# What does it mean to think Amerindian thinking?[1]

> *I am not of their age or time, and therefore have not personally heard their voices or seen their faces; but I know this from what is written on bamboo and silk, engraved on metal and stone, and inscribed on basins and bowls that have been handed down to us through successive generations.*
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> Mozi, *Impartial Care*.

The aim here is to talk about Amerindian thought, about what we can understand by this field, which is still relatively new in the area of philosophy[2]. Let us point out some elements because we know well that the consideration of indigenous thought in the philosophical tradition is something that at best still rests on rather precarious foundations[3] . There is increasing interest, but in the academic field of the university, we cannot say that there is actually a presence (we do not find journals dedicated to the subject, we do not have - to my knowledge - chairs and competitions dedicated to the discipline, as well as there are few professors available to guide these themes in postgraduate courses in the area of philosophy). There are some reasons for this that are well known (although perhaps not sufficiently studied). We know about the racist and Eurocentric character of our discipline (even more than Eurocentric: Franco-German-Anglo-centric) - although the "sources" of this Eurocentricity tend to think differently[4] . We also know the strategy of belittling philosophical expressions that do not

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[1] Everything in this text was at some point the subject of conversations with my dear friend and anthropological guide Tiago Guidi. If there is anything right here, it is mainly due to the patience with which he ruminated my concerns and regurgitated them in deliciously edible form.

[2] This is not to say that this is the first time that Amerindian thought has affected the Eurocentric philosophical tradition. As David Graeber and David Wengrow recently pointed out in *The Dawn of Everything*, since the contact at the beginning of modernity there has been an influence of the thought of American indigenous thinkers in European philosophy, even if this influence has often been repressed. What is new is precisely the reception of Amerindian thought in the university environment.

[3] If we consider the project of "History of philosophy without any gaps" by Peter Adamson and his collaborators (Chike Jeffers , Jonardon Ganeri and eventually Karyn Lai), perhaps the largest recent undertaking produced in the field of the history of synchronic philosophy, we see that it itself - a project that seeks to take seriously the global character of philosophy - includes Amerindian thought (or the ensemble in which it would be included) at the end: By the way I don't have concrete plans for what would come after that (which would be 5 years from now I guess), but at the moment probably either a return to do more coverage of India; continuing on with later philosophy in China, plus Japan and Korea; or doing a series on various indigenous philosophies around the world (Native American, Aboriginal Australian, etc.). I would like to do all these things eventually, so it is just a matter of which seems most practical to tackle first." (https://historyofphilosophy.net/chinese-philosophy-announcement)

[4] Cf. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09608788.2022.2029347

appear as a dissertative text (or: the university text) - although the history of philosophy is full of different styles that hardly fit into this format[5] . Nevertheless, here we are. It does not seem to me an accident that this happens today. It is important to comment a little on some of the reasons why we feel like a field of questions that is not only interesting, but necessary.

If we look at the current political scenario, it is quite evident that among the most central issues we can highlight the struggle for the demarcation of indigenous lands. We can justify the centrality of this struggle from two elements: firstly, the demarcation of land and the achievement of autonomy over it guarantees the space for countless groups to be able to produce their own subsistence in a relatively free way from the forms of exploitation that exist in capitalism. Secondly, it is known that indigenous territories tend to be spaces that help counterbalance the exploitation and destruction of the environment that has led to the climate collapse we are experiencing. Although these two issues are old (since the exploitation of indigenous people and the destruction of the environment can be linked to the arrival of the Portuguese in America), it is remarkable that in the last 10 years this problem has been shown as indispensable for anyone interested in the struggle for the emancipation of peoples (either as struggles to participate in, to take as a model and example or as points of alliance in the construction of networks between different struggles). These facts would be enough to demonstrate the growing importance of this historically marginalized group.

