

In terra incognita

A path opened by multiple divergent worlds

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Introduction

Worlds are many, not empty containers but dynamic manifestations. In this thesis, I'm going to explore the idea that the world is not a unique place in which every being is placed, but rather there are *multiple and different* worlds with blurred borders. To do so, in the first chapter I will introduce the concept of perspectivism, which in place of the view of a unique True, stable world, affirms the idea of an ever-changing becoming. Worlds are many, and always interpretable otherwise. After comparing perspectivism with universalism and relativism, I will then talk about this notion in the pluriversal amazon forest. In the second chapter, it will be clearer that perspectives are not exclusive of humans. Different worlds, understood as sets of relations, are expressed by different *bodies*, who continuously interpret their surroundings, participating in a kind of polyphonic symphony. In the last chapter, the semiotic nature of interpretations and relations amongst bodies will be discussed, opening up the possibility to 'cross' the blurred borders of the worlds.

Even if the main protagonists of this thesis are jaguars, ticks, dogs and wasps, this thesis is not merely an ethological report, nor a proposal for a different evaluation of the world of 'Nature' that we, humans, have to engage with a particular attitude. My focus is, instead, to outline a theoretical framework by which confrontation and co-existence with divergent worlds – and political views that follow – can be possible. For this goal, I believe that one has to reject first of all the theories that pose the 'Human' as an exceptional character on the Earth, the special Being among the other beings. Humans are not the only world-builders, shaping meaning out of a passive and meaningless reality.

A further clarification about the political charge I want to assign to this thesis might be needed. Before I started my research about 'non-human' worlds, I was looking into different proposals about the collective efforts needed to face the challenges rising in those *interesting* times¹. The problematics of the type of globalization societies have known so far, the disruption of deadly viral pandemics, the looming threat of global warming are just a few of the many issues humanity has to deal with, and possibly overcome, in the era renamed by now as Anthropocene². By diving into the many discussions, academic and not, I noticed a widespread consensus around the need to pursue an appropriate³ human behaviour at all scales. The task is to synchronize the efforts across the globe, not leaving aside the non-humans. But I was also aware of the call of the Zapatistas, a grassroots movement based in the south area of (what is called) Mexico: "The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit"⁴. Differences must not be flattened, whereas the appeal of global unity often conceals a project of total integration. It is the desire of the most powerful parties in the field,

¹ This paragraph is inspired mostly by the introduction of the essay collection *A world of many worlds*, edited by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (Cadena and Blaser 2018), in which those same concerns are expressed.

² In view of what I just wrote above, indeed I share the same doubts of Donna Haraway (2016) about this renomination that puts again the *Anthropos*, the Human, at the center of everything.

³ What this *appropriate* behaviour should be is, in fact, the main point of difference among the discussions.

⁴ "El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos" (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional 1996).

a desire of a world in which all the differences are leveled, smoothened and erased under the flag of one unique and indifferent vision proposed as the only solution.

At that point, I started to notice the tension between these two different arguments. How to consider at the same time the urgency of vast, harmonic coordination for facing planetary issues, while contrasting the threat of plain homogenization? In other words: is it possible to endure unity and differences at once? The task here is *to think difference differently*, in a way that a ‘difference’ doesn’t necessarily entail an opposition, an exclusive choice in the form of “either/or”. A logical impasse is not a total obstacle, as long as one is willful to abandon the desire of having just one coherent, and stable, view under control. But if one wants to get rid of – or suspend – their logic in order to dissolve the paralysis and go ahead, a different place is unfolding. Opening in the absence of absolute solutions, this place, as Isabelle Stengers remarks in her ‘cosmopolitical’ proposal, “refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple divergent worlds, and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable, as opposed to the temptation of a peace intended to be final” (Stengers 2005, 995). It is like when, following a map – the map of knowledge and presuppositions – the limit is reached, and an unknown territory is lurking in front of the traveller. I want to call this place *terra incognita*.

The term *terra incognita* (in Latin, ‘unknown land’), written on a map, indicates unknown or unexplored parts of the territory. Used by European cartographers especially during the Middle Age, the term was often used in pair with a sort of disclaimer: “HIC SUNT DRAGONES” or “HIC SUNT LEONES” – dragons, or lions, are there. As a reminder that the unknown needs to be approached with care and awareness, this is showing a particular inclination towards mystery: a sense of wonder and danger, where one can find both fantastical and threatening creatures. In facing them, the knowledges, the maps and the tools already possessed might not work as supposed. These have either to be changed in their structure or in the way they are utilized – and in reaching the point of making up new ones, the acknowledgment of the limits of the tools is suggesting that *terra incognita* is not only in front of the traveller, but also behind, hidden by the map already traced.

One can point at *terra incognita* only by drawing a map with the aid of the knowledge gathered previously. Without a map, there’s no *terra incognita*. This, as I will discuss in the first chapter, entails an important observation: there’s always a partial observer in play, an embodied perspective which accounts for the “embodied nature of all vision” (Haraway 1988, 581). There’s no absolute point of view, no matter what, despite all the claims of one rational and disincarnate view from above driven by a totalitarian desire. Moreover, our conceptual tools shall not be thrown away, but rather re-thought right after we realize that we see, think, perceive, interpret and build worlds in a particular, embodied manner.

Then, how to explore *terra incognita*? There’s a double movement, that can seem at times paradoxical and contradictory. Whenever the unknown is approached, there’s the tendency to trace it back to a particular representation of a world, an “image of thought” (Deleuze 1994). It is needed to precise that the ‘tracing’ is not the map itself, but is rather the methodology pursued to draw the map in the first place, the set of tools used and the way the tools are organized, employed, embodied in our perspective. During the tracing, in the

confrontation with the ‘mysterious creatures’ met in *terra incognita*, those might be reified in objects of knowledge, fixed in ‘things’ out there that can be analysed, contemplated or dissected. But if one wants to keep the openness of this unknown place, without settling in and stopping the exploration by the presumption of having traced the whole of the territory, “*the tracing should always be put back on the map*” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 13). The map, and the tools, then become open to constant modification: it is a call to “make, remake and unmake [the] concepts along a moving horizon” (Deleuze 1994, xxi). If one wants to explore *terra incognita*, it’s needed to challenge the way the map has been drawn, along with the way of tracing, by means of using the same map and tools possessed.

