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Propagating conviviality: Waiwai cultural transformation of moral depravity

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The confession

Our academic conventions usually require the confession that “as there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of” (Althusser et al. 2015, 12). Acknowledging an anticipated anthropological reading is the basis for the following essay. The traditional justification for exposure to such confessed bias invariably requires the presentation of proper credentials. Customarily, the first credential often highlights “a privileging of the intellectual” (Spivak 1988, 292) within the class structure of the academy, not merely justified by living within and passing through its categorical hierarchy, but most distinctively by the display of an “ethnocentric Subject” (ibid). The discipline seems unable to do without this subjectivity and its location, perhaps the unavoidable “double bind” (ibid 2012, 241) all productions of Western knowledge necessitate. Thus, “[a]nthropology, the ‘science of culture,’ has traditionally been oriented to the comparison and analysis of modes of action and conceptualization found among the various peoples of the world” (Wagner 2009, 308). Note the double bind: “[t]he science of culture itself is a part of something we might call the ‘culture of science’” (ibid). Perhaps the most celebrated attempt to overcome this dilemma in Amazonian anthropology has involved accepting it as unsurmountable and instead embrace it as a methodological factor, in that “the first question faced by the anthropologist is to work out what constitutes, both by extension and comprehension, the concept of the social (the cultural) for the people studied” (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 4). Here, we encounter within the theory of Perspectivism the unabashed justification of the ethnocentric subject in Indigenous Amazonian and first-world intellectual thoughts. Not only is the sociocultural agenda held steady by the project of an anthropology of the person (Costa 2019), but it is also extended to the thought processes of the anthropological other.

While much has changed throughout the history of the discipline, its concentrated gaze on human thought has mostly stayed the same. However, despite this seeming obsession, and in contrast to all the other academic disciplines of the “sciences,” anthropology’s most unique and informative method of “participant observation” has also fortunately remained steady. One could argue that seeking to “keep up with our science neighbors” has historically made anthropology preoccupied with the project of Reason and the thought processes involved in producing rationalist explanations of the world. This has been the case to such an extent that we have tended to downplay participant observation’s most substantial facet of direct sensory experience in the contribution of knowledge. This softening of (and at times even hostility towards) feelings can be of particular concern when the determination of what might well be the most distinctive aspect of Indigenous Amazonian sociality is its reliance upon the everyday felt experience of being alive in the now of convivial embodiment (Overing 2003; Overing and Passes 2000). Beguiled by our very own privileging of the intellect, our investigative gaze has rarely shifted from the sovereignty of human thought.

The second confession resulting from the obligation to present professional credentials concerns this guilt for not maintaining a dutiful anthropological faithfulness to the supremacy
of thought over feelings. Perhaps this seems like a betrayal of the discipline that has so long trained us to be disciples of Reason. It is a betrayal not because of any deliberate conversion to a competing doctrine but one that appears directly out of our equivocal cultural translations of the certainty of bodily feelings. An invariable skepticism of such translations does appear primarily because of the diversity and contesting cultural translations of life. On the other hand, there remains an available confidence that such a thing as a generalized bodily life makes itself accessible for translation. It is here that the additional “exquisite guilt” (Spivak 2012, 243) becomes manifest.

Primarily because of the insistence on participant observation and its support of long-term residence among our Indigenous hosts, the customary call for professional credentials in verifying our being present as guests, and thus witnesses to ethnographic events, serves normatively as evidence of our anthropological expertise. We treasure the role of “expert witness” dearly. It appears as part of our intellectual, elitist status. Undermining such authority does not come without some negative repercussions. Hence the feeling of betrayal. One could claim that the semiotic codes taught to be available in culture/language arrive as the unrefusable gift of life. The presumption is that with such coding, we humans translate what embodied life means. In other words, we make human subjectivity by translating the semiotic codes given to the body by the contingent time/space of its natal/mother culture/language. Here, again, is the double bind of being and the consequence of a violent action that arrives with the precedence of the culture into which one is born. At the level of conscious subjectivity, recognizing the unrefusable gift of life in terms of its translating code can generate “a peculiar act of reparation” (ibid).

