of animism and of the relation of human agency and the “Great Outdoors.”⁶ Would he still hold to the opposition if it is revealed as at least partly Eurocentric? Would it affect his employment of the term “hallucination” in its opposition to the real? In *After Finitude* he claims as follows: “Remove the observer, and the world becomes devoid of these sonorous, visual, olfactory, etc., qualities, just as the flame becomes devoid of pain once the finger is removed... Yet one cannot maintain that the sensible is injected by me into things like some sort of perpetual and arbitrary hallucination.”⁷ We can point to the use of the term of hallucination as the opposite to veridical perception. Yet this is not a universal assumption: it is prevalent in the West, but the situation is entirely different in the context of the worldviews of the native Amerindian peoples.

2 Meillassoux's “Great Outdoors”

Immediately after invoking the topic of hallucination, Meillassoux continues as follows: “For there is indeed a constant link between real things and their sensations: if there were no thing capable of giving rise to the sensation of redness, there would be no perception of a red thing; if there were no real fire, there would be no sensation of burning.”⁸ Of course, Meillassoux should assume that in the case of hallucination some components of this link are missing or given in a different manner. However, Meillassoux's speculative thought leaves this question aside, for it is in a rush to reveal the problematic “correlationist” assumption that permeates such an explanation of the relation between sensible qualities and physical objects. Meillassoux coins the now famous term “correlationism,” which marks the development of the main concern of philosophy after Kant's Critiques: human perception and cognition, its subjectivity which cannot be universalized, its transcendental objectivity that can be universalized, and the problem of their relation to otherwise inaccessible realm of “things in themselves.”⁹

³ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, “The Ends of the World,” 35.

⁴ Meillassoux, Dolphijn, van der Tuin, “Interview with Meillassoux,” Q7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 35; Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 49, 60; Franke, *Animism*, 17.

⁷ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 8. Actually, there are some researchers who maintain just that, even though the treatment of the term of reality is entirely different, perhaps incommensurable to the speculative materialism. We have in mind a neuroscientist Anil Seth who invites us to entertain opposite philosophical possibilities that perceptual reality itself might be altogether hallucinated. Seth, Rao, “Reality is a Bunch of Hallucinations”.

⁸ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 8.

⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

But Meillassoux adds that “it makes no sense to say that the redness or the heat can exist as qualities just as well without me as with me: without the perception of redness, there is no red thing; without the sensation of heat, there is no heat.”¹⁰ It is not astounding that there might be cases of perception of redness without a red thing, and that this would be typically called hallucination, or that even if there was a certain object that would reflect the red spectrum of light it might be perceived as yellow, orange or colorless. That is why the topic of hallucination is interesting here: it questions the “necessary” nature of the relation between the perceived “sensation” and its physical counterpart. But for Meillassoux the notion of hallucination, which he is effectively dealing with here, is exceptionally simplified and reduced into the mimetic scheme. This is, of course, problematic as concerns many cases of hallucination. That itself is a difficult question that cannot be taken up in this paper.¹¹ Meillassoux is interested in the relation between the world and the living creature, so the cases of “false” perception “as in a dream” are only required to demarcate that which they themselves are not.

Whether it be affective or perceptual, the sensible only exists as a relation: a relation between the world and the living creature I am. In actuality, the sensible is neither simply ‘in me’ in the manner of a dream, nor simply ‘in the thing’ in the manner of an intrinsic property: it is the very relation between the thing and I. These sensible qualities, which are not in the things themselves but in my subjective relation to the latter - these qualities correspond to what were traditionally called *secondary qualities*.¹²

The cases which do not occur in a dream, and which happen autonomously along and together with the perception of sensible qualities of physical objects are the “grey zone” between dreaming and sensing. This is of particular interest to anthropologists and philosophers working with the phenomenon of shamanism: taken as a method of communication between different *thinking* species, or as a way to communicate with many types of possible, even incorporeal entities.¹³ Needless to say, this is of little concern to contemporary speculative thought until emphasis is placed on the discussion between anthropology and speculative materialism, with such “grey areas” then being taken up as the main topic of investigation pointing out certain deficiencies in the latter.

From this point where “real” perception is demarcated from its “false” counterpart, Meillassoux is on track to begin his criticism of the correlationist assumption, a critique towards which he is guided by the analogous critiques of early modern conceptions of perception performed in phenomenology:

That it makes no sense to attribute to the ‘thing in itself’ (which is basically the ‘thing without me’) those properties which can only come about as a result of the relation between the thing and its subjective apprehension has effectively become a commonplace which few philosophers have contested. What has been vigorously contested, in the wake of phenomenology, is the way in which Descartes or Locke conceived of such a relation: as a modification of thinking substance tied to the mechanical workings of a material body, rather than, for instance, as a noetico-noematic correlation. But it is not a

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹ Generally the term of hallucination operates on the grounds of a questionable reductionist assumption that could be signified as *mimetic*: the essential characteristic of hallucination is to more or less accurately and convincingly imitate veridical perception. Questioning this assumption reveals a philosophical complexity of the status of objectivity of hallucinatory entities, while taking this assumption for granted is also philosophically precarious. How to think of the subjective experience of certain givenness without corresponding objects? It is clear that it is a serious problem for correlationist philosophies, but is it a problem for speculative materialism? For example, can the properties of hallucinatory triangles be mathematized?

¹² Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 8.