This is why, to consider the notion of *terra incognita*, besides considering some aspects of Western philosophy, I’m referring mostly to notions coming from anthropology and biology. Being two disciplines that can be blamed for having reified, respectively, ‘other’ humans and ‘other’ non-humans, I’m following authors that have instead opposed this tendency, challenging their own field of study from within.

I want to remark again that this is only preparatory work for the political aim I’m trying to pursue. To walk towards *terra incognita*, which is, as I said, “the unknown constituted by multiple divergent worlds”, the first step is to leave behind the one True, all-too-human world. I hope this thesis will live up to the task of suggesting a possible path.

1. The interpretive multiplicity in perspectivism

To navigate in *terra incognita* a proper concept is needed for the orientation in the discovery of different worlds. To begin the journey and to not get lost, this concept shall provide a two-folded advantage to the traveller, taking on, as it were, the double role of the map and the compass. In other words, it’s about establishing a starting point and a methodology to move on.

The concept I’m going to suggest for this endeavor is *perspectivism*. Its first assumption is rather straightforward: every perception, meaning, truth and experience is relative to a perspective (or interpretation⁵). Moreover, there’s nothing independent of perspectives: things, subjects and objects, worlds and even reality can’t exist in themselves, in an ‘absolute’ fashion. Last but not least, the notion of perspectivism rejects a total, all-encompassing, external perspective: as Haraway writes, we can talk only about “partial observer” (Haraway 1988), since every perspective is embodied and therefore limited. For this reason, I will try to outline this concept not only in an abstract way, as if it were a mere ‘intellectual’ doctrine. Rather, following the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de

⁵ In this thesis, I’m gonna use the words ‘perspective’ (or point of view) and ‘interpretation’ almost interchangeably. Both terms have their flaws: the former is too much a ‘visual’ word (whereas also a blind person has a perspective), while the latter seems to entail an active ‘mental activity’ (but a blooming flower is interpreting the sunlight).

Castro, I will discuss how perspectivism can be a way of living in the entrenched universe of the Amazon forest.

1.1 Truth and becoming

In the so-called Modern Age of the 19th century characterized by the full development of the imperialist projects, the birth of Nation States, and the rise of Capitalism, European thought was dominated by the positivist notion of truth: the idea that Man can fully know – and manage – the world as it is, understanding the ultimate laws that govern reality. But for Friedrich Nietzsche such a belief was the culminating point of a view rooted in Christian theology (and before that, in Plato's philosophy): the notion of Truth considered as the absolute priority of determining what things are in themselves, apart from what they merely seem or appear to be⁶. The drive to find the absolute and stable Truth underneath the ever-changing world was, for Nietzsche, nothing more than a "hostility to life, a furious, vengeful enmity towards life itself; for all life rests on semblance, art, deception, prismatic effects, the necessity of perspectivism and error" (Nietzsche 1999, 9). In fact, *perspectivism* is one philosophical position that, instead of seeking the eternal, fixed Truth beyond the world, affirms the constant becoming of the contingent world.

Let's see what this vision entails. A fragment (§481) from the posthumous collection *The Will to Power*, the same from which the overly-quoted Nietzschean statement 'there are no facts, only interpretation' was extracted, reads:

In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. —
"Perspectivism." It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. (Nietzsche 1968, 267)

Here can be found the basic elements of perspectivism: the absence of a unique capital-T truth about the world, rather an infinity of meanings available dependent on which perspective is assumed, in the form of an *interpretation*. But what Nietzsche had in mind is not to reject truth once for all, claiming the impossibility to know anything: his philosophical project entails a 'revaluation' of the concept of truth, on the basis that the stable, fixed and eternal Truth is never encountered in direct experience. On the other hand, the drive to "fix the real world" is "a compulsion to arrange a world for ourselves in which our existence is made possible" (Nietzsche 1968, 282). Hence, truths and orders are necessary to life, to cope with the ever-changing environment, simply for pragmatic reasons: the "needs" and the "drives". The fatal error, for Nietzsche, is to project the order and stability beyond the experience, as the primal condition for everything that changes and constantly becomes. The consequences of this fallacy is the pursuit of a 'real' order in lieu of the *becoming*, of life itself, of 'this' world made of actions, deeds, accidents and impermanent events, which are instead refused as mere appearances. What Nietzsche does is to flip the relation between order and becoming: in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, "what is real is the becoming itself [...], not

⁶ My reading of Nietzsche's philosophy is dependent on the interpretations of Deleuze (2006) and Cox (1999).

the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 278). Truth has to be situated within the becoming: in fact, for Nietzsche it is still possible to ‘know’ something, to isolate some tendencies or regularities: nonetheless, those are “*interpretable otherwise*”, always dependent on a particular perspective.

But perspectivism doesn’t have to be mistaken with simpleminded relativism. As Viveiros de Castro urges to note, perspectivism is instead “at right angles, so to speak, to the opposition between relativism and universalism” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 469). This orthogonal placement is intended to show first of all that relativism and universalism are in the end the two sides of the same coin, the currency of modernist thinking. This is a crucial point to make, so it is better to clarify what are the differences and the common ground in the mentioned opposition. This aspect can be elucidated by looking closer at *things*, seeing how the concept of ‘thingness’ shifts under the lens of perspectivism.

1.2 Things and things-in-themselves

As I discussed, Nietzsche rejected the notion of the absolute Truth, an eternal and stable order beyond appearances. In the revaluation of concepts such as change and becoming, he struggled against the view prominent in his age: that we have to put appearances aside, since they can be deceiving, and Truth has to be found in a reality cleansed of any ‘distorting’ view. This notion is based on a presupposition: there are *things* out there, and there is a separation between how things *appear* to us, and how things are *in themselves*, independently of any experience, perception or relation⁷. A ‘thing’, or an ‘object’, in this case, is anything that can be outlined and fixed as having a particular irreducible *essence*, a fundamental characteristic proper to itself that might be in the case indicated, described or known.