Furthermore, the logic that such reciprocity for the debt of life can never match the initial transaction often produces that sense of guilt. For the anthropologist, translating Indigenous cultures can expose the prospect of guilt in betraying our moral responsibility to our culture/language in revealing the existence of many other subject-making semiotics. In the anthropology of Indigenous Amazonia, we can hardly avoid the irony of this position in the problem raised between the responsibilities of rights-centered and virtue-centered ethics (Overing and Passes 2000, 4). Examples of what the guilty confession of this essay would regard as instances of the nontranscoded have to do with an emphasis on an Indigenous Amazonian ethical preference for the felt experience of embodied being rather than on any anthropological foregrounding of objectified thoughts about the rights of being in the world.

Suppose we can agree that “[a]nthropology ... understands subjective life by analyzing the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behavior – through which people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another” (Biehl et al. 2007, 7). In that case, we should also be able to agree that we cannot accomplish this without the living presence of sentient bodies. The guilty reading highlights this process of bringing forth an always-already preformed ethical subjectivity of the body from an unavoidable specific natal semiotic translation. Unable to refuse the gift of life or the cultural processes for understanding this reality, consciousness translates its subjectivity while simultaneously recognizing the external forces of such processes as being beyond its control.

What appears most intriguing for this confessional reading is not the recognizable lack of control in becoming the inevitable victim of cultural forces, but rather the models of controllability sought in rationalist translation projects. One could argue that the “violence” presumed by the inability of the conscious, inscribing, living body to avoid its natal semiotics of being continues over into the transcoding it deploys in the translation of different culturally inscribed subjectivities. For anthropologists, this double bind continues to be particularly obstinate. To be clear, this essay does not attempt to argue that we can overcome the difficulty of the double bind. It merely invites the reader to take account of its presence made
absent, not only in those descriptions concerned with a “controlled comparison” (Rivière 1984, 6) between the different Indigenous peoples of the Guianas but also in descriptions seeking coherence from the “controlled equivocation” (Viverios de Castro 2004) between the represented thoughts of Indigenous Amazonian peoples and those of their modernist sociocultural translators.¹

The modest contribution of this essay is to continue the interest in Amazonian scholarship of the body that the now-classical concern for its adornment (Seeger 1975; Turner 1980) once initiated, which then led to that for its substances (Crocker 1977), Indigenous knowledge (McCallum 1996), and its Perspectivism (Viverios de Castro 1998). Most pertinent, however, is the current essay’s concern with maintaining scholarly attentiveness to embodied personhood and its Indigenous moral concern for felt joy, even for sociality and conviviality frequently referred to as “beyond the human.” The trend has been to follow this attention on the embodied person as far as including Indigenous representations of plants (Daly 2021; Kohn 2013; Rival 1998), a path opened by the recognition of Indigenous Amazonian peoples’ willingness to allow what we would regard as nonhuman species the possession of subjective agency.² Indeed, one could conclude that the energy currently being invested in Indigenous forms of being within Amazonian scholarship fuels the curiosity for what kind of knowledge Amazonian peoples deploy in pleading innocence to the human contribution of global warming. What the guilty reading in this essay seeks to confess to is just how daunting the transcoding of translated subjectivities can be. This is particularly the case when the “correlative history of the modern soul and of a new power to judge” (Foucault 1977, 23) reveals how “the soul is the prison of the body” (ibid, 30). Having been obligated to incarcerate thoughts about embodiment within our translation of subjectivity, it becomes a difficult, even uncertain, prospect to liberate them from such confinement.

We may find an example of this kind of difficulty in one appeal for an “anthropology beyond the human” (Daly 2021, 379), where, the anthropologist having been initially convinced by the Makushi that their Cassava Mama “listens, that is why people talk to their cassava plants” (ibid, 377), the translation does not venture beyond the confines of conventional thought. It settles with the view that plants “too can be intellectual, volitional persons” (ibid, 378). Here, the controlled comparison that permits an interpretation of differences between semiotic codes appears to rely upon a generalized subjectivity characterized by the supremacy of thought bound by a particular concern for the rights of Reason. This is the case even when “it is only through the careful and appropriate consumption of foods and conditioning/caring for one’s body that the ideal aesthetics of the Makushi person are constructed” (Carneiro de Carvalho 2015, 141). One of the pitfalls of the current essay, thus, would be to ignore the “risk of mistaking a difference in kind for a difference of degree” (Deleuze 1994, 3), something easily done if not carefully guided by the mantra that a “language, a form of thought, cannot (we may be told) get things right or wrong, fit or fail to fit reality; it can only be more or less useful” (Diamond 2008, 78).