¹³ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 2. See also the following observation by Descola: “The further one moves away from the domain of ‘complete persons’ (*penke aents*), who are defined principally by their linguistic aptitude, the more distinctions become emphasized. For instance, humans recognize plants and animals that, if they possess a soul, are themselves capable of recognizing humans. But although the *Achuar* can speak to them, thanks to their *anent* incantations, they do not immediately receive a response, for this can be communicated only through dreams. The same applies to spirits and certain mythological heroes. These are attentive to what is said to them, but in general they are invisible in their original form and so can be fully engaged with only in the course of dreams or hallucinogenic trances.” Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 16.

question of taking up once more the traditional conception of the constitutive relation of sensibility: all that matters for us here is that the sensible is a relation, rather than a property inherent in the thing.¹⁴

Meillassoux is inclined to object to the position of the noetico-noematic correlation; he also reveals that phenomenology serves him only negatively, as the way “not to go about things.” Indeed, if phenomenology is talking about the correlation of consciousness and the world along with a thesis of consciousness being “about” something that is given within the horizon of the world, then Meillassoux attempts to show that there are some properties “about” the world that are intrinsic to objects themselves, and that these properties are indicated in the predictability and reproducibility of quantitative statements. Such statements, even if they are themselves “intentional,” point to something beyond the intentionality of consciousness – to the “real” qualities of the world that would still be “there” even if there were no consciousness whatsoever. It might seem like an attempt to salvage the objectivity of “purely mathematical” observations from the lair of subjectivity, but Meillassoux is very careful in formulating his position in order for it not to appear as another form of Pythagoreanism:

The thesis we are defending is therefore twofold: on the one hand, we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject's relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such a relation, and that they are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them, whether I am in relation with this object or not.¹⁵

Mathematizable properties of the object prompt the question of the “reality” of the object outside its relation to the subject (“are they as such as in a way in which I conceive them?”) and, especially, directs attention to what *is not real* (in this case – that which is not quantifiable). But in the contexts of the ontology of climate crisis and of post-colonial thought, such extrapolation reveals its other side, which is keenly observed by Danowski and Viveiros de Castro.¹⁶ Mathematics could be characterized by an “ambition” to be the most universal science that is not subject to cultural contextualization. But might this “ambition” not be taken as a form of epistemic colonialism? How is it possible to claim that the qualities described by mathematical statements are objective in the world without Western mathematics, but with systems of cognition based on different methods of observation, such as those of shamanic practice? Is it not yet another attempt to show “the animist savages” their place? Is it not a statement that all cognition that has nothing to do with western mathematics is null and void and that it does not speak of anything that would be objectively in the world itself? However, Meillassoux's position is much more sophisticated, and does not easily succumb to such questions. The aim here is to show that certain properties of the object *can* be mathematized or are *prone* to mathematization *despite* their particular cultural contexts. In an interview he claims that:

I follow these two theses because I argue and demonstrate—strictly through argumentation—that there is contingent being independent of us, and furthermore, that this contingent being has no reason to be of a subjective nature. I also try to found a scientific rationalism based on the use of mathematics to describe non-human and inorganic reality. This is not to “Pythagorize,” or to assert that Being is inherently mathematical: it is rather to explain how it is that a formal language manages to capture, from contingent-Being, properties that a vernacular language fails at restituting. My thesis on mathematics is a thesis on the scope of formal languages, not a thesis on Being.¹⁷

The point of the failure of vernacular language still seems contentious if taken from a post-colonial perspective, because it might seem to be positing the indigenous manners of cognition and expression as inferior. But is that really the case? As rich and accurate the Amerindian or other indigenous methods of cognition might be, the objects of such cognitions could still be “borrowed” and mathematized to capture their contingent properties and then “returned to the hands of the natives,” and their mathematization

¹⁴ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 35.

¹⁷ Meillassoux, Dolphijn, & van der Tuin, “Interview with Meillassoux,” Q7.

would not take away anything from the richness of their, let's say, shamanic appropriations. It is a question of if and how a post-colonial speculative materialism is possible.¹⁸

Further on in the book, Meillassoux arrives at his main critical argument that addresses the trajectory of post-critical thought:

From this point on, *intersubjectivity*, the consensus of a community, supplants the *adequation* between the representations of a solitary subject and the thing itself as the veritable criterion of objectivity, and of scientific objectivity more particularly. Scientific truth is no longer what conforms to an in-itself supposedly indifferent to the way in which it is given to the subject, but rather what is susceptible of being given as shared by a scientific community.¹⁹

So after Kant's critiques, naïve realism was supplanted by the trial of intersubjectivity, and it is to this point that Meillassoux would like to direct our attention. We have become uncritical of the critical turn, he says; it is rarely contested that there is no possible way of talking about the properties of the world apart from the way these properties are given to us in experience.²⁰ Meillassoux groups all the major philosophical movements since Kant under the same flag and is probably, to some extent, correct.²¹ Kant's role at the crossroads of modern philosophy is that of marking off the limits of the transcendental subject that gives objectivity to scientific statements only through the application of universal categories of reasoning. As far as speculative materialism is concerned, this is where the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger and the subsequent critiques of the latter in postmodern relativisms are located, as well as the whole branch of analytic philosophy which is focused on language and representation.²² Following this grouping, the main description of post-critical thought as correlationism is revealed:

Such considerations reveal the extent to which the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of *correlation*. By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism.²³

Meillassoux's arguments are sound, and cannot be easily dismissed in a manner of "orthodox" modern philosophies. Since our aim here is to reconstruct Meillassoux's position sufficiently so as to present the criticism from the point of post-colonial and ecologically oriented thought, and to ascertain how Meillassoux's position fares against such criticism, we cannot concern ourselves with the possible ways in which correlationist philosophies could react to Meillassoux's critiques. The main point where Meillassoux himself leaves the *door* open for an *intrusion* from post-colonial thought and ecologically oriented philosophy is when he goes for a speculative stroll into the "Great Outdoors":

18 According to Elizabeth Povinelli, Meillassoux knows that imposing an absolutely necessary entity or absolutely necessary content or quality would strike many readers as a form of totalitarianism. Thus he has to find a way of thinking the absolute without insisting upon an absolute entity, and so he turns to a historically located mathematics which is able to describe the "Great Outdoors" in absolute and necessary terms. Povinelli, *Geontologies*, 111. With this strategy, Meillassoux seems to be deliberately avoiding colonialist tendencies. The plurality of the "Great Outdoors" comes as a clever substitute for an absolute entity in being nothing like an entity but rather an opening to something complex and grand within the multiplicity of "natures" beyond this very opening. The "Great Outdoors" begins on the *threshold* and thus, in its meaning, should be treated as something not quite equivalent to unified absolute entity, or wilderness, or nature, but to the opening towards the multiplicity of the latter, and this opening is supposed to allow mathematization of certain contingent qualities.

19 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 13.

20 This is not the case in Amerindian contexts, in which the properties of the world are discussed insofar as they are given to experience to a wide range of entities beside humans.

21 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 12.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, 13.