Let’s consider now Viveiros de Castro’s statement on perspectivism and the opposition between universalism and relativism. A universalist approach claims a neutral vision in seeking and knowing absolute truths (that is, timeless universals) about independent things-in-themselves, purified by any distorting representation. Nietzsche, as seen, rejects this position, since “we are asked to think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent” (Nietzsche 2007, 87). In a similar manner, a relativist approach refuses the possibility of knowing something about things-in-themselves: only different representations of something unknowable are available: the ‘real’ things are beyond our reach. Nevertheless, the starting point of both universalism and relativism, intended in this way, is the same: *the presupposition that there are independent things-in-themselves*, whether they be accessible or not. Or, in different words, they both rely on the distinction between appearance and the true world.

Following Viveiros de Castro, the dichotomy universalism/relativism works also in the opposition of Nature and Culture, typical of Western thought. There is just one Nature, which

⁷ This opposition is at the base of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (2009): what we can know and experience are the *phenomena*, how things appear to us, while the things-in-themselves, the *noumena*, are unknowable.

follows universal and stable laws, and countless Cultures that represent the same world in different ways. This is, in a nutshell, Western multiculturalism. As the Brazilian anthropologist writes, “after objects or things were pacified, retreating to an exterior, silent and uniform world of ‘nature’, subjects began to proliferate and to chatter endlessly away” (Viveiros de Castro 2012, 152): the world of Nature, the reality ‘as it is’, independent and objective, is put at one side, separated from the plurality of Cultures, which is the domain of different appearances and representations. It’s not hard to see that the opposition of humans (pertaining to the realm of Cultures) and non-humans (independent of ‘us’, in the realm of Nature) follows the same line of separation.

Although for Bruno Latour (1993) this separation never actually happened (and that’s why “we have never been modern”), we don’t have to rush to the conclusion that Nature and Cultures – or other dualisms – don’t exist at all, as an utter injunction to avoid them. The flaw of modernist thinking was to believe that the Nature/Culture categorization, in their sense defined above, is the inescapable ultimate framework in which we are situated⁸. Likewise, when Nietzsche writes that there are no facts, but only interpretation, he is not rejecting ‘facts’ once for all: rather we can talk about facts only *within* a particular interpretation. As discussed before, truths and order can be found *within* an interpretation, and not outside any perspectival relation. Again, what’s important to stress here is that facts – or things, reality, Nature, and so on – cannot be considered in themselves, but only by virtue of a perspective.

But what does it mean that there is nothing *independent* of perspectives? If there is no unique Truth, if there are no things-in-themselves, but rather countless meanings and truths, and only things relative to a perspective, this entails that there’s nothing absolute, unconditioned. Instead, we have to consider everything in their relationship with a perspective. That is, the quest to know what things are, their essence (i.e., their fundamental composition) can’t avoid any perspectival approach. As Nietzsche writes, thinking that things possess a constitution in themselves is a “dogmatic idea”, presupposing “that a thing freed from all relationships [i.e. interpretations] would still be a thing” (Nietzsche 1968, 302–3). In other words, this view is at odds with the supposition that to know something one needs to be as disengaged as possible from it, but also claims that relations (and points of views) are prior to essences. The knowledge about a thing, as well as *what* a thing is, are both dependent on a perspective.

Having said that, another difference between perspectivism and relativism can be pointed out. With the latter, there’s no basis in distinguishing and evaluating between different representation, since those are separated from the ‘true’ thing-in-themselves represented in various ways. On the other hand, according to perspectivism interpretations can be criticized against other interpretations, by which different things, truths and orders emerge, none of them being the final one. Since those are relative to a perspective or interpretation, they are never neutral, since it is the “needs that interpret the world: our drives and their For and Against”. (Nietzsche 1968, 287). As Donna Haraway writes, in a very Nietzschean fashion,

⁸ The dual categorization of Nature and Culture is then vulnerable to the same critique Deleuze moved to Kant, who “traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical” (Deleuze 1994, 135).

“relativism and totalization [i.e., universalism as I defined it] are both "god tricks" promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully” (Haraway 1988, 584).

I have so far defined perspectivism in its conceptual core, the ‘map and compass’ for the travel, a methodology based on the refusal of an ultimate Truth and things-in-themselves. Worlds and things don’t exist independently, but they emerge within a perspective. I will follow now the research of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro to get a glimpse of perspectivism ‘at work’ in the Amazon forest. If universalism and relativism “make it impossible to see well” (Haraway 1988, 584), with perspectivism we will see always *different* things.

1.3 The entrenched pluriverse of the Amazon

In describing the thought of Amerindian⁹ people, the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro acknowledges a *perspectivist* quality in their conception of the world, in their ‘cosmology’. As a schematic but clear description of what Amerindian perspectivism is, Viveiros de Castro writes:

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: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture - they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.) (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 470)

In Amerindian perspectivism every living being has a point of view, and to be a prey or a predator – even a ‘human’ – depends on the position assumed and the relations in play. And since different points of view are located in bodies¹⁰ with different habits, needs and drives, different things and worlds emerge.

The quote above reads that “jaguars see blood as manioc beer”. To understand this, let’s go back to the concept of ‘thing’, seen through the lens of perspectivism. Its essence, what it ‘is’, is not prior to an interpretation, but comes *within* a perspective. In other words, *a perspective is essential for a thing’s essence*. Then, instead of considering a drink-in-itself represented and perceived differently either as ‘beer’ or ‘blood’, an essence prior to the relations considered, Amerindian perspectivism is taking into account “relational multiplicities” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 73). Multiplicities are not essences or prearranged and fixed composition

⁹ Although ‘Amerindian’ seems a category too broad for addressing the many differences among native people living in the vast territories of what we call Americas, there’s nonetheless a similarity across their cosmologies, as the work of Lévi-Strauss on Amerindian myths (1964) shows. For specific accounts of perspectivist thoughts, see (Viveiros de Castro 2012, 48–53).

¹⁰ I will explore the concept of ‘body’ in the next chapter: for now, it can be understood as “an ensemble of ways or modes of being that constitutes a habitus, ethos, or ethogram”, instead of “the specific physiology or characteristic anatomy of something” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 72).

(Viveiros de Castro 2014, 109), but are part of the ever-changing becoming that, as seen with Nietzsche, can be always “interpreted otherwise”. Not stable and self-identical, rather always *self-different*. A ‘thing’, which is dependent on a perspective and ‘fixed’ for pragmatic reasons, is emerging from a relational multiplicity and is never stable, nor the ‘same’ thing. As Viveiros de Castro writes, “one is either in the blood or in the beer, with no one drinking a drink-in-itself. But every beer has a background-taste of blood and vice-versa” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 73).