Instead of a translation favoring a trained rationalist processing that gives causal power to precedence, let us attempt a reading that gives both precedence and subsequence equal causal power. In other words, consider suspending dialectical thinking and replacing it with folded thought, where the latter cannot provide an origin point of departure with an expectation of a produced effect that also gives superior status to its producer. In coming to terms with the “Truth” of Waiwai representation of conviviality, let us attempt to consider that their felt joy of living in the moral reality of their social world does not rely upon the causal force of an origin point that provides it with the capacity to effect conviviality. Instead, consider how joyousness and sadness, always already folded into each other, elicit from each other the meanings they provide for the feelings of the living body. The Waiwai making of happiness does not require the defeat of sadness and thus a gained superiority for joy—in other words,
a battle with a winner and a loser. The causal forces of joy and sadness elicit their presence from each other, where the favored feeling of joy comes not from the dominance of an agential desire for conviviality but rather from the propagated care given to balancing properly the relations between joyousness and sadness.

The everydayness of myth

With all the qualifying guilt in place, let us attempt to translate a partial representation of the reality of feeling alive in a self-designated Waiwai body—as stated, a reality resistant continually to objectified anthropological translation. The usefulness of any such translation remains with the persistent skepticism it generates, and the confidence gained from knowing that any translation of felt reality belongs to existence within this reality of living. The translation of the plant body of cassava has its use in this essay not because it presents itself by way of a documented myth, but because, like many pervasive social representations, it is available in the everyday experience of community living. The cassava plant is not just the principal food consumed daily by the Waiwai, thus becoming an embodied aspect of their felt contentment; it also carries a message about achieving such contentment in its elaborate transformation from plant to food.

The Waiwai call the manioc or bitter cassava plant *shere*. When they take it through its various transformational stages from tuber to roasted or baked foods, it acquires the names of *owi* and *chïre*, respectively. Consistent with many other Indigenous Amazonian peoples, the Waiwai also have many different names for the variety of cassava plants they grow on their farms (Fraser 2010; Salick et al. 1997). Many women farmers take great pride in the diverse selection of cassava they grow. This sense of prideful worth comes from the same direction as that which informs every village member that while they identify their community as Waiwai, the community in which they live nevertheless is built upon a shared collective understanding of the ancestral diversity between them. Indeed, this facet of diversity occurs not only in the Guyana Waiwai communities but also in those of Brazil, where one can find Aramayena, Chikena, Marakayena, Mawayena, Parakayena, Shereu, Trio, Wapishana, and self-identified Waiwai all living together in the same village (Aniceto de Souza 2021; Howard 2001; Oakley 2022).

One could reasonably argue that this longstanding tradition of village incorporation has made them susceptible to Christian conversion and evangelizing (Dowdy 1963). Perhaps more accurately, one should say that they converted the Protestant Unevangelized Mission theology into the Waiwai conventional semiotics of being (Aniceto de Souza 2021; Caixeta de Queiroz 1999; Valentino de Oliveira 2010). In other words, their Indigenous hermeneutics adapted and incorporated a new and unfamiliar translation of the world to them.3 It is the persistence and success of this Indigenous philosophy of being that their translation of cassava cosmology helps identify. Their reading of the *Panakïrïyena* (Sunfish People), or White People, who came to their communities to bring the *kaankarita* (Bible), or “Word of God,” followed the same means of translation that they applied to all incoming strangers and newly introduced crops of cassava.

The availability of their philosophy of preferred social life comes not simply from its rendering in myth, but their myths live in the everyday world and thus can be imagined as all-pervasive. Consider, for example, how even without their verbal recitation or documentation, and in much the same way that the myth of pink dolphins, *Boto* or *Yïkuruna* (Cravalho 1999; Slater 1994), appears in the everyday lives of some Amazonian communities, or how the Greek myth of Sirens appears in the everyday lives of most modern cosmopolitans, so, too, does the myth of Cassava Mother appear in the everyday lives of the Waiwai.

