

Anthropology becoming philosophy

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish, Univocal, Minneapolis, 2014. 229 pp., £20.00 pb., 978 1 93756 121 5.

While the debates and provocations of sixties France in the texts that make up post-structuralism, or, perhaps more accurately, 'la pensée 68', continue to influence contemporary philosophy and theory, the encounter between philosophy and anthropology that framed that period has had rather less of an effect. Little is said, at least in the Anglo-American world, about the fact that Althusser, Derrida and Lacan engaged in dialogue and debate with Lévi-Strauss about the nature of society and history; or about the central role that anthropological theories of kinship, as well as the myth and arts of various societies of Western Africa, played in the formation of the two volumes of Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. There has, however, been a slight change of late. Bernard Stiegler's writings on technology have as their basis a re-examination of the relationship between Derrida's concept of grammatology and Leroi-Gourhan's paleontological account of anthropogenesis, while, more broadly, there has been a return to philosophical anthropology in the works of Étienne Balibar and Paolo Virno. Is it possible that this encounter is returning to both disciplines, transforming our understanding of society, humanity and knowledge?

Of all of the various recent returns to anthropology there is none more sustained and engaged than the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as is demonstrated by the recent translation of *Cannibal Metaphysics* (published in French in 2009). Viveiros de Castro approaches this relation from the perspective of anthropology, not philosophy, although he does so from one informed by philosophy. *Cannibal Metaphysics* begins from the middle of the intersection of philosophy and anthropology. He immediately contests two ways in which this relationship has been viewed. The first, and most traditional, is to see anthropology as providing insights into 'primitive societies'; insights which could then be used to add a bit of empirical detail to the conceptions of human nature put forward by armchair ethnographers. The second, and more recent, turn sees anthropology as nothing more than a reflection of the preoccupations and obsessions of the culture of the anthropologist. From looking glass to mirror, anthropology remains nothing other than a reflection

of the society that created it. Viveiros de Castro aims to shatter this mirror. (He even proposed to call the book *Anti-Narcissus*.) In place of the dialectic of magnification and reflection he proposes a relation of refraction. Anthropology is about neither us nor them, but the unstable division between the two, and thus between subject and object. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'Doesn't the originality of anthropology instead reside there, in this always-equivocal but often fecund alliance between the conceptions and practices that arise from the worlds of the so-called "subject" and "object" of anthropology?' Rather than simply see the practices and concepts of other societies as some supposed evidence for a putative human nature, or simply a reflection of one's own cultural anxieties, they should be viewed as intellectual and cultural productions in their own right. It is a matter of reading the ethnographic other not just as evidence of human nature, but in terms of its ability to constitute entire new concepts of nature and humanity. 'If real philosophy abounds in imaginary savages, anthropological geophilosophy makes imaginary philosophy with real savages.'

Viveiros de Castro turns to the practices and myths of Amerindian societies to read them in terms of their concepts, their metaphysics. What he finds effectively inverts and transforms the classical Western concepts of nature and culture. While it is commonplace to posit one nature that is interpreted by different cultures, Amerindian societies offer a variety of different natures that, paradoxically, are refracted through the same 'culture'. Amerindian mythology looks at the different animals of the rainforest, such as jaguars, as having their own 'humanity', their own perspective on the world. At first glance this perspective seems oddly similar to ours. Just as we have beer, the 'beer' of jaguars is blood. This identification of the humanity of animals of nature, the belief that they can only be known or understood in terms of their particular perspective, does not annul the difference between man and animal. Rather, it conceives this difference differently. First, and most importantly, it radically inverts what it means to know something; to understand is not to reduce something to an object, but to imbue something with its own 'humanity', its own action and perspective. This transformation of

the object of knowledge is a transformation of the subject as well. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'What perspectivism affirms, when all is said and done, is not so much that animals are at bottom like humans but the idea that, as humans, they are at bottom something else – they are, in the end, the "bottom" itself of something, its other side; they are different from themselves.'

What perspectivism asserts is, then, not an identity – animals are human too – or a simple inversion – positing one culture and multiple natures in place of one nature and multiple cultures – but rather a way of thinking perspective as difference and variation as nature. Perspective posits neither identity nor contradiction but variation as the fundamental relation that structures both reality and our knowledge of it. There are perspectives all the way down. Anthropology does not just contribute to some philosophical anthropology, expanding or redefining our understanding of humanity, but becomes part of a general transformation of our understanding of knowledge and reality.

It is from this perspective, a perspective of 'internal difference' which would already seem to parallel Deleuze's philosophy, that Viveiros de Castro turns to the encounter of philosophy and anthropology in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Deleuze and Guattari engage not just with anthropological theory, with Lévi-Strauss and other writers, but with the cosmologies and ontologies of different societies such as the Dogon, Guayaki and nomads from Mongolia. As Viveiros de Castro argues, *Anti-Oedipus's* critique of Oedipus is in part framed in terms of how the Oedipus myth, or its psychoanalytic reinterpretation, treats the problem of filiation and alliance, the elementary structures of kinship that determine descent and relation. In order to counter this conception of the family, psyche and society, Deleuze and Guattari do not turn just to a Marxist critique of the family, but to a cosmological, or mythic, conception of production understood as a universal intensity. In myths drawn from the Dogon and other societies, filiation is figured as the 'intense germinal flux', as an intensive production that is prior to, and the condition of, the extensive marking of persons and relations that define alliances. Everything is production prior to being marked, exchanged and consumed. Filiation is intensive: alliance is extensive. The task of every socius, to code desire, can then be understood as containing the intense potential of desiring production, subjecting it to the order of alliance, to the family and reproduction. The concept of production

that Deleuze and Guattari develop in opposition to representation has as much to do with the myths of 'pre-capitalist societies', as it does with Marx's 'Pre-capitalist Economic Formations'.