In Amerindian perspectivism, since nothing can be considered in itself, apart from any perspective or relation, “the real emerges as a dynamic, immanent multiplicity in a state of continuous variation, a metasystem far from equilibrium” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 105). It is an unsteady universe full of different worlds, depending on a concert of relationships that are never secured once for all. To have a world then means to *maintain a relation* in a neverending effort.

There is always a risk in the confrontation between different points of view. When there is an exchange of gaze with a jaguar in the forest, two beings see themselves as humans and the other as non-human. As seen in the quote above, *what* and *who* is the human is not pre-given but depends on the perspectives in play, which can be indeed diverging ones. There’s a contrast in “suddenly finding out that the other is ‘human’, that is, that *it* is the human, which automatically dehumanizes and alienates the interlocutor and transforms [who is seeing] into a prey object” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 483). The condition of every living being is the constant threat of becoming something else, to lose its status of ‘human’, a prey of others, an ‘*it*’, an inanimate thing. In Amerindian cosmology, it 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 different from themselves”. In the forest teeming with different perspectives, no existent being can rest on a solid identity, thinking itself as an independent entity, unaffected by all the relations that compose the space of living.

The task of the shaman, the only one that in Amerindian cosmologies has the authority “to cross the corporeal barriers between species [...] and administer the relations between those species and humans” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 60), is exactly to maintain those relations without turning the world in a space full of dead things. This is when perspectivism reveals itself as the art of diplomacy between beings, a *cosmic politics*: that is to acknowledge the *different worlds* of different species that shape the relational pluriverse (Cadena and Blaser 2018), “the abstract space of divergence between them *as* points of view” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 90). The key is to communicate through differences without the purpose of canceling them, without imprisoning the other in the perspective that is defining the other as ‘other’, that is, without ignoring all the different points of view and possible different interpretations.

*

In this chapter, I attempted to provide a brief summary of the philosophical notion of perspectivism, which affirms the priority of becoming and relations, and denies the idea of independent things-in-themselves. There’s nothing outside of a relation in the midst of this

“whole marvellous uncertainty and ambiguity¹¹ of existence” (Nietzsche 2001, 30), and Amerindians, in the way Eduardo Viveiros de Castro describes their cosmology, are rather aware of that.

But if perspectives are everywhere, and nothing can be conceived without them, *who* is interpreting *what*? The *body* is a crucial aspect in the differentiation of points of view, considered as the complex of habits. There is a field of studies that focuses on habits and behaviour: ethology. In the next chapter, I will follow the father of this discipline in his stroll through unknown and invisible worlds.

2. Living worlds

There's not one unique world, let alone a prearranged reality that is firmly awaiting to be discovered as it is. Approaching *terra incognita*, equipped with the concept of perspectivism, things and worlds emerge by the standpoint assumed, rising in the ever-changing becoming that is never the same, but always interpretable otherwise. And, considering the Amerindian cosmologies, this is not only valid for *Homo Sapiens*' 'minds', but for every living being. In this chapter, drawing from the studies of the biologist Jacob von Uexküll, I will argue that perspectives are not exclusive of humans. Rather, it is a *body* – not understood in a mere physiological way – that perceives, builds and expresses worlds.

2.1 Meaningful meadows

At the beginning of the 20th century, the natural sciences were firmly based on the presupposition that living beings are solely composed of sensory and motor organs stitched together. For the physiologist methodology that looks only at physical and chemical reactions, a body works like a hydraulic engine¹². But the Estonian biologist Jacob von Uexküll realized that this approach had two main implications: animals and plants are treated as mere insentient objects, like machines, and then nothing would prevent to see also the *Homo sapiens* as nothing more than automata, whose sensitivity and will are just background noise (Uexküll 2010, 42). On the contrary, Uexküll wanted to employ a new methodology to go beyond the idea of the animal seen just as a passive entity, dismissing the anthropocentric view of the natural sciences that consider the *sapiens* as the only free agents in nature. For him, both humans and non-humans interpret the world, each of them in their

¹¹ The original German term is *Vieldeutigkeit*, which refers actually to the plurality (*viel*) of interpretations (*deuten* is 'to interpret') (Cox 1999, 51).

¹² This view is rooted in Descartes' philosophy (2017), which was a milestone of modernist thought. He made a stark distinction between body and mind (the latter being equivalent to the soul, or reason), which define respectively the physical and the psychological domains. Indeed, for Descartes the soul is the only thing that differentiates (mechanical) non-humans from (reasoning) humans. Conversely, for Amerindian people every living being has a soul, and the differences are in the bodies (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 56).

peculiar way. He places an *interpretative process* between the stimulus and the organism (Esposito 2020), something that is not driven only by an external force.

The world, using again Nietzsche's words, is interpretable otherwise, also by bees, paramecia, ticks and lilies. Uexküll's methodology then entails another huge reconsideration in the field of natural sciences. During his time it was taken for granted that every form of life was growing, walking, flying or swimming in a unique environment, in the same space and time – the single, objective world accessible to reason via its analytic observations. On the contrary, Uexküll opened up the wonder of millions of different worlds, one for each embodied point of view. This is rendered in one idyllic passage from the foreword of his most popular book:

The environments, which are as diverse as the animals themselves, offer every nature lover new lands of such richness and beauty that a stroll through them will surely be rewarding [...]. We begin such a stroll on a sunny day before a flowering meadow in which insects buzz and butterflies flutter, and we make a bubble around each of the animals living in the meadow. The bubble represents each animal's environment and contains all the features accessible to the subject. As soon as we enter into one such bubble, the previous surroundings of the subject are completely reconfigured. Many qualities of the colorful meadow vanish completely, others lose their coherence with one another, and new connections are created. A new world arises in each bubble. (Uexküll 2010, 42–43)

The first important thing to notice is that when one takes into consideration the point of view of another living being, the world changes completely. New *connections*, or relation, are created: as I discussed in the previous chapter, the bundle of relations depends on the perspective assumed, by which a unique order of things emerges. Then, from a point of view of a bee, what for *sapiens* is a colorful meadow mutates into a field composed of different shapes signaling where the nectar could be located (Uexküll 2010, 84). This entails that the bee doesn't move in the same world as all the other animals that swarm in the meadow: its surroundings are different than the ones that we see, and we don't share and experience the same space and time.