While a great deal can be said about identifying a trans-mythic placement and play on gender as well as the transformability of other-than-human bodies, there is in general an

3. Let us view this on the same grounds as offered by Gow’s explanation of Piro people’s conversion, where the conclusion was that “Evangelical Christianity [was not] a new religion” (Gow 2006, 221), “but a new way of living an already extant cosmology” (ibid) “based not on belief, but on experiential knowledge” (ibid).
awareness of such mythic presence even beyond attempts at its documentation. For those of us attending the SALSA conference in Leticia, such presence was practically impossible to avoid in the effervescent images and local conversations about Yakuruna. Meanwhile, we who live in modern urban spaces have the European mythic presence of the Sirens regularly sounding off whenever an emergency vehicle seeks to clear a path through impeding traffic. Subliminal messages might be about the dangers of embodied gender enchantment—from the modernist monstrosity of chimera to the hopeless fulfillment of an autonomous subjectivity (Shildrick 2006)—but the communicative remains a primary aspect of the mythic presence. From Tyler to Lévi-Strauss, much of the anthropological scholarship on myth has placed its emphasis on reducing “the unintelligible – randomness” (Maranda 1972, 8) of myth “to the intelligible – a pattern” (ibid). The decoding process stayed preoccupied more with the epistemological than the ontological. However, the constant everyday presence and availability within myths of what we could call their “effect of supplanting a conventional semiotic relation with an innovative and self-contained relation” (Wagner 2009, 315), in other words, “obviation” (ibid), we can nonetheless appreciate as an aspect of felt embodied experience.

The plant body of Mother Cassava, or what we might translate as the feminine morphology of the plant, carries this mythic power of obviating the living body and its feeling of life across the interval of difference between humans and plants. While transcoding the Waiwai ethical subject, in our attempt to translate the mythic presence of the Cassava Woman, we should emphasize their privileging of embodied feelings, particularly those contrasting the joyousness of conviviality and the sadness of unfriendliness. The difficulty in avoiding the violence incurred by some of our conventional methods, for example, in searching for and discovering the “logical properties” (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 14) or the “logical operator” (Descola 2012, 476; Vilaça 2000, 88), has been noted. Deferring judgment on the method’s success in generating anything more than a meaningful representation seems prudent. The confession made here is one of piety towards the view that feelings can only be in the living body and not in the representations used to represent the body. We frequently ignore this inescapable fact in many readings of anthropological descriptions of the person, where the category of personhood, in which the body must socially live, is often mistaken for the living body. Unable to rise above the double bind of translation, let us merely stay steadily focused on the Waiwai responsibility-based ethical system, one it is possible to translate into our modernist semiotic code as indicative of their willingness to engage in what we could call an “ethics of risk” (Shildrick 2006, 46). Their philosophy of how to read and translate diversity and respond with inclusiveness does not depend upon notions of subjectivity dependent upon rights-centered systems. This bias might explain why we frequently encounter Indigenous Amazonian peoples who have no occurrence of homelessness or, indeed, have no struggle with decisions about asylum for strangers seeking sanctuary in their communities.

From the vile to the pleasant

Let us enter at the level of the documented mythic discourse about the Cassava or Manioc Mother (as recorded by Fock 1963 and L. Mentore 2012). The Waiwai credit Cassava or Manioc Mother with introducing this plant as their staple food. In an excerpt from the documented Waiwai creation myth,

the Jaguar chacha went out to a clearing where she disposed of her excrement and from this sprang the cassava plant. However, the people did not like this, so the chacha went once more to the clearing and, this time, allowed herself to be burnt. From her burnt bones other cassava plants shot up of the type used to this very day. (Fock 1963, 41)