For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the *great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere.²⁴

These lines resonate soundly with the context of the climate crisis and the “indifference” of the possible climate catastrophe towards human beings, but such an opening is not reflected sufficiently by Meillassoux: he is focused on the literary power of these lines that seem to strike a death-blow to contemporary philosophy, but with such an attack he opens himself up to a counterstrike. What “Great Outdoors”? Is it the one that is drowning in plastic waste to such an extent that it is hard to say whether the oceans full of plastic are “nature” or “culture”? Aren't these the ones left in the wake of indifferent mathematization and exploitation of nature which led to the state where nature without traces of “cultural” pollution is hardly to be found? Meillassoux's goal is precisely to demonstrate the objectivity of the mathematization of the “real,” but at what cost? Today, in the wake of such mathematization, the very attempt to describe a “reality” without a touch of human perception/agency is left without its target: for there is hardly such a thing at the present time. That is why speculation about the world prior to conscious (human) agency is probably the only way to argue for such a materialism. The point is that the distinction between nature and culture, which provides the foundations of modern philosophy and for speculative materialism itself, must be critically re-examined. And this is exactly what is happening in the contemporary discourse on animism and indigenous thought.

As noted above, Meillassoux's line of investigation follows the only viable path to the problematic of “ancestral” times and the question of the “arche-fossil,” which is to become the axis of argumentation against correlationism. The point at issue is what sense we should make of scientific statements about events anterior to the emergence of life on Earth:

I will call ‘ancestral’ any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species - or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth... I will call ‘arche-fossil’ or ‘fossil-matter’ not just materials indicating the traces of past life, according to the familiar sense of the term ‘fossil,’ but materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life.²⁵

Meillassoux's question is under what conditions statements about such a “reality” are meaningful, and how such ancestral statements could be interpreted by correlationist philosophies.²⁶ As he observed about the “Great Outdoors,” it is indifferent towards our epistemic/ontological attempts at grasping “reality” outside the correlation, yet in the context of the present climate crisis, the situation is quite different. Climate change is “indifferent” in the catastrophic *response* to ecologically destructive human agency that is constituted by the industrially employed epistemic achievements of the mathematization of the “natural.” This *response* hints at the reality of the *relation*, and paves way for the questioning of the assumptions of speculative materialism. If correlationist philosophies are puzzled by “ancestral” statements, they have quite a lot to say about the mathematization of nature and its consequences in the present times.

The next point that Meillassoux considers is that of the ideality of mathematical observations directed at the ancestral events. He claims that this is not Pythagorean, that the numbers or equations deployed in ancestral statements do not themselves exist in the stated conditions of the ancestral past, but are ideal insofar as their reality is to signify something beyond themselves.²⁷ As he puts it: “In this particular instance, it would be necessary to specify: the *referents* of the statements about dates, volumes, etc., existed 4.56 billion years ago as described by these statements - but not these statements themselves, which are contemporaneous with us.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., 17.

²⁵ Ibid., 21-22.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁸ Ibid.

Meillassoux's affirms that: "A scientist would not state categorically that an ancestral event definitely occurred in the way in which she has described it – that would be imprudent."²⁹ However, he concludes that despite their inherent proneness to falsification, ancestral statements are those whose referents can be posited as real once they have been validated empirically.³⁰ That is the point where the question of the "reality of relation" is poignant. Real for whom? For scientists and for anyone who subjects themselves to the ontological status of scientific statements? For observers of the climate's response to human agency? Yet for cultures that have different systems of cognition and different cosmographies and do not subscribe to empiricism, such as the Amerindian indigenous cultures, the referents of their own mythopoetic "contemporary" ancestral statements are posited to be real. It is not a new observation that such cultures have a lot to say about the time of the ancestors, and that one of their key ontological categories is that of the mythical ancestry that is alive and influential today as much as ever. It is of particular interest that many of the above mentioned cultures posit the referents of "ancestral statements" – the myriad of all possible "original" entities – to have originated from the people and not the *vice versa* as it is for speculative realists and/or materialists.³¹ The thematic of myth and primordial humanity will be approached further in the following chapter. Meillassoux foresees an objection of similar origin from a correlationist philosopher who would add the words "as far as it goes" to any scientific ancestral statement. Namely, the correlationist would interpret an ancestral statement in the following way:

[...] event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans -for humans (or even, for the human scientist). This codicil is the codicil of modernity: the codicil through which the modern philosopher refrains (or at least thinks he does) from intervening in the content of science, while preserving a regime of meaning external to and more originary than that of science.³²

Yet the phrase "for humans" should actually include humans who are not positioned in the dominating cosmography of modernity. Certain "correlationist" thinkers who might be interested in ecological and post-colonial themes might consider this to be a limitation of Meillassoux's argument. Scientific statements, at least as far as the ethics of post-colonialism is concerned, are not "more originary" than other modes of cognition working "successfully and sustainably" for the indigenous. In the face of the climate crisis, the fact that the indigenous "carbon footprint" is significantly smaller (yet these societies, in all matters, lead *meaningful* lives) could be taken as a testament that such "methods" of conceiving the world that are intimately linked with their sustainable lifestyles, are just as "originary" and successful. This does not entail that mathematical statements could not be directed at the objects of Amerindian or other cognitions. Possibly this could be done without referring to any unnecessary competition over "what is more originary," and yet these statements could capture the objects' contingent properties.

We arrive at the last point that concerns us within the brief reconstruction of such a form of speculative materialism, and upon which the central objection from post-colonial anthropology is focused:

If one refuses to hypostatize the correlation, it is necessary to insist that the physical universe could not *really* have preceded the existence of man, or at least of living creatures. A world is meaningful only as given-to-a-living (or thinking)-being. Yet to speak of 'the emergence of life' is to evoke the emergence of manifestation amidst a world that preexisted it. Once we have disqualified this type of statement, we must confine ourselves strictly to what is given to us: not the unthinkable

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 26.

³¹ Noticing this incongruity, McKenzie Wark arrives at a similar claim: "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, "In and Against the Human." The question, in which the problematic of (indigenous) imagination is revealed, is how do we interpret virtuality in relation to myth? In this case we take it to be inseparable from shamanic hallucinogenic trance which mediates the virtuality of ancestral times with the diplomatic art of contemporary, present inter-entity communication and so on.

³² Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 27.

emergence of manifestation within being, but the universal-izable given of the present fossil-material: its rate of radioactive decay, the nature of stellar emission, etc.³³

It is the question of positing the “pre-existence” of “one anterior to the other,” a question whose answer shows the meeting of different worldviews and corresponding “realities,” as well as the unfortunate colonialist pretense for dominion and “primitive-ization” of the other that is ripe within the western modernity's self-image.

3 Speculative Materialism from a Perspective of Post-Colonial Anthropology and Subsequent Philosophy

In his *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Viveiros de Castro provides a context for considering the meeting between indigenous perspectivism (a communicable sociality of possible entities) and modern naturalism that is relevant to the discussion between speculative realism/materialism and post-colonial thought:

To this we added the synoptic concept of multinaturalism, which presented Amerindian thought as an unsuspected partner, a dark precursor if you will, of certain contemporary philosophical programs, like those developing around theories of possible worlds, others that refuse to operate within the vicious dichotomies of modernity, or still others that, having registered the end of the hegemony of the kind of critique that demands an epistemological response to every ontological question, are slowly defining new lines of flight for thought under the rallying cries of transcendental empiricism and speculative realism.³⁴

Amerindian shamanism, which is defined by characteristics of perspectivism and multinaturalism, appears as “an unsuspected partner” – an *intruder*, if you will – in a dialogue developed by Meillassoux. This intrusion, we suppose, happens in the opening onto the “Great Outdoors,” because at least from an outdated Western colonial perspective, the “savage” shaman is a being of the “Great Outdoors,” existing in the “wild.”³⁵ Viveiros de Castro claims that:

Shamanism is a mode of action entailing a mode of knowledge, or, rather, a certain ideal of knowledge. In certain respects, this ideal is diametrically opposed to the objectivist epistemology encouraged by Western modernity. The latter's telos is provided by the category of the object: to know is to objectify by distinguishing between what is intrinsic to the object and what instead belongs to the knowing subject, which has been inevitably and illegitimately projected onto the object.³⁶

The distinguishing of what belongs to the knowing subject and what could be or could not be known about the properties of an object is of fundamental importance to Kant, while the focus is on the transcendental subjectivity. A question of quality “intrinsic to the object” is of greater concern to speculative realism/materialism, and the issue here is whether it is possible (and if so, how) to avoid the projection of subjective impressions onto the object that would completely hide the object itself. However the “projection” of qualities onto the object is essentially different in the case of Amerindian shamanism. Instead of being “imperialistic,” forcing itself epistemologically (mathematically) onto the object, it proceeds “diplomatically”: one *changes* oneself into a being of the same kind as the partner of inter-entity communication. As Viveiros de Castro puts it: “Amerindian shamanism could be defined as the authorization of certain individuals to cross the corporeal barriers between species, adopt an exospecific subjective perspective, and administer the relations between those species and humans.”³⁷ He draws a line between the scope of the *mediation* of Western epistemology as cultural relativism and of Amerindian shamanism as multinaturalism:

³³ Ibid., 30.

³⁴ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 49.

³⁵ As we have noted before, the plurality of the “Great Outdoors” indicates a certain “multinaturalism” and signifies resistance to the charges of colonialism.

³⁶ Ibid., 60.

³⁷ Ibid.

“If Western relativism has multiculturalism as its public politics, Amerindian shamanic perspectivism has multinaturalism as its cosmic politics.”³⁸ Multinaturalism is defined in opposition to the Western ontology of the unity of objectivity and plurality of subjectivity (of one nature, multiple perceiving agents). Amerindian ontology is of multiple natures and unified subjectivity.

(Multi)cultural relativism supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature, which remains perfectly indifferent to those representations. Amerindian thought proposes the opposite: a representational or phenomenological unity which is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity. One single ‘culture,’ multiple ‘natures’- perspectivism is multinaturalist, for a perspective is not a representation... A perspective is not a representation because representations are a property of the mind or spirit, whereas the point of view is located in the body.³⁹

He concludes with an observation about the guiding principles of modern and indigenous thought:

Thus if a subject is an insufficiently analyzed object in the modern naturalist world, the Amerindian epistemological convention follows the inverse principle, which is that an object is an insufficiently interpreted subject. One must know how to personify, because one must personify in order to know.⁴⁰

This is a fundamental observation that brings into play the theme of the specific mode of imagination as personification, and also provides an alternative to positions that seek to exclude any point of view from reality, such as those of speculative materialism. In this way, Amerindian ontology comes into dialogue with speculative materialism. The following questions arise: what is a subject or a person in an Amerindian worldview? What defines humanity? What is the role of a myth and its supposed virtuality under this definition?

As McKenzie Wark observed, myth is a “time out of time” before objects and subjects became distinct.⁴¹ However, myth is just as operational – virtual in the time of the present in shaping and defining the current relations between subjects and objects. For an indigenous person of the Amazon, the mythical social origin of all entities constitutes the possible ways of coexisting and communicating with said entities today as well the manner in which the person defines herself as a person.⁴² To be a person is to see oneself as a person, and to communicate with other entities is to personalize them. Then what excludes humanity from the multiplicity of subjects? According to Viveiros de Castro:

The original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but rather humanity. The great mythical separation reveals not so much culture distinguishing itself from nature but rather nature distancing itself from culture: the myths tell how animals lost the qualities inherited or retained by humans [...]. Humans are those who continue as they have always been: animals are ex-humans, not humans ex-animals.⁴³

We note how the incommensurability of humanity and the natural world is addressed within an Amerindian myth: humans are the ones who have not lost the original state of being while everything else has, but only as far as their appearance is concerned. The separation of nature and culture is not ontological, but only relative to the point of view which itself is corporeal.

The Ends of the World by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, where we find a discussion of Meillassoux’s materialism, contains a thesis that the anticipation of the end of the world permeates all the cultural spheres of modern human life. Today, the topic of the end of the world is reflected not only in

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” 478.

⁴⁰ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 62.

⁴¹ Wark, “In and Against the Human.”

⁴² According to Viveiros de Castro: “Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans [...]” Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” 470.

⁴³ Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” 472.

the natural sciences, popular mass culture, and media, but also in philosophy. It means that there is an evident change of character in the relation between humanity and the world.