For Uexküll those various worlds are composed of perceptual 'marks' that interest the living organism. He uses the German word *Umwelt* (*Umwelten* in plural), which is usually translated in English as 'environment', in a way that leaves behind the particular meaning present in the original version. In German *Umwelt* is composed of two parts: the word *Welt* stands for 'world', while the prefix *um-* adds the sense of 'being around', but with an element of overturning, as in the word *umdrehen*, literally 'to turn' (*drehen*) 'around' (*um-*), to flip, to reverse (Mazzeo 2013). So the concept of *Umwelt* is not only indicating the 'world around', which implies a kind of center, but also a world that, instead of being disconnected, or merely projected, is turning back towards its own center in a constant exchange, where it lies the point of view, the interpretative process that was Uexküll's main focus. But also, this process is not located in an abstract, free-floating element: rather, a point of view is embodied (Deleuze 1993, 10), and is not separated from its surroundings.

In his most known example, Uexküll imagines how the world is seen by a tick. This eyeless parasite climbs bushes following her skin sensitivity to light, then waits there until a mammal passes by. The odor of her prey – a molecule of butyric acid – is a signal to abandon her standing post: if she falls on the mammal's body, she seeks a spot to stick her head to suck the warm blood (Uexküll 2010, 44–45). Uexküll doesn't see the tick as a machine that reacts passively to light, chemicals in the air and temperature. He is considering instead the *Umwelt*, the meaningful world from the point of view of the parasite. For the tick, all the stimuli come with a significance, and she is united with them in a direct relation: "the tick is this relationship; she lives only in it and for it" (Agamben 2004, 47).

Within different perspectives, different worlds emerge. The perception varies accordingly to the sense organs (dog's eyes grasp the spectrum of light in a dissimilar manner than flies' eyes), but above all the *Umwelt* comes full of carriers of significance that guide the living being in the environment. Those meaningful relations in play differ accordingly to the perspective, and are peculiar for each creature. The differences are not strictly based on the various physical compositions characterizing every 'animal-machine': rather, they are differentiated by their habits, the particular way of interacting with the environment, basically what Uexküll call 'qualities' or Deleuze indicates as *affections* (Cimatti 2020, 178), all the microdispositions such as the drives, intentions, feelings, and instincts that make distinctive each living *body*.

Now, let us see how the concept of 'body' can be seen in a perspectival approach.

2.2 Bodily interpretations

The notion of *Umwelt* had a great influence not only in the field of natural sciences, but was implemented also in the development of the philosophical thinking of the 20th century. Gilles Deleuze was one of the many that foresaw the relevance of the idea, and this is why it will be helpful to look at his work (and his collaboration with Félix Guattari) in order to re-read Uexküll's 'biological philosophy'.

What differentiates a tick from a bee is not their materiality: in the end, one can say that both are composed of 'atoms'. On the contrary, the peculiarities reside in their habits, their way of being, all the affections. For Deleuze, the *affection* "refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body", whereas the *affect* "refers to the passage from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of the affecting bodies" (Deleuze 1988, 49), i.e. indicates a transition or a relation. A body, then, is 'nothing but' its affections (Cimatti 2020, 176), and the power of affect and being affected in its relationship with other bodies. In the case of the tick, the impulse to follow the sunlight, the responsiveness to mammal's odor in her wait, the drive to seek for a warm spot on her prey's skin, and so on, are the various *affections* of her body, the different ways of being that compose her behaviour. When there's an *affect*, that is the moment when the tick smells the prey, her body is *affected*, shifting to a different 'mode': she leaves her spot, and the seek for the blood begins. But this doesn't need to be seen in a purely mechanical way: in her receptiveness, the tick *interprets* the right signal.

Now it is possible to have a better understanding of the Nietzschean theory of interpretation, to see how it is not only about human subjects. A body, being the complex of 'its' dispositions, instincts and drives, is not a stable or isolated thing but rather in constant relation with its surrounding, affecting and being affected by other bodies. It lives in those continuous and ever-changing relationships. And, referring back to Nietzsche, "it is our needs that interpret the world: our drives and their For and Against" (Nietzsche 1968, 267): in other words, the perspectives and the interpretations emerge from the bodily affects. "Who interprets? – Our affects" (Nietzsche 1968, 148). Moreover, there's not just one interpretation at a time that 'substitute' the previous one in a linear way, as the example of the tick might suggest. Rather, there's a multiplicity of interpretations, and the 'unity' of the body emerges only as an aggregate from the continuous interpretative process. (Cox 1999, 130–31).

The concept of *Umwelt*, re-read through the concept of perspectivism, can be then rephrased as *the set of relations and affections in a continuous interpretative process of the affected and affecting body*. It's not a world understood as an empty space populated by objects and things, but it's the assemblage of those ever-changing relations in play from a particular perspective. The *Umwelt* of bees is then the way the colorful meadow appears meaningfully to them, but also their drive to look for the nectar, the dance they perform for the colony, and so on.

With a perspectival approach, the body is then reconceptualized, and is not seen anymore as a physiological machine, but rather as something 'lively', in a constant interpretative motion, affecting and being affected by other bodies. To understand the relation between bodies, and their *Umwelten*, it will be useful to consider again the concept of the ever-changing becoming.

2.3 Chaos and order

In the passage quoted above, Uexküll illustrates the *Umwelten* as bubbles, as if those worlds are sealed by a definite border. Indeed, Uexküll is aware that his theory could entail an 'environmental solipsism', the idea of different worlds isolated by each other. Inside each *Umwelt* there's a concert of relations, but what about the relations between different *Umwelten*?

To circumvent this problem, Uexküll has to postulate the presence of an unknowable, higher order of harmonization (Brentani 2015, 217). Even if the spider doesn't know anything about the fly, her web is perfectly measured to catch the prey. Using a musical metaphor, for Uexküll the spider "has taken up certain motifs of the fly melody in its bodily composition" (Uexküll 2010, 191). In his vision all behaviours of living beings are based on melodies, harmonized by nature¹³, seen as a superordinate factor, the founder of every interspecies relation. But if we consider the concept of becoming, there's no need to account for a higher, already present ordering component.