Note how in this version, the most notable event is the deposited feces of “chacha” (grandmother or senior woman) that grow into the manioc plant tuber, the source of the vile-tasting
bread. The always-already ambiguity of human-nonhuman identity is made evident to the Waiwai by reference to the feline being given the female and kinship category of *chacha*, which the myth compounds by the contrast of the carnivore to the herbivorous consumption of cassava. The Waiwai consider a proper meal to be this mixture of *woto* (meat) and *sere* (cassava bread). One is always “*kromanas okre!*” (feeling very hungry) or even “*rooma poko nas amna!*” (suffering from hunger) without these foods. It must be this balance between the two opposite foods that brings on the *tawake* (happiness) or *okre* (pleasure) necessary for living the morally good life. One food substance without the other does not fulfill the expectation of a traditional Waiwai meal. At the point where the Jaguar *chacha* defecates the foul tuber that grows into the product of the vile-tasting cassava bread, we can give meaning to the action as an unfulfilled expectation of goodness. The quotidian activity of meal production and its expectant relation to the making of *kiriwani* (goodness or wellbeing) explains the necessity for a remaking or transformation inherent in this narration of the myth. With the *kichichime chire pbasi* (foul taste) of the bread made from the *wehko* (excrement or smell/sound from flatulence), the feline’s body sets itself up for another attempt to make good the apparent mistake. What is *kichichime* (vile, harmful, or ugly) cannot remain for long without an attempt to transform it into the beauty and pleasure of *kiriwani*. This effort we translate anthropologically as a moral duty present in the everyday community life of the Waiwai.

Thus, we find in the narrative movement of the myth that after disapproval from those presumably having eaten the foul food, the older woman returns to the cleared farm plot and has her body cremated. This time, the proper manioc plant, suitable for consumption, grows from her charred bones. Note how the myth repeats in this transformation the well-understood Waiwai knowledge about the process involved in eating and the contentment felt in the “belly” (Oakley 2022, 246). Every child knows about the predatory power of the *kamara* (jaguar). They also know the lethal result of its hunt is the outcome of a force that belongs to its body. The vile and unpleasant outcome of this force they interpret to be not merely the death of its prey, but also the suffering of the remaining relatives of the deceased. What the jaguar eats becomes evidence of its vile action as it is transformed in the jaguar’s body from food into waste. The products of its body are inedible because they undergo a transformation that has not correctly changed the products of predation.

A Structuralist translation would view the production of the vile in its “raw” manifestation as progressively opposite to the “cooked” pleasure that results in Cassava Woman’s successful second attempt at making the plant edible (Lévi-Strauss 1970). A Perspectival translation would likely rely upon the logical operator of predation and perhaps determine the relation between the predator and prey as one indicative of the “War Machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 2010; Viveiros de Castro 2010, 14). We could probably read this latter translation as fitting the responsible moral code of our rights-centered systems. Unlike our modernist interpretation of the “inalienability” (Marx 1977) of individual bodily forces, to which all humans must or should be guaranteed rights, the Waiwai translation of their semiotic code of ethics may not begin with such essentialized qualities of the body.

A quick analysis of their discourse about *ekati* (vital spirit) and its relation to *pun* (body) or *opun* (my body) would yield an agreement that, while all causal forces in the world are the product of vital spirit, indeed that which energizes the life of the body, such spirit does not have what we would refer to as intentionality. In other words, unlike the Judeo-Christian divinity or the scientific logical relation between cause and effect, *ekati* does not independently possess any conditional directionality toward an object beyond itself. Such a directional force would have to come from a body already enfolded with *ekati*. In other words, intentionality belongs to a living body enfolded with a nonintentional spirit. Hence, in this ontology, even though the power to produce effects in the world belongs to the spirit, the responsibility for such effects can only belong to embodiment. This conclusion explains the often-interpreted
view that nothing happens accidentally in Waiwai cosmology. Particularly with death and misfortune, the violent force to produce such outcomes clearly can only be caused by ekatï. However, everyone knows that, because such a force has no independent will, it must have been human intent that crafted spirit to direct its force with ill will.

From this understanding, the Waiwai moral ethic appears more concerned with the body and the outcomes of its potential will. Propagating good intentions requires constant attention to the body, particularly when we agree that, from their perspective, the body can indeed be unstable (Viveiros de Castro 2004; Stolze Lima 1996). Evidence of ill will in the translation of the Cassava Mother myth sits at the center of the representation of the jaguar body and its product of an excrement tuber. In this vein, much could also be added about the one removed generation of motherhood in the meaning of “grandmother” or “older age” of chacha. Overriding this view, however, is the steady claim to the fertility of the female body as its aged body continues to give life at both attempts at producing the tuber.