Not surprisingly, along with this political prominence of indigenous peoples, consideration of what they have to say is also increasing. Increasingly - whether in traditional media, such as the world of books, or new media, such as the internet (from social media profiles to the proliferation of recordings and/or *livestreams*) - indigenous people (either as individuals or as representatives of a particular group) have been given a space to air the reasons for their political struggles. This certainly does not mean that everything is a bed of roses. Of course it is not possible to deny that the historical racism that constitutes the Brazilian state is still very much alive, that this space is not just *any space*. But if we compare the presence of these groups on the scene and in public discourse ten years ago, it is remarkable how things have changed.

However, this recent increase in presence should not confuse us. Although an increase in presence can be understood as a recent phenomenon, any look at the history of indigenous peoples in Brazil can note that there is a slow collective construction of a political actor (without being understood here as a homogeneous unit, we can speak of multi-faceted movements, composed of multiple ethnicities, often using different strategies) that precedes the current irruption at least since the 1970s (with special emphasis on the achievements in the 1988 constituent assembly). It would not be an exaggeration to say that much of the strength that exists today is a fruit of the movement of indigenous people organizing among themselves in the struggle for their rights from that moment on.

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[5] Besides Socrates, a philosopher who never wrote (which indicates already at the center of this tradition a possibility of practice not subordinated to writing), we still find an immense variety of formal experimentations within writing itself. Cf. Helen de Cruz: https://dailynous.com/2023/04/18/various-literary-forms-of-philosophy/

This movement brought with it a counterpart in the discursive sphere. If we look at a discipline like anthropology, the privileged gateway to Amerindian thought (and that of native peoples in general, around the world) in the university world, we find a troubled history. Beginning its history in the nineteenth century, divided between the solidarity-based emancipatory impetus of Lewis Morgan and the colonial enterprise of British anthropology, it took some decades for anthropology to be able to critically construct investigative practices that do not inferiorize groups and peoples that were its object of study. This movement, which we only briefly mention here, even seems an inevitable effect (albeit with sufficient delay to undo entrenched prejudices) of the very contact required to conduct anthropological investigations. The kind of contact that anthropology demands, the continuous coexistence, the attention to the other, seem to contain in themselves a way to address the very colonial ills that for so long financed its development. Without going on at length here, suffice it to say, however, that already from the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the work of Lévi-Strauss appears as a point that marks a turning point in the discipline. A work like *Savage Thought* (a title that perhaps works better if we understand it as an ironic contrast to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's "The Primitive Mentality", written in the 1920s) relentlessly catalogues the rationality inherent in the practices of countless groups usually understood as irrational or stupid. Instead, therefore, of an understanding of natives as thoughtless, Lévi-Strauss opens the door for anthropology to study not only the behavior and practices of a group (which can facilitate its domination), but the very way in which there is thought and rationality in its practices.

This Lévi-Straussian gesture is redoubled by a certain generation of anthropologists who succeed him. In addition to an understanding of the rationality of practices, from the 1980s and 1990s onwards (in a movement that - at the time of the owl's nocturnal flight - accompanies the political consolidation of indigenous groups here in Brazil), they began to take into account the very thought produced by indigenous people in order to understand their own practices. Here in Brazil, we can highlight Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Tânia Stolze Lima, two anthropologists who were fundamental to a global renewal of anthropology, especially since the construction of the concept of "perspectivism", which would be above all the "indigenous point of view on the point of view". What interests us here at the moment, however, is this novelty: instead of simply describing habits, this recent anthropology has increasingly been concerned with opening the doors at the university to a thought thought by the indigenous people themselves.[6]

It is not surprising (and here we are talking about a more recent phenomenon, already at the dates we mentioned above) that the culmination of this process is that the original peoples themselves also have their voice within universities. We find this on several fronts. In the political sphere we can highlight books such as *The Fall of Heaven* co-written by Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa and anthropologist Bruce Albert. In the literary sphere, the works of Daniel Munduruku, objects of reflection in *The Banquet of the Gods,* consolidate a constant (but

[6] The last turn of this nut, it should be pointed out, is perhaps the anthropologist-militants who have ethnographic/anthropological material as "residue" produced in the context of a political struggle in the context of demarcation of indigenous lands. We mention as exemplary cases here the works of Luísa Pontes Molina and Lucas Keese dos Santos.

invisibilized) presence of native peoples in national art. Finally, we can mention the presence in the university itself (undoubtedly also as a result of an expansion of access to the university during the PT governments) of indigenous people such as João Paulo Tukano, Eloy Terena and Célia Xakriabá who, as anthropologists, end up radicalizing this movement of entry of Amerindian thought into the university insofar as they themselves assume the condition of spokespersons for their thought.