As I discussed, the concept of becoming was posed by Nietzsche to deny the presence of an eternal, universal Truth that would account for all the changes of the existing things. Instead, he said that truths and any kind of knowledge had to be found *within* the becoming: and if the

¹³ Here 'nature' is intended as the broad assortment of living beings, and not something to be opposed to 'culture'.

formers are not definitive – but only ‘temporary’ interpretations – it is because the latter is never identical, always different, in its constant movement. Hence, ‘order’ has not to be opposed to pure irregular chaos: with Deleuze we can think of this becoming as a *chaosmos* (Deleuze 1993, 81), where order (in ancient Greek ‘cosmos’) and chaos are intertwined. The drives and needs of interpreting are part of this chaosmos, not external ordering principles in their will to impose a structure over the chaos.

The *Umwelten*, the assemblages of relations referring to a particular body, emerge from the becoming. Since the affects indicate “the passage between different bodies, between different states of one body, or between parts of different bodies” (Wambacq and van Tuinen 2017, 3), those have to be understood as irreducible events, or “pure becomings”. The *Umwelten* are not then ‘projected’ by a pre-given ‘subject’, or rearranged by a supernatural entity: those worlds are rather *expressions of the becoming itself* (Deleuze 1993, 26). If they are fleeting, different and finite it is because the becoming is ‘actualized’ within a particular perspective, being the points of view “a power of arranging cases, a condition for the manifestation of reality” (Deleuze 1993, 21), located in the various bodies. But the point of views might be diverging and contrasting too: there’s not a pre-given harmony.

Bodies, as I discussed, affect and are affected by each other. By moving, perceiving, following instincts and passions and all their other dispositions, they are forming unstable and ever-changing relations with their environment, and those relations always shift. As seen in the Amazon forest, every living being can be a prey or predator (or both, with no contradiction), depending on the encounters happening in the “reticular system constituted by intensive relations (‘becomings’) between heterogeneous singularities” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 110). Those volatile structures don’t have a permanent order, but they are always different, fluctuating instantiations of the becoming.

Then, in taking Uexkull’s vision of nature as a musical score, Deleuze and Guattari reject the postulation of an ordering principle. Uexkull writes that the spider has some motifs of the fly in its bodily composition, as an already present correspondence. But for Deleuze and Guattari the “becoming is not a correspondence between relations” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 262). Rather, they see the natural symphony in terms of interlinking of codes that constitute every time new relations not present before. For them, the ‘music’ is not composed: on the contrary, it emerges by the constant encounters and exchanges between all the life forms (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 365, 366). Rather than being coordinated by an overarching conductor, “unformed elements and materials dance [...] and enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 297), following, interpreting and stratifying different motifs.

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We have seen in this chapter how perspectivism does not apply only to humans, but every living being – as bodies – interpret their surroundings, being part of the ever-changing becoming, expressing their *Umwelten* in a sort of emerging musical score made of relations and affects. The following chapter will consider the *semiotic* nature of those processes, going

back to the Amazon forest to look at the constant *semiosis* – intended as the continuous exchange of signs – of which the space of living is constituted.

3. The signs of life

Following a perspectival approach and taking Uexkull's suggestion to explore invisible and unknown worlds, we have seen that the whole array of life is not confined anymore in the box of Nature, opposed to the human Cultures, but is all part of an always different becoming. Similarly, the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn aims to overcome all the stark separations between humans and non-humans present in the dualistic approaches (as in the division between natures and cultures) without reducing all the differences to one side of the pole. Rather, he shows that there are different ways of being, but in continuity with each other: also humans are open to the emerging worlds around them (Kohn 2013, 15–16).

Kohn's anthropology beyond the human assumes the task of the “permanent decolonization of the thought” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 40), also by suggesting that processes like ‘thinking’, ‘knowing’ – and, as was pointed out in the previous chapters, ‘interpreting’ – are not exclusive to human but are shared by all living beings. Those processes can be described in a *semiotic* way, as exchanges of signs. In this last chapter, I will argue that Kohn's proposals can be consistent with the notion of perspectivism and becoming as they have been already discussed in this thesis.

3.1 The chain of semiosis

Eduardo Kohn narrates the moment when the dogs belonging to Hilario's family, with whom he was living in Ávila, a Runa (*runa* meaning in Quichua ‘human person’) village in Ecuador's Upper Amazon, disappeared. The dogs were killed by a jaguar, and Hilario's family was upset by having not foreseen their fate, which can be usually known in observing the dogs as they dream. According to Ávila Runa, dogs dream, they have intentions and motivations, since all beings have a point of view (Kohn 2013, 131–50).

This view, as Kohn indicates (Kohn 2007, 4–5), is similar to the one developed by Uexkull, which I have discussed in the previous chapter. There's not an objective world devoid of intrinsic significance, on top of which, as if it were a blank page, humans place their cultural meanings. Rather, meanings emerge with different worlds according to the perspective in play. Indeed, Kohn stresses out that “significance is not the exclusive province of humans” (Kohn 2013, 31), but rather is present whenever there is life. Moreover, he adds that *meaning*, which is what emerges in the interpretative process I've discussed, is not untied from materiality: rather, “it is always entangled, to a greater or lesser degree, with material processes” (Kohn 2007, 5). Meaning is always embodied¹⁴. Referring back to the example of the tick's affected body, the meaning that comes with the mammal's odor is not separable

¹⁴ If for Kohn meaning is not separable by its materiality, Karen Barad (2007) proposes that also the inverse is valid: matter and meaning are always entangled.

from the materiality of the perceptual organs and the concreteness of the consequential events.

This process, for Kohn, has a semiotic nature. *Semiosis* (the semiotic process) is the production, exchange and interpretation of signs, the ‘carriers’ of meaning. Signs are not something pertaining only to human languages, but “all life is semiotic and all semiosis is alive” (Kohn 2013, 16). As an example, Kohn refers to the scarecrows Ávila Runa build to protect their cornfields. The scarecrow, interpreted by the white-eyes parakeets, is a sign of a potential predator (Kohn 2013, 89).