Even though such a change in thought is only partly motivated by the threat of the ecological catastrophe, it reveals and questions a basic, fundamental notion: human being is incompatible with the world.

It has long been said that modernity's cultural apperception has (or rather had) as one of its fundamental elements a sentiment of worldlessness from which a spiritual crisis of (Western) humankind arose – and whose outcome was the attainment, by that same humankind, of the novel condition of autonomous Subject (“humanity”).⁴⁴

The condition of “worldlessness” could have been, and actually has been, criticized from “inside” of the realm of the autonomous subject (in Romanticism and later in phenomenology). But since the harsh response of the “indifferent” climate has been continuously witnessed, and the outcomes of this response have been imagined (in the arts, media and natural sciences) in their unpredictable catastrophic possibilities, rejection of the indomitability of the autonomous “worldless” subject has reached a whole new level.

Kant's misnamed “Copernican Revolution” is, as we know, the source of the official modern conception of Man (let us keep it masculine) as constituent power, the autonomic and sovereign lawgiver of nature, the only being capable of rising above the phenomenal order or causality of which his own understanding is a condition; “human exceptionalism” is a veritable *ontological state of exception*, grounded on the self-grounding separation between Nature and History.⁴⁵

This particular mode of the “ontological state of exception” has been “checked” by the response of the climate to human agency. Our “rising above” the causality of the physical has been thrown back into the face of “Man” in showing the catastrophic *causality* of such a “rising.” The *effect*, the *response* to the posited “worldlessness” shook the veritable state of ontological exception which appeared as being the cause of something “physical,” yet ontological at the same time. The reality and possibility of extinction became intertwined, and the separation of “Nature and History” had lost its self-groundedness. The witnesses of such a loss had to turn elsewhere to see if and why such a separation were indeed necessary. One of the explanations for this separation had appeared in post-colonial thought, which pointed out modernity's *need* for self-affirmation during the colonial era in positing the abstract animist “primitive”⁴⁶ for whom such a separation was unnecessary. And if the separation was established, it was being done in a different manner, which was precisely the indicator of her “savagery”: her being in the “original state of animality” in its most pejorative sense. Thus the right to be the master of the “savage animal” of our own species had been “grounded” ontologically, which led to the imagined “legitimacy” of slavery.

The business end of this mythical dispositif was the Promethean image of Man as the conqueror of nature, the being which, emerging from his original animal abjection, lost his world only so as better to regain it as master. But this is a profoundly ambivalent privilege, as we have known since Romanticism at least. The rational appropriation and instrumental economicization of the world led to its “disenchantment” (Weber), and *Dasein*, that “world-former” (Heidegger), reveals himself in the end as a victim of his own success, discovering himself absolutely alone in his “clearing” - the *Lichtung* in the middle of the forest that gives him the monopoly over Being, truth and death.⁴⁷

The “clearing,” which today also refers to deforestation (among other meanings), is an artificial and ruthless “safe-space” that is left after “separating” nature from itself. It emerges in the face of the dynamics of relation and separation (or absence of relation). As we have seen, the question of relation or separation is addressed in Amerindian myth as a divergence from or preservation of the original condition of humanity. When it is drawn into a dialogue with the mathematization of nature as the means to transgress the incommensurability of humanity and the physical world, it reveals that modern thought from Kant forward relates the subject to the world by privileging the subject. Meanwhile, Amerindian myth begins from the

⁴⁴ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 28.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Franke, “Animism,” 17.

⁴⁷ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 28-29.

world, which is already defined by its human condition: the relation is already there without the need to establish it transcendentally. All in all, the alleged “rising above” of modernity had “brought us back down” or showed increasingly that the “rising” had been imagined, hallucinated – performed in the heat of the ideological, colonial frenzy of modern times. Thus the authors signify the theme that begins to be woven into the discourse of speculative realism: “Modern anthropocentrism or humanism, therefore, corresponds to the ‘us before the world’ scheme, a position of transcendental anteriority of the human which is all the more constitutive of this world the more humans, as empirical beings, show themselves to be constituted by it.”⁴⁸ “Us before the world,” as Meillassoux had also noticed, is the face of modernity’s correlationist self-affirmation; however, as is noted in the post-humanist and post-colonial discourses, it harbors within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The empirical sciences lifted up by the spirit of the “ontological exception” began to excavate the evidence of the world anterior to givenness in its most ontological sense: the world that constituted the being which then constitutes the world turn. According to the authors of *The Ends of the World*:

[...] Latour has argued in some essential pages, an absolute ontological incommensurability that expresses itself in two complementary mythical figures: that of the world’s disappearance, absorbed by the Subject and transformed into his Object (a social construction, a projection of language, a phantasm of desire); but also that of the Subject’s disappearance, absorbed by the world and made into a thing among things, an organic contraption assembled by a blind watchmaker. The crisis of what would come to be known as “correlationism” effectively began long before the name was coined.⁴⁹

So, the transcendental anteriority of humanity had sown the seeds of its own “crisis of faith” due to the previously unimagined response from the world: which was to be transcended, yet appeared as antecedent (at least for a speculative materialist) and responsive and even vengeful (for an ecologically oriented thinker).

It is in the light of this observation that Danowski and Viveiros de Castro interpret the philosophical position of speculative realism, and Meillassoux’s speculative materialism in particular. The latter attempts to dissolve the so-called correlationist assumptions of various modern philosophies that are based on the conception of a necessary relation between being and consciousness. Meillassoux’s speculative materialism, according to the authors, lays the theoretical groundwork for a world-without-us, while offering metaphysical schemes that would be appropriate for the cognition of such reality.⁵⁰ At the heart of such a process there arises an incompatibility, which appears not as a simple incongruity, but as a structural or genetic inconsistency. In cases like this one, the incompatible agents cannot be accommodated by discovering models of coexistence. It is an even more radical discord that is described by the diagnosis of incommensurability, as was indicated by authors’ Danowski and Viveiros de Castro’s swerve in the direction of Latour. As we noted above, the assumption of incommensurability is addressed both by mathematics (and speculative materialism) and Amerindian myth (likely myth as virtuality in general). It reveals a dynamics of relation and separation that then layers over the ancient story of *logos*’ triumph over *mythos*,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ We do not think that such an evaluation is completely warranted, since to predict does not necessarily mean to prepare. Graham Harman in an interview after the conference “The Agents of the Real” in Vilnius, where said position of Danowski and Viveiros de Castro had been discussed, claimed that he does not completely agree with such an interpretation of the new realisms. According to him the new realists seek to predict rather than to “fly in the dark.” Harman, “Kartais filosofija lenkia kultūrą,” Q3. The main difference between Meillassoux’s position and that of Harman concerns the question of incommensurability of humanity and the natural world: “Are the things-in-themselves directly accessible to humans or not? Simply put, the answer of speculative materialism is yes, while the answer of object-oriented ontology is no.” Harman, “The Road to Objects,” 171. According to Harman, the 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. Ibid. We suppose that by “flying in the dark” Harman means the other views that his philosophy rejects, the views that would entail adherence to the inaccessibility of the in-itself, yet subscribing to the exclusivity and objectivity of human cognition while staring in the face of the climate crisis; perhaps denying the influence of human agency on the climate while maintaining the supremacy of the modern western worldview as well.