It is not by chance, therefore, that I believe that 'Amerindian thought' is now emerging as a field that we should take seriously in the university institution of philosophy. The presence of indigenous people in this space[7] , producing even cutting-edge academic material, is only the most recent figure of a greater participation (autonomously and not as dominated groups) of indigenous people in the national public space. The consequence of this presence is that, fortunately, we can no longer as an institution ignore the contribution of indigenous peoples to philosophy.

Having said that, we may now ask ourselves: but what about philosophy with this? The path seems obvious. If we repeat the movement of anthropology, if Amerindian thought (in its innumerable variations and unities) challenges us, what is up to us as philosophers is to take it seriously. The point is that "taking it seriously" implies to some extent having some clarity about what we mean by philosophy. There is a long discussion that I cannot extend here, so I apologize for the schematism[8] , but if we look at the current scenario, especially in universities (where, for better or worse, much of what is understood as philosophy happens), it does not seem an exaggeration to say that there are two basic philosophizing tendencies.

The first is that of the historian of philosophy: in a simplified way, he seeks to understand a philosophical system, usually of an author, either by appealing to internal or external elements (whether philosophical discussions or material constraints). Classics or forgotten, contemporary or ancient, dominant figures or simply marginalized, it does not matter (usually by issues of class, gender and race). What seems to unify this attitude is the desire to offer a testimony of a thought (or of an attempt to think something). Thus, in this case, "taking seriously" Amerindian thought would imply studying it as one studies other thinkers in the history of philosophy. It is therefore a question of building a system, or understanding a concept, or being able to explain the contexts that condition a given thought. This is certainly a possible path and I do not doubt that it will be taken.

Some questions will have to be addressed: how to deal with a predominantly oral tradition? How to deal with the absence of "authors" in the modern sense? Some discussion of the difference between studying 'a people' and 'an individual' will have to be undertaken. None of this is necessarily impossible or even unprecedented for historians of philosophy. What is

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[7] Something even visible when we look at the quantitative increase of its presence: with an increase of 374% between 2011 and 2021 (https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/educacao/noticia/2023-04/matriculas-de-indigenas-em-universidades-subiram-374-de-2011-a-2021#:~:text=Between%202011%20and%202021%2C%20a,%2C7%25)%2C%20in%20per%C3%Dodo.).

[8] Cf. Saldanha, Rafael. "Doing philosophy from institutions: a matter of shame" in: Medeiros, Claudio (org.); Galdino, Victor (org.). *Experiments in postcolonial philosophy,* 2020.

perhaps unprecedented, and what will entail the creativity of these future 'historians of philosophy', will be their attempts to demarcate 'doxastic' content from 'philosophical' content. After all, as it is easy to recognize (without being able to differentiate!) that it is not all the time that we philosophize, we are always constrained (often begrudgingly and provisionally) to establish boundaries between what we consider and what we do not consider philosophical. It is known that this kind of demarcation is a privileged source for reproducing situations of subalternity, but I would like, with a little good faith, to consider those situations, so present in studies of the history of philosophy in which the different demarcations produce images of quite different philosophers. A classic example is the problem of how to read Plato's work. Should we consider style as part of philosophy or not? Should we consider the dialogues as a whole or as separate? Should we believe that Socrates is Plato's spokesman or not? Regardless of the answer to each of these questions, they appear as challenges that the historian of philosophy must face. Those who approach material from indigenous sources will therefore have to deal with a series of new problems that are not always usual for the historian of philosophy[9] : how to decide in an ethnography what is philosophical content? Is it possible to differentiate between myths with more poetic tendencies and more reflective tendencies (or is there no such difference)? How to differentiate between the speech of one (or more) individuals and the thought of a people or group? What to do if the individual occupies a singular position in the social organization of a group? These questions, as said, will be the space of invention for historians of philosophy. And of special importance, since we know that, at least in the university world in which we find ourselves, the ability to transmit traditions through the history of philosophy is one of the main mechanisms that guarantee the strength and survival of a given philosophy. It is through historians of philosophy that we are able to avoid certain pitfalls or reductive understandings when it comes to interacting with our ancestors in a less naïve way.