But what is a sign? As the philosopher Charles Peirce puts it, is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce in Kohn 2013, 29). A sign is then made of relations, that can be illustrated in a triadic shape: at its vertices there are the meaningful ‘sign’ itself, the ‘object’ it refers to, and who interprets the sign, the ‘interpretant’. For example (although this is already a very specific semiotic case), the sign-word ‘horse’ refers to the real object-horse for the interpretant-speaker who’s talking about horses. Moreover, semiosis is not a closed system. Every interpretant is a new sign, and it is produced in regards to the previous sign’s relation to its object. A palm tree falls, and a monkey hears the crash, which is a sign of danger: interpreting this event, she jumps away, producing another sign – the jump, or an eventual scream – that can be interpreted by all the other potential interpreters (Kohn 2013, 33). Semiosis is then a continuous and growing open process, a web of semiotic chains of interpretants from which all the events of life emerge: selves, which are “in the most minimal sense, [...] a locus – however ephemeral – for sign interpretation” (Kohn 2013, 206), and living bodies too (Kohn 2013, 39). Signs, as meaning carriers, ‘do’ things, hence they are not just ‘about’ the world: rather they are *in* the world.

This semiotic approach can be connected with the concept of perspectivism. As stated in the first chapter, there are no things-in-themselves, independently of any interpretation. What is prior are relations, events, the ever-shifting becoming: there’s no a ‘tree-in-itself’, but a tree is a tree only according to an interpretation. Similarly, the ‘object’ that is represented by a sign exists only in relation to a Peircian ‘interpretant’: objects and things are also effects of semiosis (Kohn 2013, 104). Or, as Deleuze claims, objects are created and erased by signs (Deleuze 1986).

Then, considering the Peircian triangle, if ‘objects’ are created and erased by signs, and ‘interpretants’ are signs too, parts of the semiotic chain, what is a sign? If there are no things-in-themselves, a sign can’t be a mark of some-thing stable already there. Considering the semiosis as a continuous process, a sign it’s a *difference* in the semiotic chain: signs provide something new, they make a difference (Kohn 2013, 51). To make things clearer, let’s take again the case of the tick, waiting on a little branch of the bush for the mammal to pass by. The smell of the prey, interpreted by the tick, is a sign that will make a difference, the affect that refers to the passage from one state to another, the change in her bodily disposition. It’s the meaningful event that can’t be considered independently of the tick’s perspective.

The meaningful sign processes, not separated from material processes, are about differences. Let us see in detail how those differences emerge in the semiosis, especially in the iconic relations.

3.2 Picking differences

In Peircian semiotics there are three kinds of signs, according to the type of relation with the ‘object’ they refer to: *icons* share a likeness with the ‘object’ represented, *indexes* are pointing directly to something not immediately present, and *symbols* refer to their ‘object’ indirectly by virtue of a system of other such symbols. Handprints on a wall are icons, the smoke rising from the horizon is an index of a fire, and a word is a symbol because it means something only within a linguistic system, made of other words. However, the basic form of relation is the iconic one: indexes emerge from sets of iconic associations, and symbols are the product of relation amongst indexes (Kohn 2013, 52–53).

Icons, then, are at the basis of all semiotic processes. As Peirce describes them, it seems that icons signify through similarity. A drawn portrait is a typical case of an iconic sign: being similar to the subject depicted, it refers to it by a shared amount of likenesses. Or, referring back to another example I made before, scarecrows are icons since they resemble – and stand for – predators from the parakeets’ point of view. But Kohn warns that similarity is not the fundamental property at the base of iconic relations. At its core, an icon is not a thing that shares some aspect of something else that is already known to be different. As mentioned earlier, a sign is prior to its object, hence the referenced object can’t be the first cause of its sign. What happens in the first place is rather an *iconic confusion*, an exclusion of other differences (Kohn 2013, 84–85).

Let’s take again the example of the tick, employed by Kohn as well. In her *Umwelt*, the butyric acid, which is the secretion of some mammals’ bodies, stands for ‘prey’, it smells *like* mammals. The tick doesn’t distinguish between a dog and a mountain lion: for her, those are all ‘prey’. The prey-for-ticks, as a thing (in the tick’s *Umwelt*), doesn’t exist in itself: it is rather created along the interpretative process of the little parasite¹⁵. Of course, it is only by her ability to distinguish mammal’s odors amongst other smells if she’s able to survive, but then it is irrelevant if she falls on a cow or a mountain lion: she’s indifferent to the diverse features of her preys. For Kohn, the semiotic activity at the base of iconic processes, the capacity to notice and ignore differences, can account for *all* of the life processes. Or, in other words, it is the *ability to take out a difference by excluding all the other differences*¹⁶.

The productive force of the interpretative process, moreover, is not relegated within the ‘borders’ of one specific *Umwelt*. As seen before, bodies affect and are affected by other bodies, and since “the tick confuses [the] warm-blooded beings, other parasites can travel among them (‘the mammals’) through the tick” (Kohn 2013, 85). A ‘kind’ of mammals, a

¹⁵ This doesn’t entail that the mammal is ‘created’ by the tick, and there’s absolute nothingness before that. Instead, is the mammal-as-a-thing that emerges in the semiotic process.

¹⁶ If for Kohn this is an ability pertaining only to organic life, for Barad this exclusionary process is at the base even for the *materialization* of time, space and matter (Barad 2007, 152).

prey-for-ticks-thing, not present before, is produced through the encounters of different bodies, thanks to a form of meaningful and differentiating relation.

The tick's case is exemplary of the many ephemeral orders that emerge within the natural symphony of the becoming – ephemeral because it is dependent on the interpretative process of the eyeless parasite. As previously mentioned, this is the *chaosmos* in which order and chaos are intertwined, where no things-in-themselves can be found, but everything depends on perspectives and interpretations, and *Umwelten*, as sets of meaningful relations, emerge through materially embodied semiotic processes.

For Eduardo Kohn, acknowledging the shared relational modalities throughout all the worlds of living beings is one of the main tasks for an anthropology beyond the human. Processes like thinking, knowing and categorization have to be extended beyond the human province, which is nonetheless anything but isolated: as Kohn writes, “our world is also defined by how we get caught up in the interpretive worlds, the multiple natures – the *Umwelt* – of the other kinds of beings with whom we relate” (Kohn 2007, 17). After this recognition – which has to be considered with the perspectival approach – it is really possible to approach *other* worlds and to become-other with other beings.