We can transcode the Waiwai making of an ethical subjectivity by translating their grasp of sociality from this narrative vignette. In that case, it could well be one emphasizing the gendered agency of womanhood and its contribution to feeding life. The plant's strong sociocultural association with women's activity in feeding their families and community comes mythically marked. However, as with other anthropological translations, our trained interpretations would properly turn first to the legacy of an Abrahamic “sacrificial” gift of the older woman's body. In this interpretative mode, her death is a source of all future and ongoing life. However, the Christian Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12), may not work as well in the Waiwai moral paradigm. The logic that the gift of self to the other can be presumed to be followed by a similar subjective response may not be at play in this instance. Suppose Waiwai subjectivity does not depend upon a separate independent intentionality of spirit, but instead on the folded intimacy between an unintentional spirit force and a body shaped by volatile feelings. In that case, one cannot be guaranteed an outcome of reciprocity from an exchange of self in the gift given if one had not placed proper effort in stabilizing the body in the form of a kiriwani pun (good body) or kiriwani toto (good person). This is perhaps best seen in their rendering of pawana (visitor or stranger) (Aniceto de Souza 2021; Howard 2001, 1993; Oakley 2022), where their acts of hospitality have the intention of transforming the uncertainty of the unfamiliar other into kiriwani toto. What seems evident in the Waiwai moral paradigm is an emphasis on caring for the body's feelings. Feeling the embodied reality of being culturally represented by the given sign translated to mean “woman” seems dependent upon the body's capacity to be available to others as a sign of how it feels. A sociality based on not being kichichime would emphasize the pleasurable as a moral sentiment and the basis of the trust needed to live together tawake (happily) or yenpori (in beauty).

What we find rewarding in the myth for an interpretation of Waiwai sociality hinges on the act of disapproval from those who initially received the food from the vile-tasting tuber of the older woman's excrement. Here, we could benefit from the view that “concepts of subjectivity and objectivity, as analytically deployed, are no more than (English-speaking) place-holders for distinctions Amerindians work out through protocols of eating” (Strathern 2012: 5). And yet, we might apprehend from our mythic translation of their dutiful and desirable actions to feed and be fed a Waiwai aesthetic of social existence based upon a distinctly felt embodied subjectivity not determined by obedience to superior disciplinary forces of dominant ideas, as would be the case if it were principally about rights governed by laws or customs of conduct. Instead, let us consider theirs not as a case of doing the right thing based on obedience to precedence, but more about presence and feeling the pleasure of goodness. Trust in the reality of embodied feelings appears as the more convincing attribute of Waiwai sociality. So, the moral responsibility in the desire to propagate the primary food
source appropriately directs the older woman to return to the farm and offer up her body to
the process of proper manioc growth.

Perhaps this is a worthy example of an Indigenous corroboration of our modern anthropological translation and theorizing of “consumptive production” (see Gow 1989; McCallum 2001; Strathern 1990). Fully cognizant of the subordination of the modernist self to the Capitalist economic systems, the concept of consumptive production inverts the standard Marxist reading of capital and instead engages the transcoded possibility of human production at the mercy of desire.

In the specific case where we find this in experimentation (Gow 1989), it is the improper satisfaction of the oral desire of the Bajo Urubamba child who eats dirt that draws the researcher’s attention. Rather than privilege the modernist interpretation of such desire as determined by biological subsistence needs, where eating dirt provides little if any bodily nutrients, the alternative of an Indigenous concern for virtuous moral care takes the advantage. Like the presented Waiwai mythical problem involving the eating of vile cassava, the event of a child eating dirt serves to shift the discussion from governing rules and rights to the moral value of care. What is good is not the law but goodness itself.

While this may not seem as insightful as attempts by Indigeneity to resist the effects of settler-colonial oppression, it does help to steady the reading of what we might reconsider to be at stake for the Indigenous socialites oppressed by modernity. Any Indigenous subjectivity exposed to the modern state apparatus with its Capitalist wage economies and struggling with the disadvantage of access to monetary wealth for food and clothes does become morally worthy of the rights that state laws have available. However, even as they might resist and compromise with modern state alternatives, such subjectivities often do so holding on to the semiotic codes of virtuous care commensurate with their concern for embodied feelings (Hewlett 2023). What seemed most attractive about the anthropological attempt to use the theory of consumptive production in order to introduce an alternative reading was its revelations about the violence incurred by the exposure of Indigenous subjectivities to the modernist notion of the self driving the logic of advanced industrial Capitalism.