The second basic tendency of current philosophizing is that which is generally understood (especially by outsiders) as the analytical Anglophone tradition[10] , but which is certainly shared by some "continental philosophers" who do not consider themselves simple historians. Regardless of the theme, of the tradition that is inherited, what matters here is that there is a philosophizing in the present. In order to differentiate it from the historian of philosophy but to avoid taking it as a "generic model", let us call them "philosophers of the present". These philosophers of the present generally have clear referents (scientific, political, aesthetic) which impose problems. These problems are sometimes dealt with by means of arguments[11] that aim

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[9] Although, it is important to emphasize, they do not fail to be addressed by philosophers concerned with thinking the philosophy of African oral traditions. I thank my friend Victor Galdino for these indications.

[10] We certainly need to differentiate here between a "culture of analytic philosophy" that covers a larger space (by its ability to form much of the basis of what we understand by philosophical university life today) and the historical core generally identified by analytic philosophy (and which goes through some names like Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, etc.).

[11] The definition of argument is complicated. However, it would be appropriate to consider this term in a plastic way here, since what matters is that these philosophers aim to convince someone about some position. The argument will not necessarily be deductive, inductive or dialogical. Often it is a matter of presenting positions whose internal consistency should serve to convince. In some cases, the convincing is done for aesthetic purposes. In many others, there will be an appeal to ideas and concepts from the

to bring the point of view of an interlocutor closer to his own. In cases where the interlocutor already agrees with the position - or in which the philosopher himself writes something to better understand what he thinks - this argument aims to give reasons that strengthen the value of that concept (by detailing it, exposing its limits, investigating what can be derived from them, comparing it with other concepts that propose other cuts). Thus, to "take seriously" Amerindian thought would be to consider, evaluate and think from the ideas presented to us. Thus, like the historian of philosophy, here too it will be necessary to deal with the problem of demarcation (once again! let us take this demarcation in good faith, in a productive way).

What will be done is to take Amerindian theories (which, as we have seen, have been increasingly prominent in recent anthropological literature) as an object of analysis and confrontation. Unlike the history of philosophy, the aim is not simply to "know", but to build or strengthen a positive position. Thus, one must consider, for example, a way of thinking about the body, or of considering the relationship between humans and animals, evaluate the different arguments, reasonings, strategies of persuasion - or, if we want to be pragmatists, the consequences of adopting such and such a concept. We can imagine two attitudes of the philosopher of the present towards Amerindian thought. This can be "material that makes them think", which gives them arguments, ideas, notions that either help them to carry out a certain philosophical project (the construction of a system, reflection on a certain problem)[12] or alter their own project[13] . Of course, between these two paths the principle of the excluded third does not apply. What matters, however, is that a productive relationship is built with Amerindian thought. In this case, therefore, the philosophical activity promoted by the philosophers of the present allows Amerindian thought to enter the institutional university world of philosophy as a thought that is more than capable of contributing to current discussions. This gesture is fundamental, since it allows Amerindian thought to help us think more.

Although due care can and should be taken when approaching certain materials, it is important to emphasize that for the philosopher of the present there is no difference between "current thinking" and "contextualized or historical thinking". If there is something to think about in a given *corpus* (be it something taken from the most diverse sources), it will be something that stimulates thinking precisely because it is not constrained by its context. That is, to treat Amerindian thought philosophically is to pay attention to the moments when they force us to think despite being inserted in the context in which it was produced. This is not a trivial gesture. Although the work of the historian of philosophy is fundamental for us to be able to understand the beacons that allow us to read a work (and often what we cannot read in them),

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history of philosophy that can help us understand certain problems. What seems central to me, however, is that the aim is to produce an effect on the interlocutor in which he ideally changes his position after contact with a text/presentation/idea. For a detailed analysis of the problem of deductive argument in philosophy cf. Dutilh Novaes, Catarina. *The Dialogical Roots of Deduction: Historical, Cognitive, and Philosophical Perspectives on Reasoning*.