and brings back the play between the latter in a never-ending story similar to the mythical scheme of two snakes devouring each other's tails.

We do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the Anthropocene, in placing us in the perspective of an “end of the world” in the most empirical sense possible – a catastrophic change in the material conditions of existence of the species – has sparked a veritable metaphysical anguish. This anguish has expressed itself as a profound distrust of all figures of anthropocentrism, [...] – the *world of the worldless people* that is (that was) the world of the Moderns.⁵¹

In our *Zeitgeist* which is marked by such “distrust” of anthropocentrism, reactionary worldviews and philosophies arise; at least to some interpreters, speculative realism and/or materialism might appear as one of them. Apparently, this rather harsh evaluation is derived from: 1) posing the question of “what really motivates the rise of speculative realism/materialism?” and observing that speculative materialism displays a spirit of distrust of anthropocentrism in the face of the question of the “end of the world” when it considers the world after the extinction of cognizing agency. On this basis, it might be taken for a reactionary view motivated by the “metaphysical anguish” of climate catastrophe, as rationalizing and trying to make the world after one of the “ends” a little less terrifying; 2) reduction of the scope of speculative materialism: noting that if taken in the context of other contemporary views which are dealing with the anguish of the climate catastrophe, speculative materialism appears as predominantly occupied with opposing the lines of thought that advocate the abolition of “nature” and the perennality of the human; 3) observing the “conservationist” tendencies of Meillassoux's “Great Outdoors,” which then stands as a bastion of defense against humanity's metaphysical incursions into “nature” by protecting its inaccessibility, yet allowing a window of observation for certain “specialists.” However, we would like to abstain from such an evaluation, even though we agree with a point of clarification on their general mythical “eschatological” schematic. On this topic, the authors indicate that:

Current transformations of this mythical scheme move in different directions, however; some of them seek to invert the negative sign that marks this destruction, advocating the radical abolition of the world as the only way out toward the final emancipatory transfiguration of the human. In an age in which manic exuberance and melancholic depression seem to fight over the helm of the collective psyche, every discourse on the end of the world elicits an inverse discourse preaching the perennality of the human, its endless capacity for overcoming and sublimation, and tending to see any mention to the ideas of decline or end as unreal, far-fetched, reactionary, and superstitious.⁵²

As we have seen, Meillassoux re-established the “Great Outdoors” as indifferent and alien to experience. It is a “nature” which points to the world before and after any possible experience, meaning it is hard to claim that he advocates either perennality of the human or the end of the world along with the possible extinction of *Homo sapiens*. The authors Danowski and Viveiros de Castro are particularly interested in this case of speculative thought⁵³ – that of Meillassoux – which they characterize as: “A world without observers, defined essentially, and not just accidentally, by the absence of perspective. A world, in fact, that is radically dead.”⁵⁴

Meillassoux, as seen by the authors, takes up the task of procurement of the “speculative antidote” to all the religious worldviews that came back to pester modernity after sensing a weakness in the hegemony of scientific image of reality.⁵⁵ Are the indigenous worldviews to be counted among them? Also, the sphere of meaning of the term “antidote” entails the meaning of poison as well; thus it refers to a bigger philosophical intrigue or conspiracy in which Meillassoux is supposedly involved. Therefore his position is seen as a reaction against the intrusion of “religious worldviews.” “Naturally, the culprit here is Kant, who allegedly led philosophy down a path distancing it infinitely from the ‘Great Outdoors’ and trapping it inside the

⁵¹ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 29-30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

golden cage of the subject.”⁵⁶ Of course, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro could not have missed the hint at the “Great Outdoors” which, quite clearly, opens up Meillassoux’s securely fortified position to the theme of the climate crisis. But at the same point of entry, which is very interesting to us, speculative materialism reveals its susceptibility to a breach by the topics of shamanism and hallucination: a hallucination that demarcates the limits of the ambition of speculative materialism to talk about what is “real” sans givenness to experience, and what is “not real” in that which is given to experience. The term “hallucination” pops up at a crucial point in the authors’ critique of Meillassoux:

With Kant, in short, we have lost the world and turned inwards, in what could be described as a veritable psychotic episode in the history of our metaphysics: the modern constitutive subject is a narcissistic hallucination, and the legislating Understanding, a proverbial Napoleon in a provincial madhouse.⁵⁷

It is precisely against this “narcissistic hallucination” of correlationism that Meillassoux’s position is directed, but by the same stroke the theme of hallucination operates as the grounding demarcation of a new breed of authentic materialism. What is required is only that we define hallucination in the terms of speculative materialism itself. Even though they do not speak of this theme, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro arrives at a similar critique:

The problem with correlationism, according to its critics, is the primacy of the relation over its terms; it is necessary to separate Being from thought if we are to get to the rock bottom of the real, the world of extra-subjective primary qualities. It should be noted that what Meillassoux and the majority of speculative realists seem to be interested in is not both terms taken in isolation; it is the world or Being as external to thought that concerns them, not thought (language, society, culture, etc.) as such, of which Meillassoux has little more to say than that it can get hold of extra-experiential reality through mathematical means.⁵⁸