In the Waiwai case, whenever their encounter with pawana toto exposes them to the strangeness of an unfamiliar other, even one interpreted as vile, they have available to them an already instilled obligation to be faithful to their sense of the ethical self, capable of delivering the necessary transformation of uncertainty into the trust of a system based on proper feelings (Oakley 2022). The modern Capitalist world wants little or no vision of such subjectivity. Its entire governing apparatus works relentlessly with a singular sense of self, “one born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint” (Foucault 1977, 29), where the ethical self must be faithful to the moral value of rights. For example, no other desiring agency should be at play but the one that seeks satisfaction in the rights gained over the goods available in the market. In this regard, the attempted erasure of Indigenous subjectivity, like the silencing of Echo in Ovid’s myth, can best be deflected if the concentrated gaze of modernist subjectivity, like that of Narcissus, can be diverted away, even briefly, from the appeal of itself. Not because it might better serve as the most highly valued image of subjective desire, but rather because of its usefulness in drawing our attention to the fact that other worlds do occupy our planet. The usefulness, therefore, of the consumptive production theory resides in its willingness to hold on to and keep in contrast its translation of the Indigenous ethical systems as “subsistence economies” and our modernist devotion to rights in “Capitalist economies” (Hewlett 2023). Retaining the distinction between the two modes of production when researching the Indigenous system of the ethical self shifts the modernist translation from its orthodox interpretation of labor’s direct access to its subsistence needs and its featured dependency on the Capitalist means of production, allowing for a more explicit recognition
of the political violence directed against the Indigenous subjectivity, where the casual force at the origin site of labor cannot replenish itself without access to what it initially produced.5

The vile taste (or imagined anticipated taste) of improperly processed manioc sends the older woman back to the farm to correct her actions and outcomes. She, through her cremated body, provides the means for recreating the life of the plant and the continued life of the humans who eat the processed products of the plant. The anus and the vagina stand in parallel coded stances as orifices from which life enters and exits the world. However, the markedly life-producing capacity of the woman's body more strongly holds the meaning of creative vitality. One could claim that the cloaca birth of manioc and the vaginal delivery of humans reiterate each other's capacities. In either case, the discursivity of myth suggests that the distinction between bone and feces leads to good and bad foods, respectively. Food is determined as good or bad after the eater places themselves in the social position of being fed.

When the discursive statements of the myth offer the event of someone fed excrement, what relations do they claim are eaten? One answer could be the relations provided by the donor of food. The bad relations created by the vile taste of the food suggest the predatory outcome of relations with a carnivore grandmother. However, her return to the farm and the cremation of her body suggest that the proper alimental quality of pleasurable food derives from the giver contributing their caring presence to that of the consumer. As suggested (by Strathern 2012 and Viveiros de Castro 1998), the receiver of food eats, and, with the food consumed, constructs relationality, and thus helps to provide the anthropological interpretation of the category of the person feeding the eater. The cremated older woman offers not simply her body and its coded meaning of edible food, but also, with her body-as-manioc eaten by her kindred, the additional moral nourishment for other relatives with whom she lives. This shift in translation here has to do with the distinction drawn between theories of shared substances and those of shared-embodied feelings.

Here, rather than a reliance on the conventional focus on substances, let us additionally draw into our translation an Indigenous desire for concorporality that always remains unfulfilled. Like with the conjoined bodies of mother and fetus and those of conjoined twins, this desire suggests the notion of shared bodies and shared subjectivity. Such oneness of self, when severed by the evidential separation of bodies, nonetheless continues longing for the once conjoined ideal body. In the way that the Waiwai understand the workings of a generalized ekäti that vitalizes all forms of embodiment, the ekäti can be said to traverse the interval between bodies and bring differences together. This mechanism, however, can only be set in motion because of the simultaneously existing reality of individually separated bodies. Thus, the desire and its material fulfillment concerning bodies keep the prospect of convivial sociality forever open as a quotidian aspect of Waiwai life. The events of the myth bring into play this Indigenous philosophy of being. What they place into thoughts as desirable memory (rather than a right to Reason by logical thought) is the virtue-centered ethics of feeling nourished by conviviality. As recently stated about Waiwai politics of memory, “To feel contentment and love for others, for example, necessitates that one thinks about or remembers them, which is a moral practice of ‘looking after’” (Oakley 2022, 346).