[12] Cf. Costa, Alyne. *Cosmopolitics of the Earth: Modes of Existence and Resistance in the Anthropocene*; Fausto, Juliana. *Cosmopolitics of animals*. Bensusan, Hilan. *Lines of future animism*; de Cruz, Helen; De Smedt, Johan, *Melioristic genealogies and Indigenous philosophies*.

[13] Cf. Valentim, Marco Antonio. *Extramundanity and supernature*.

the history of philosophy is not exhausted in the context (however we understand the context) - otherwise we would have to accept that the very delimitation of the context excludes us from it by making a philosophy unthinkable for us. Thus, in a productive tension with historians, philosophers of the present would help us treat Amerindian thought with the freedom and autonomy that we usually treat works that make us think along with them.

The challenge here, beyond those already mentioned, is to treat Amerindian thought with due respect. This means neither attributing too much nor too little to it. We can say that we should avoid considering it as a simple instance of exception, as an inconsequential counter-example that only blocks the ability to think about certain problems. The problem is not that it cannot serve as a counter-example, but that its role is reduced to that, to a simple *catalog of differences* that prevents us from even building something with it. We should also avoid taking it as an idealistic solution to any and all problems. Taking Amerindian theories (whatever they may be) as concepts that can be associated with any problem or that can help us solve any impasse ends up putting us dangerously close to an impoverishing eclecticism. By connecting these concepts with everything we are led to ask what in fact these concepts are trying to address or delimit. In a way, it is as if over-dimensioning these concepts is also a way of emptying them of their ability to help us think (be it our problems or new problems).

It can be seen, then, that these schemes construct a duality that is not easily resolved. The entry of Amerindian thought into universities is easier from the point of view of the history of philosophy because of the way it produces a transmissible, understandable object. On the other hand, this way runs the risk of plastering what is studied, building a cordon of isolation that paradoxically keeps us away from it when introducing it into the university. If philosophy is, independent of great definitions, a construction in and through thought, this is a case in which we are restricted only to performing historiography. As far as the philosophers of the present are concerned, they have the merit of being able to treat Amerindian thought as something constructive. We think from them, together with them. The problem is that the risks of eclecticism or counter-exemplism haunt them. In this case, the remedy for this is precisely the history of philosophy, which in its impetus to understand that thought in a contextualized way ends up providing us with minimal beacons for its conceptual effectiveness (in addition to helping us understand this thought, historiography can help us understand the problems that a thought seeks to solve).

This problem is particularly interesting to me, and even allows us to jump a little beyond the outline I made earlier to the point of view that is capable of describing them. If on average we find those two tendencies, we can also say that there is a third tendency that seems to me to offer a more productive way of approaching Amerindian thought (precisely because it preserves the positive aspects of each) and of dissolving the tension that has arisen. I believe that it is necessary to preserve both the contextual character that delimits the problems of Amerindian theories and the ability to be questioned by the thoughts produced in contact with Amerindian thought. How to do this without simply ignoring the conflicts that these two positions imply?

A few anecdotes can help us get closer to what interests us. The first is the Antillean parable retold by Lévi-Strauss. As he puts it,

> [In the Greater Antilles, a few years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards sent out commissions of inquiry to investigate whether or not the natives possessed a soul, they were engaged in immersing white prisoners in order to ascertain, by lengthy observation, whether or not their corpses were subject to putrefaction.[14]