We note that getting to the “rock bottom of the real” is performed by a speculative “two-step”: by separation from “primary” hallucination (“as in a dream”) and then by exorcising the “secondary” hallucination of the primacy of the relation.⁵⁹ Danowski and Viveiros de Castro keenly observe that the majority of speculative realists seem to be interested not in Being and thought taken in isolation, but only in the world as external to thought: thought itself (language, society, culture, etc.) is of little concern. If one adds to this list “hallucination” – the term employed by Meillassoux himself when demarcating it his main topic “reality” – the picture becomes either even clearer or even more opaque. Yes, a speculative materialist/realist can describe thought as being able to get hold of extra-experiential reality through mathematical means, but what about the “reality” of hallucination which is intimately woven into the experience of “external reality” both in the “primary” and the “secondary” sense? What exactly is the hold of “reality” on us in hallucination? Of course, the answer could simply be analogous to correlationism: what is primary in hallucination is our relation to it. But to what does hallucination relate? Leaving the latter question aside, we first suppose that most correlationists (e.g., phenomenologists) also employ the term “hallucination” negatively in demarcating what is not their main topic of interest: that which is “really” given to experience in external world. It would be peculiar if a phenomenologist were to attempt to answer the question of whether the primacy of the relation (for example, that between noesis/noema) is also hallucinated, which is how it is taken to be by speculative realism / materialism. Second, the task of defining our hallucinatory take on reality is far more complex than first meets the eye. In the absence of any further discussion of hallucination within Meillassoux’s work, we can refer to Husserl’s *Perception and Attention*.⁶⁰ There, in speaking of the objective perception of physical objects like houses, he says that the perception of a house is not given anywhere separately from the intentional and perceptual (sensual) grasp of the house. These are one and the same, even if there are perceptions in which we perceive the object although we are also aware

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 31-32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁹ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 8.

⁶⁰ Husserl, *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit*, 10.

that it is not given in physical reality. In such cases too, we still perceive an object, and are conscious of the problematic *veracity* of the givenness of that particular object; *we distinguish intimately between verifiable and non-verifiable perception*. In a rich passage, Husserl goes on to say that delirium, hallucination, illusion, purely descriptively, are real perceptions, but it seems their status is phenomenologically puzzling, and that they are all quite different in their relevant characteristics and problematics.⁶¹ But the point is that, descriptively speaking, all of these experiences are “real.” The intrusion of hallucination into “standard” cases of perception is of a peculiar and autonomous nature, and so it also indicates a certain “reality” of pre-givenness, and an underlying dimension of consciousness that is not explicit at the fore of attentive observation, though it is able to intrude in certain conditions.

It is of crucial importance that we recognize this inherent distinction here. For in the case of the “primary” hallucination, we are supposed to recognize the non-verifiable nature of its givenness, but in the “secondary” hallucination of ontological exclusion and the primacy of relation, the veracity and possible verification of such a hallucination is of a different order of complexity, since any attempt at verification includes itself in the same hallucination. Therefore, insofar as it is taken for a hallucination from a speculative materialist standpoint, the latter – in performing the process of verification – falls back into the same hallucinatory anthropocentric exclusivity it had claimed to escape. What is there to say about the intimately recognizable distinction of the verifiable and the non-verifiable perception in this case? Danowski and Viveiros de Castro arrive at a similar conclusion concerning the anthropocentric nature of speculative materialism, though by different means.⁶²

The authors of *The Ends of the World* maintain that the thought experiment that Meillassoux employs in support of his metaphysical realism, “the argument of ancestrality,” depends on the derealization of thought.⁶³ Thus means it could be also interpreted as equivalent to the “derealized” status of hallucination, for either (a) thoughts are “real,” and then hallucinations are also “real” as for Husserl, or (b) thoughts are “not real,” as seems to follow from “the argument of ancestrality,” and as such are similar in their characteristics to hallucinations. But the derealization of thought goes further: for it is directed not only at human thought, but at any kind of sentience whatsoever. It is a peculiar turn, since it assumes and then immediately dissolves the notion of the non-human thought. This leads us to ask about the possibility of non-human thought. As concerns terrestrial life, this means plant and animal sentience, and the conditions under which such possibilities are imaginable. This very question is one of the main topics of post-colonial anthropology, as well as the renewed forms of theorizing about animism found in such works as Eduardo Kohn's *How Forests Think*. According to Kohn: “all living beings, and not just humans, think, [...] all thoughts are alive. It is about “the living thought.”⁶⁴ We will suppose that in Amerindian ontology, to be alive means to retain personhood and sociality, despite physical divergence from original humanity. For Meillassoux, however, when seen from a post-colonial standpoint: “It is life as sentience that must be excluded from reality's ultimate structure; [...] which excludes from the world not only the principle of life but also the meaning of every principle, namely, the principle of sufficient reason.”⁶⁵ As we have seen, the principal of “sufficient reason” – of causality in general – returns to face speculative philosophy in the situation of the climate crisis.

Danowski and Viveiros de Castro conclude their direct confrontation with speculative realism as follows:

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.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 35.

⁶³ Ibid., 32-33.

⁶⁴ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 72.

⁶⁵ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35; Shaviro, “Panpsychism And/Or Eliminativism.”

The problem with such “anti-anthropocentrism” is that it is not only characterized by its obsession with the human point of view (that of mathematics, probability, and “safe” predictability) which as we noted above is of the same ilk as anthropocentric “secondary” hallucination. More than this, it is also marked by its colonialist tendencies, granting hegemony to modernity’s self-affirmation in showing the “ignorant animists” that they have no place in the “real” world:

But a negative anthropocentrism is still an anthropocentrism – perhaps the only really radical one – as much as those who burned idols were the only fetishists in the grotesque comedy of errors of colonialism, since they truly believed in the unreality of fetishes in the same way that they (unrealistically) believed that “savages” truly believed in their reality (Latour 2010a).⁶⁷

In such an interpretation (which is not, we think, the only possible one) the case is also similar in the following respect: speculative realism truly believes in the unreality of “secondary” hallucination, while idly believing that correlationists do believe in its reality. But in this respect it also shows itself to be involved in the same hallucination, and perhaps even more fervently.