Viveiros de Castro's reading of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* through their engagement with anthropology reframes the difference between the two books. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'The concept of becoming effectively plays the same axial cosmological role in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the concept of production plays in *Anti-Oedipus*.' In each case the term in question is opposed to the order of representation, but this opposition functions differently and is related to different concepts. The shift from production to becoming is also a shift from filiation to alliance as the privileged term. In *A Thousand Plateaus* alliance is no longer the intensive excess, but the imaginary genealogy that constructs identity and continuity out of the various alliances. 'All filiation is imaginary, say the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*. We can add: and all filiation produces a state, is a filiation of a state. Amazonian intensive alliance is an alliance counter the state (homage to Pierre Clastres).' The critical perspective shifts from alliance to filiation just as the object of critique of the two volumes shifts somewhat from capital to the state. Alliance is no longer associated with social reproduction, with the coding of society, but with transformation, becoming. The alliance that is found in becoming, in the transformations of myth, sorcery and sacrifice, is neither an identification of man with nature, nor nature with society, but a transformation of each. Viveiro de Castro reminds us that Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of becoming is framed by Lévi-Strauss's understanding of sacrifice and totem, between two different ways of understanding the human–nature relation: 'the imaginary identification between human and animal, on one hand, the symbolic correlation between social differences and natural differences, on the other'. Becoming is neither an identification of man with nature, or the social order with the natural order, but a transformation that destabilizes each. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing–progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or producing.

At this point it would seem that the difference between the two texts is a relatively simple manner of a shift from production to becoming, and from filiation to alliance. However, as Viveiros de Castro argues, there is always more than just one alliance or filiation. There are always intensive filiations, filiations that exceed any legacy of state, family or society, and intensive alliances, alliances that pass beneath established identities and relations. I should say that in the final analysis there are both intensive and extensive dimensions to each relation, but, as Viveiros de Castro argues, *Anti-Oedipus* does not seem to allow for intensive alliances; filiation is always productive and alliance is a recording of this intense germinal flux. (However, it would seem that Viveiros de Castro overlooks the role of direct filiation in the constitution of the state.) This makes the second volume's focus on alliance as a kind of becoming even more striking. For Viveiros de Castro, *Anti-Oedipus* remains too Oedipal, or too anti-Oedipal, structured by that which it negates. As much as desire is expanded beyond the family to become world historical, it remains human desire. It is caught in an opposition between production, understood as intensity and alliance, and representation, understood as extension and filiation. In contrast to this *A Thousand Plateaus* give us an alliance that splits into two, an imaginary alliance constituted in relation to the state, to the majority, and an intensive alliance, an alliance of becoming which passes beneath it. Becoming exceeds not only Oedipal identity, but the delimited nature of humanity as well.

These transformations and divisions of filiation and alliance reorient the political task of each book. Beyond the obvious (and dated) critique of Oedipus the task of *Anti-Oedipus* is to think a production irreducible to teleological and instrumental logics of production. The anthropological and cosmological dimensions do not just add a touch of exoticism to a Marxist critique of psychoanalysis, but push Marx beyond the 'mirror of production'. The task of *A Thousand Plateaus* (or, at least, some of the latter plateaus) is to think exchange irreducible to identity and the contractual foundations of the social order. Viveiros de Castro's recasting of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in terms of alliance and filiation, in terms of their relation to anthropological debates about the nature of kinship, ritual and myth, does not reduce the texts to a merely intra-ethnographic debate about the nature of kinship but opens up their innovations and transformations to fundamental problems concerning how both the economy and the state are conceptualized.

Viveiros de Castro's perceptive reading of Deleuze and Guattari offers a fundamental way to think his own relation to anthropology. It is not a matter of production, or at least production in its teleological sense, where ethnographic research would simply function as the raw material for philosophical representations. Nor is it a matter of an alliance, in which anthropology and philosophy exchange empirical research for theoretical concepts setting up a free-trade zone between their disparate, and distinct, territories. It is a matter of thinking a relation between anthropology and philosophy as a becoming: a becoming philosophical of anthropology, as anthropological texts are read for their metaphysics and ontologies, and a becoming anthropological of philosophy, as philosophical texts are read in terms of their relations to the practices and rituals that condition their emergence.

Jason Read

De interpretatione

John Fletcher and Nicholas Ray, eds, *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2014. 365 pp., £16.99 pb., 9781909831087.

John Fletcher, *Freud and The Scene of Trauma*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2013. xvi + 364 pp. \$40.00 pb., 9780823254606.

In different ways, these two books are significant and helpful additions to the anglophone reception of the psychoanalytic theory of Jean Laplanche, for which John Fletcher can claim much credit. The first, *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, will be the more widely read, including translations of three essays by Laplanche concerned with the Freudian topic of interpretation and the interpretation of Freud – two sides of the same coin, for Laplanche. The other, Fletcher's extended study of the centrality of the idea of 'trauma' in Freud's thought, is for a more specialized readership, but provides perhaps the most detailed and rewarding Laplanchean interpretations of aspects of Freud's early work, in particular, that can be found in English.

Fletcher and Ray's Introduction to *Seductions and Enigmas* provides an overview of the relevant aspects of Laplanche's work which is both accessible and useful. It covers, in particular, Laplanche's method of