What we have focused on in this short story is not simply a mismatch between two groups with different habits and practices. Repeating what has already been said and reworked in the comments to this excerpt, we have, above all, different theories about what makes us human. While the Spanish understand that the differential element of humanity lies in the possession of a soul, for the indigenous Antilleans it is the body that marks the uniqueness of the human. It is not, however, a matter of arbitrating between these two options, but of understanding that both groups operate according to divergent theories. Without an understanding of this theoretical divergence, we are unable to size up the mismatch of perspectives. This mismatch seems to intensify when we return to the classic parable of the beer-drinking jaguar recounted by Viveiros de Castro. As the anthropologist reports, for a number of indigenous groups it is possible to subscribe to a perspectivist theory. It is based on the concept that

> [Each species sees itself as embodying authentic humanity, in its bodily form and habits. What jaguars eat is seen by them as human food. For example, when licking the blood of a prey killed in the forest, the jaguar does not see this liquid as raw blood, but as beer made from fermented cassava. Since humans do not drink blood but cassava beer, jaguars, being human in their own department and from their own point of view, experience this liquid that leaks from the body of their shattered prey as a good cassava beer, served in a carefully cleaned and ornamented gourd. In other words, each species sees itself under the species of the culture.[15]

We can see that things get complicated. Although the first parable attests to a mismatch, it is still a commensurable mismatch. Under certain conditions, it is perfectly imaginable for a Westerner to adopt a position that privileges the body and one that privileges the spirit as a marker of humanity (we even find inversions of this frequently throughout the history of Western philosophy). I imagine that for many "modern Westerners" (or "naturalists", to borrow a term from the anthropologist Philippe Descola[16] ), who operate from a division of reality between nature and culture, it is inconceivable to accept this Amerindian position. It would therefore quickly be reduced to a "belief" - a term which, as we know, we use to attribute to others ideas that we could never conceive of and yet accept that they hold[17] . The novelty of the gesture we seek to repeat from recent South American ethnology, however, is the imperative to "take seriously" Amerindian thought. This means that even in this third way we are prevented from saying that this position is a simple belief (and therefore irrational).

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[14] LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. "Race and History", in Structural Anthropology II, São Paulo: Editora Ubu, p. 343, 2017.

[15] Viveiros de Castro, *Encounters*, p. 95

[16] From now on, for the sake of simplicity, I will contrast Amerindian thinkers with naturalist thinkers where appropriate. Cf. Descola

[17] Cf. Pfaller

I think it is important, however, to pay attention to an element of this "reflex" that appears in some of us, which refuses to believe that it makes any sense to believe that "jaguars are humans to them and we are wild pigs to them". When we look at it, there is a reason why some of us find it meaningless: it makes no sense to conceive of jaguars as beings endowed with a culture. The jaguars we encounter (for those who encounter them) are even literally *confined* (usually in cages). There is not much chance of encountering a jaguar in our daily lives. One can hardly speak of encounters with wild animals. In fact, much of our encounter with animals is mediated by property relations (in the case of pets) or market relations (in the case of the food we consume, which is purchased). This is why I believe that the reflex to believe that it is something meaningless is not entirely misplaced. In fact for someone who lives an urban life and who cuts the world in a naturalistic way, it is a kind of theory that does not connect with anything that exists in their reality. This tendency to want to reduce it to a belief seems to me, therefore, a natural response that expresses a difference in ways of life. On the other hand, in the world of those who produce this perspectivist theory, the jaguar is a relevant actor (as well as other wild animals). Among those mentioned, the privileged mode of relation with animals is not purchase or ownership (although it exists, of course), but hunting. Without going into details, one can differentiate between these two modes based on the relationships one establishes with the environment. Buying generally develops from an *extractive* relationship with nature. Nature is seen as an available resource that is transformed into a commodity through labor. This work includes animals in the commodity circuit. Although hunting may have a relationship with the market (as another mechanism of extractivism), subsistence hunting operates in another dynamic. On the one hand, there is certainly all the discipline involved in building the hunter, the skills he must cultivate, the techniques he must learn. But there is also a relationship with the environment itself. Subsistence hunting cannot overbalance the natural cycles of a region. While the extractivist relationship with the environment tends to deplete it, to exhaust it, the subsistence practice that is central (materially and culturally) to the lives of many indigenous peoples (although this is increasingly threatened) aims to ensure the reproduction of the life of a given group. Thus, the relationship that is established with the environment is certainly more delicate and requires more care. It is at this point, therefore, that we can better understand the Amerindian theory of perspectivism. As Viveiros de Castro puts it:

> if in the naturalistic world of modernity a subject is an insufficiently analyzed object, the Amerindian interpretative convention follows the opposite principle: an object is an incompletely interpreted subject. Here, one must know how to personify, because one must personify in order to know. The object of interpretation is the counterinterpretation of the object.[18]

Personifying animals, understanding them as full of intentionality is a consequence of a certain practice and a way of reproducing social life. The way in which the social life of various Amerindian peoples is organized causes certain problems to arise for them. If we want to take seriously that perspectivism is an *Amerindian theory of perspective* (or, as has been said, "a point of view on the point of view"), we must then understand that it is a construction that allows Amerindians to situate themselves in the face of the problems that practices impose on

[18] Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*

them. We must therefore invert the usual way of thinking about things. It is not that Amerindians "think" that animals are human and in response to this they start to act in a certain way: respecting, being more cautious, negotiating. It is, in fact, the opposite. It is because they already have a relationship of respect, in which they exercise caution and negotiate with animals that they end up thinking and theorizing about them the way they do. The social relationship they entertain with animals, which we can identify here with the interaction of the gift described by Marcel Mauss, conditions what they think. It is therefore a question of conceiving Amerindian thought as an effort to think about one's own condition. It is not a belief, disarticulated, at best rationally justified *a posteriori*. What we have here is a thought that emerges from the movement of trying to understand the practices and the world that constitute it, of seeking in thought a way to understand what is the case. Thus, it is possible to say that the validity of thought is also in its ability to make certain objects appear, to make certain situations treatable. When looking at Amerindian reality from this theory, more things in reality are explained than without it. In this case, a series of behaviors and practices, ranging from hunting and the relationship with the environment to relationships with spirits and ancestors, become more intelligible when viewed from a perspectivist theory. It is understood, therefore, that certain precautions or care are demands of a diplomacy required by the world they live in (and a diplomacy that, due to the constitution of this world, is not the same as that theorized by naturalist theorists).

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> If we were to go into detail, it could even be said that Amerindian thinking about perspective is an idealized abstraction of a certain social exchange that they already carry out with animals. It is therefore possible to say, as inspired by the Marxist theorist Alfred Sohn-Rethel, that Amerindian thought is an "idealized abstraction" of the real abstraction" that operates a synthesis of their social world: that is, of the practices and operations that constitute this world that they live in and that allows it to reproduce itself.[19]

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It can be seen here, therefore, that in fact knowledge of the context that gives meaning to Amerindian theories (worked on by historians of philosophy) plays a fundamental role. By understanding the social soil from which indigenous people think, we can realize that what they think has a close relationship with the way they live. It is this that allows us to understand the contexts in which these theories make sense, in which they are effective and help indigenous people to situate themselves in the world they inhabit. It can be seen here,

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[19] This is an incomplete development here, but to telegraph the path taken in these short sentences we recommend reading some of the work of the autonomous collective of which I am a member, *Subset of Theoretical Practice, which* can be found at www.theoreticalpractice.com. For references that help to begin thinking about these problems, we recommend Alfred Sohn-Rethel's theory of real abstraction, Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift, and Kojin Karatani's theory of modes of exchange. These indications, however, only indicate the beginning of the path, since a theory of the real abstraction of the gift is still under construction by the *STP* collective.

therefore, that one of the consequences of this way of describing Amerindian thought is that we cannot think about their theories 'freely'. Unlike the previous tendency, this is not due to a contextual cordon that prevents other people from thinking these thoughts because they do not fully coincide with the individuals who thought them. Nor is it said here that these original peoples "think differently" because "they are different".[20] What is said is that their thinking emerges from the practices in which they are immersed. Thus, they are moved to think from the material reality that constitutes them - hence their theories are not so easily mobilizable, as some (not all!) of the philosophers of the present aspire.