But does this apply to Meillassoux? Perhaps it does when he speaks of animism in hostile fashion. But once more showing the magnitude of his philosophical genius, Meillassoux entertains the hypothesis – which cannot be refuted *a priori* – of humanity being as old as the cosmos itself.⁶⁸ The colonialist assumption of an *a priori* refutation of indigenous world-views rears its head at this point, and Meillassoux seems to have nothing short of a mystical premonition of the coming critiques from anthropology. For the ancestral humanity of beings is one of the central notions of the Amerindian cosmology. This gives rise to an alternative mode of conceiving reality: namely, personification devoid of anthropomorphism. As Danowski and Viveiros de Castro notes:

There is, however, one other possible mythocosmological variant left: that in which the world is subtracted from the correlation with the human at the beginning rather than the end of times; a variant, in short, in which the human is placed as empirically anterior in relation to the world... This is a hypothesis that is explored in several Amerindian cosmogonies.⁶⁹

The authors take note of the Yawanawa, Aikewara and other indigenous people, according to whom “At first, then – originally – everything was human or, rather, nothing was not-human.”⁷⁰ Then:

After a series of exploits, parts of this primordial humankind progressively changed, either spontaneously or, again, under the action of a demiurge, into the biological species, geographical features, meteorological phenomena, and celestial bodies that compose the present cosmos. The part that did not change, remaining essentially equal to itself, is the historical, or contemporary, humankind.⁷¹

It is from these roots that the Amerindian personifying cognition of reality takes shape. Everything that is not human today is still capable of thought and understanding: not because it is currently anthropomorphized, but because it has grown into different perspectives of understanding reality from the same starting point. This prevents the transcendental anteriority of present humanity of the correlationist philosophies. “In Amerindian cosmologies, the real world of different species depends on their points of view, for the ‘world in general’ consists only of different species, being the abstract space of divergence between them as points of view.”⁷² However, there are ways of communication between the people of celestial bodies, geographical features and the shamans of contemporary humankind. It appears as an allowance for certain individuals to transgress the incommensurability of humanity and other entities, by actualizing the virtuality of mythical times and bringing forth the primordial origin of entities, then taking the path of

⁶⁷ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 35.

⁶⁸ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 182.

⁶⁹ Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 63.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷² Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 90.

particular divergence from humanity into the relative form of being that coincides with the object. This is usually achieved through shamanic hallucinatory trances that allows the shamans to “travel,” to relate to beings without the necessity to face them physically. That is why shamanism is held to be a kind of cosmic diplomacy. This offers an alternative to philosophies that tend to exclude cognition or thought from reality: instead of excluding oneself, one might develop the subtle capabilities of personification, imagination and “diplomatic” communication as perfected in shamanism. This would grow into ways of recognizing thought as possible apart from present-day human beings, but without going in the direction of subjective idealism.

However, by entertaining a notion of ancestral humanity, Meillassoux secures himself from a hasty post-colonial criticism and shows his position to be, at least in part, devoid of modern epistemic hegemony. He says that even if this were the case, it would not prevent the inquiry he is making:

For the fundamental point is this: even if science had discovered this synchronicity, this would still have been a discovery – which is to say that it is precisely insofar as modern science is mathematized that it is capable of raising the question of a possible temporal hiatus between thinking and being – of construing the latter as a meaningful hypothesis, of giving it meaning, of rendering it tractable – whether in order to refute it or confirm it.⁷³

But the question remains: how would Meillassoux refer to animism in this renewed, decolonized sense where the notion of the ancestry of humanity is further developed into a cognitive system or worldview that is evident, efficient and sustainable in the contemporary shamanism of indigenous peoples?

4 Conclusions

As we have seen from our crossing of Meillassoux's “Great Outdoors” with the theme of the climate crisis, the principle of causality (which, according to Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, is denied by speculative materialism) returns through the doors that are speculatively opened up to the “Great Outdoors.” The climate's response is the effect prompted, at least in part, by human agency which indicates not the indifference of “reality” towards possible experience or agency, but the indifference of the “reality” in its intrusion that is given *for* experience, from within the “hallucinated ontological exclusion.” In short, it is a matter of intrusion (of X) to exclusion (of Y) that threatens the very ontological possibility of exclusion. In this light, speculative materialism does not appear as a reactionary attempt to divert attention to the remnants of the ontologically reversed conditions for such an exclusion. However, its “Great Outdoors” is to be found not somewhere in the “absolute outside,” but in the place of the opening where the intrusion happens. Nevertheless, Meillassoux's speculative materialism stems from the critiques of post-colonial anthropology mostly unscathed, since he takes precautions by considering the possibility of primordial humanity and its consequences for his claim of the objectivity of mathematical observation. Even so, Meillassoux does not sufficiently explore the further implications of this mythical scheme, which should bring about alternative ways of addressing the problem of incommensurability. The dynamics of separation and relation within the problematic of incommensurability of humanity and the natural world, as addressed both in Amerindian and modern Western ontologies, emerges in junction with the intertwining of *mythos* and *logos*. *Mythos* (as an ancestral time that constitutes the present) and *logos* (as an ability to know the world without adherence to myth) defines the being of humanity and everything else in two similar yet opposite ways. Either it depicts humanity as the final result of a being's emergence from naturality (namely, the rise of the animality of mythical times into ontological exclusion at the “end of the world”) or it draws humanity as a primordial state of being that then dissipates into a myriad of different entities found in the present. In either case, humanity seems to enjoy a unique and separate position within the cosmos: either as the beginning of everything, or as the end which then defines the essential relation of subjects and objects.

In the wake of these considerations, it becomes clear that the topic of “primary” and “secondary” hallucination in both modernity and present-day speculative thought needs to be investigated further and in greater detail. In short, a new philosophical paradigm of hallucination is required: one that could provide

⁷³ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 182-183.

direction for subsequent background research related to the discussion between speculative realism/materialism and philosophical anthropology based on Amerindian and other indigenous worldviews. Also the paths of modernity's ("hallucinatory") self-affirmation and hegemony must be taken into account, questioning the meaning of the conquest of nature and of colonialist mastery over the *other* (the "savage animal") and its ecological and cultural consequences.

In short, from the discourse of post-colonial anthropology there comes an alternative way of conceiving of humanity's relation with the world. It is one that emphasizes imagination in personifying the objects of cognition, as beings originally capable of thought. In this way, animism poses an interesting question for contemporary speculative philosophy: is the in-itself knowable or thinkable if it itself thinks? Or alternatively, is there is no in-itself if it also thinks?

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