Interstices
Center for Transversal Thinking

Alain Daniélou Foundation

ECOSOPHY
TRANSVERSAL BRIDGES
TO OTHER FORMS OF RELATION

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Conception

Interstices: Center for Transversal Thinking proposes an encounter on different clusters of experiences and elaborations that may potentially lead not only to a deeper understanding but also to a more consistent crystallization of the concept of *Ecosophy*.

In his article *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement* (1973), Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term and related its meaning to a wide-ranging policy wisdom going beyond mere scientific description and prediction. His 1989 book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* underlined the broad horizon of his endeavor and the inclusive ontology (openness to other-than-human life forms) required for its realization. In the same year, French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari published *The Three Ecologies*, a book in which ecosophy appeared as a force radically opposed to the ravaging and homogenizing power of 'Integrated World Capitalism' and its effects not only on human society but also on other (both material and incorporeal, other-than-human) universes of references. Guattari's last book, *Chaosmosis* (1992), refers to the challenge of the ecological crisis by broadening its scope from industrial productivism and exploitation of resources to social, political and existential impasses affecting human and non-human forms of life and requiring a transversal bridge between different ontological strata. Guattari's ecosophic object is in this sense the contrary of the well-delimited object of science; it requires a new form of practice encompassing levels of existence and reality that have been left behind by the traditional paradigms of Western thought.

Much as these philosophical attempts at ecosophy are valuable, a qualitative input was necessary on the part of anthropology to transform the ground level of reflection, which both in Naess and Guattari remained still too focused on a conception of living beings as operationally and informationally self-sufficient and only open to the world in energetic terms. With the ontological turn in anthropology, a change of paradigm took place, compelling theoretical models dealing with figures of otherness to assume the problematic character of their own self-reflection and the categories employed to make sense of different modalities of being in the world external to the Western mainstream. Philippe Descola's attempt at symmetrization of cultures through his model of plural ontologies in his book *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2005), and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's effort to grasp the question of alterity and relation through a perspectivistic torsion in his Cambridge conferences of 1998 (cf. *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 2012), are two pioneering examples of this epoch-making renewal in the field of anthropology. Some authors like Graham Harvey included alternative modalities of sociality within Western modernity as examples of a kind of attitude and behavior to be included in the formulation of a "New Animism" in which Eco-Pagans and reconfigured forms of nature religion find their place beside Indigenous populations of past and present.

Symmetrization in anthropology is an exercise of subjectivity compromising not only the participation of ethnographers in the human community that is their object of study but also the other-than-human community that constitutes and co-creates that space of relations. In Bruce Albert's ethnographic research on the Yanomami, it is the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa who does ethnographic work on the other-than-human agents building the cosmology of that cultural group, since that "universe of incorporeals" (in words of Félix Guattari) is not accessible to the Western anthropologist. The ensuing book, *The Falling Sky* (2010) displays a new cartography of the ethnographic territory which requires a reconsideration of existing conceptual tools and methods in order to do justice to the challenge of symmetrization, with significant consequences for the way in which philosophical thought approaches the question of "ecosophy" in the light of this new paradigm.

If *Ecosophy* aims at recapturing a form of "wisdom" that implies interrogating and eventually transforming the universalized Western notion of *Anthropos* – by decentering "human beings" from their position of dominance and their isolation from embeddedness and interconnectedness with regard to other beings –, its scope

should include an ongoing attempt to subvert rigid or naturalized notions of perception, imagination and cognition, as well as a dialogical endeavor to redefine frameworks of cultural practices involving symmetrization when it comes to encountering, understanding and doing justice to other modalities of being in the world.