On the other hand, and this is where the tension seems to break down, all this effort also forces us to rethink the differences between the constitutions of both worlds. If "naturalists" think differently, this is also a consequence of the material reality that constitutes them. Their thoughts are attempts to deal with material reality and the problems it brings[21] . Thus, just as Amerindian thought has its own efficacy and value in the world in which it emerges (since it is a way of thinking about *that* world), naturalist thought has its own efficacy in the world from which it emerges. This difference that separates these two ways of thinking, however, is not definitive. An attention to the worlds that constitute these thoughts indicates to us what in a world makes such thought appear and constitute itself in the way it appears (including, the thought itself is already an index of an operation that seeks to some extent sew this world). Thus, by identifying the elements that constitute the thought of a world, we can understand the scope of effectiveness of a particular thought. We glimpse the conditions under which we can think a thought.

It is from this identification that possible bridges that allow us to think the thought of another become possible. If it is certainly not possible to say that the worlds are the same (since we would think the same!), it is possible to say that there are non-dominant parts of the naturalistic world that are composed of the same type of operation that constitutes the Amerindian world. In this way, it is certainly not possible to explain all of the naturalistic world from Amerindian thought. The class struggle, for example, is only understandable if we look at it from the logic of value. Nevertheless, as we must always remember, however much class struggle explains many things in our world, the logic of value cannot explain everything we see in it. There are other dimensions of our world that may need another kind of thinking. Thus, contact with Amerindian thought, the fruit of a specific social soil, can allow us to see some things that may not have been so intelligible in the naturalistic world before.

To end with an example we can take a picturesque example (and described in a simplified way), taken from the brilliant book *Strike in the Factory,* by Robert Linhart. In this book, the young

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[20] "Let's make things clear. I do not think that the "mind" of American Indians is (necessarily?) the theater of "cognitive processes" different from those of any other human animals. It is not the case to imagine Indians as endowed with a peculiar neurophysiology, which would process the different differently from "us" (for example). As far as I am concerned, I think they think exactly "like us"; but I also think that what they think, that is, the concepts they give themselves, are very different from ours - and therefore that the world described by these concepts is very different from ours." (Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. xx)

[21] Here it is Sohn-Rethel's theory that understands the emergence of Greek philosophy and its universal concepts as an idealized abstraction of the real abstraction operating in commercial exchange.

Linhart infiltrates the factory, becomes a worker with the aim of encouraging the masses of workers to rebel, to become politicized and to start fighting for their emancipation. What he finds there, however, is a grueling job, which quickly saps even his revolutionary impulses. After a while, after getting to know the people around the factory, the young Linhart resumes his plans to encourage his colleagues to fight for their rights. At first it seems obvious and simple: everyone is exploited. However, no revolt starts spontaneously because of simple oppression. We cannot understand it so easily (precisely because the thought of the need for struggle appears so strongly!), but what Linhart shows in his book is that although everyone is a worker, this does not imply a bond of trust, an ability to understand that the other is an ally (rather than an enemy). The book therefore demonstrates (among other things), the long seams and negotiations needed to articulate a unity. It is as if beyond worker unity (as described by Marx's logic of value), a camaraderie was needed to help overcome a series of external differences (as the factory itself is divided between French and immigrants, for example, with different privileges within the exploitation). What I wonder is whether this division is not made more intelligible precisely by the *intense* work of *personification* in Linhart's descriptions? Certainly Linhart is not thinking about perspectivism in the way that Amerindians do, but it seems to me that there is shared ground in the nature (though not the extent!) of the problem. For even if for Linhart this is a part of the problem and for Amerindians it is a more central problem, for both it is the same problem to be thought. Linhardt was able to solve his problems, to think about the different problems that made up that situation. But it would not be easy to imagine that the strike often stalls precisely because it can only think that "it is only natural that it should happen!" because "exploitation happens to all workers!" and so the forces remain disunited and unable to understand what has limited them. I get the impression that part of the work in introducing Amerindian thought is, to some extent, with the help of this thought (and the kind of problem it serves to think about), to help us see situations, problems, issues in our worlds that our own thoughts may not be able to illuminate clearly.