3.3 Becoming with worlds

To understand their dogs' dreams, Kohn writes, the people from Ávila try to put themselves in their viewpoint. Acknowledging that also other living beings inhabit an *Umwelt* – i.e. that they are selves that interpret the world – Ávila Runa set the possibility of transspecific knowledge and communication, instead of presupposing an insurmountable distance.

Umwelten are not sealed bubbles, but have blurred borders. The assumption that “there exists such a thing as ‘being itself’ in all its singularity” (Kohn 2013, 86), independently of everything else, poses stark separations that are instead broken when living beings are described in terms of blocks of becoming, relational multiplicities, or ephemeral points in the semiotic chain. As Kohn remarks, “there is no one thing that one could ‘be’” (Kohn 2013, 87): no one *is*, rather everyone and everything *becomes* and is part of the becoming. In their interpretative process, partaking relations with other bodies, affecting and being affected by them, every living entity inhabits a different *Umwelten*: nonetheless, those expressed worlds are not totally estranged from each other.

In entertaining the viewpoint of their dogs, Ávila Runa are crossing the blurred borders in a transspecific movement, which “entails some degree of becoming other” (Kohn 2007, 7). But this is not a change of identity, they don't shift from ‘being human’ to ‘being dogs’: as Deleuze and Guattari write, becoming is not a change of identity, and “the two terms of a becoming do not exchange places, there is no identification between them” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 306). Rather, both of the terms change.

One of Deleuze and Guattari's preferred examples of this kind of becoming is the relation between a wasp and a rare type of orchid whose protrusion resembles a wasp. The flower doesn't merely mimic the insect, but emits mock female wasp pheromones. That's why the

male wasp tries to mate with the orchid – even to the degree of reaching an orgasm – and pollen is latched to its body, which is then being carried to other flowers. This is not simply a matter of an all-encompassing collaboration between the flower and the insect. Only certain parts of the two bodies relate and affect each other, crossing the interspecific ‘borders’: the reproductive organ of the wasp and the protrusion of the orchid. These parts enter in a new relation: the former becomes “a liberated piece of the orchid’s reproductive system”, and the latter “becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 293). A new becoming emerges: “a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 11). Both species are transformed without being assimilated, in a connection where differences are not annihilated.

What happens in the Ávila Runa village, Kohn writes, is similar: “in their mutual attempts to live together and make sense of each other, dogs and people increasingly come to partake in a shared constellation of attributes and dispositions” (Kohn 2007, 7). Dogs have to become humans, being educated as youngsters for a correct behaviour: they don’t have to be violent or lazy, and in the development of the human ethos they sometimes even get hallucinogenic drugs in order to understand human speech. On the other hand, Runa had developed a trans-species language to address their dogs by incorporating elements of communicative modalities from both human and canine realms.

Human and dog species, in their continuous relationship, become involved in each other and thus continuously change. To become-other then means to entangle the world one is inhabiting with another world, or as Kohn writes, is “to become another kind ‘with’ that being” (Kohn 2013, 140), without flattening the differences. Similar to what we’ve seen in the first chapter, following Viveiros de Castro, to engage another point of view is always a risky business. The position of one own’s perspective and the relations in play don’t have to be abandoned or completely dissolved. “There is a constant tension, then, between the blurring of interspecies boundaries and maintaining difference” (Kohn 2013, 140), and, in negotiating and sustaining this tension, what it means to be alive, a dog, or a human, change profoundly.

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“If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism”, writes Haraway, “then we know that becoming is always becoming *with*, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (Haraway 2008, 244). For her, to become *with* can lead towards a practice of becoming *worldly*, which is not only about appreciating the complexities that knot together different worlds, but also how to respond and to live within the various relations that compose and emerge from the becoming. It is the encounter with the fantastical and threatening ‘creatures’ on the path through *terra incognita*, as I said in the introduction, which have to be approached with care and awareness. It’s not only about the entanglements between humans and non-humans, but also about different human worlds.

As I discussed in the first chapter, “human exceptionalism” can be a consequence of a belief in a unique world, knowable and manageable, which is just an other-worldly belief that reveals a negation of everything that becomes, “a hostility to life” in Nietzsche’s (1999, 9)

words. Only in the affirmation of the becoming, along with the recognition of embodied perspectives, it is possible to start to become *worldly*, to appreciate *these* co-dependent worlds, to live there and become with them: and then also to open the possibility to change them, since those worlds are not given once for all, but they are always *interpretable otherwise*.

Conclusions

In this thesis I tried to suggest a possible path towards *terra incognita*, the unknown constituted by the divergent and multiple worlds. Refusing both universalism and simpleminded relativism, and rejecting the notion of independent things-in-themselves, perspectivism is a useful tool for acknowledging the relations in play within and between different worlds, as seen in the account of Amerindian cosmologies by Viveiros de Castro. The notion of a true, stable and unique world awaiting to be discovered and known is then replaced by the idea of an ever-changing becoming, always interpretable otherwise.

This, as seen in the second chapter, entails a reconceptualization of the *body*, understood as the complex of habits and affections. Following Uexküll, the living beings can't be considered as passive machines, but their body is indeed the locus of a continuous process of interpretation. Non-humans, then, interpret too: and the differences among bodies account for the multiplicity of perspectives in place. The different worlds, or *Umwelten*, seen as the set of relations and interpretation, are not isolated, but rather are the expression of the becoming itself from a particular point of view.

Finally, in the last chapter, we have looked at the semiotic nature of these relations. Considering the semiosis – that is the production and exchanges of signs as *differences* – at the base of every living process, is a crucial aspect to open the possibility to 'cross' the blurred borders between different *Umwelten*, and to erase once for all the stark separations between humans and non-humans, natures and cultures, posed by any dualistic approach. As discussed, everything is part of the becoming, but is always becoming-with, in close contact with other diverging worlds.

To conclude, I want to remark again on the political aspect underlying the argumentation I've put forward in this thesis. As seen above with Haraway, to become-with can involve a practice of becoming worldly, a practice of attention to different and multiple worlds. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing puts it, this is the art of noticing "the divergent, layered, and conjoined projects that make up worlds" (Tsing 2015, 22). But, as we have seen in the last chapter, to pick up a difference entails the exclusion of other differences. The practice of becoming worldly is then never to be accomplished in a terminal way, but is a path – the path towards *terra incognita* – and it entails a degree of neverending responsibility, along its moving and ever-changing horizon.

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