Contentment in the self-same

In the myth of the Shere Yeme (Cassava Mother) recited by Laureta, a trusted Waiwai confidante (L. Mentore 2012), the narrative unfolds of how a mother, her married daughter, and her son-in-law, living together, prepare bread from manioc flour passed from the mother's body through her anus, much like the packed flour squeezed from a kwašu (woven basket) ready for baking. The son-in-law, becoming suspicious of where his meals are coming from, decides to spy on his epiche (wife) and wosham (mother-in-law) while they are preparing
the manioc flour. Shocked at his discovery, he confronts his wife with his newly acquired revelation. She informs her ye’mother) that he has exposed their “secret.” The daughter tells her mother that her husband “is dirty from you because you are passing the cassava from your bottom” (ibid, 147).

Let us reference “dirty” here as having less to do with physical pollution and more to do with moral contamination. Let us additionally refrain from following our interpretation of the material filth of excrement by tracing its symbolic translation through the moral contamination informed by Christian theology about sin or its prohibition. Instead, let us attempt to follow the Waiwai semiotic code of virtue and identify moral depravity as emanating from the process of a self-contained provision and consumption of food. What could be more counter to their proper moral conduct of social living than the ability to make one’s body be what one grows and eats without any assistance from others? However, rather than this kind of autosarcophagy that echoes the incest taboo and the frequent negative references in Amazonian myths to greed, the Waiwai attention to eating excrement places more emphasis on the preferred felt aesthetic for living pleasurably than on a prohibitive law and requirement to obey acceptable social conduct.

What appears in the narrative sequence provided by Laureta, unlike that provided by Fock, is the stated recognition of the wife and mother-in-law that their “secret” conveys the meaning of manioc food provided without the requirement of any helping contribution from others of difference across the marked divide preferred for an exchange properly to take place. Because of anthropology’s long legacy of using the collective morality of peaceful alliances when exchanges between divided, opposing entities benefit the whole, the translation here should presume the presence of a decipherable Waiwai view of the antisocial (Durkheim [1984] 2014; Mauss [1950] 1990). However, a reevaluated notion of moral sociality founded on the ideal of concorporality could view the unfavorable exchange as a positive transformation requirement.

Informed by a difference between attributes (even in the case of gender) that has an always-already shared vital spiritual similarity not sealed off from separated bodies, the possibility of becoming self-same with others is always available. It becomes a moral agenda socially to transform the body of pawana and stabilize it with tawake, the contentment of which serves as the reality needed for trusted relations and a life lived as pleasurable. The prospective intentionality of the body is the focus of moral nourishment.

As the narrative proceeds, the mother-in-law responds, “I was sorry for you all. I was always helping you all, but I see that he has caught me now. Alright. Tell him to go cut a little farm, and when it is dry, to burn it. Then I will have to die... And you all must bury me in the middle of the farm” (L. Mentore 2012, 147). The son-in-law complies, and after he has finished his work, his mother-in-law dies. They bury her body in the cleared field, which grows the manioc plant. In Laureta’s version of the myth, it is the son-in-law’s socially normative agency in cutting and burning a field for the growing of manioc that the act of defecation brings about. The “gift” of the mother-in-law’s body in death to her daughter and son-in-law was its transformation into manioc.

Her body changed from serving
as the self-sufficient means
for making manioc
to becoming the manioc plant itself.
However, its growth cannot occur
without the forest’s clearing and burning.

In other words, in Waiwai cultural expression, the male clearing of forest trees for a farm provides the space where the manioc stalks can fashion a village to live in. Can we then say

6. As Mary Douglas (2009) has done with her overarching literary interpretation of Leviticus.
for the mythic discourse that the filthy immorality of defecating the manioc flour had to do with denying the necessary agency generated in the relational bonds between women and men, whereby men’s agency assists in consuming the space between genders by contributing to the fertile ground in which manioc gets planted? In other words, we can interpret this “consuming” of space between the different genders as a Waiwai statement about what is required to bring the shared experience of being properly human into existence. In the same way, we can understand the often ethnographically confronted Indigenous notion that nothing dies accidentally, and that all killing can only be interpreted as the desire for the killer to feed hungry bodies. The expenditure of energy required to process manioc food is equivalent to that associated with the harvesting of hunted bodies, and thus tantamount to “eating persons.” This is part of mutual feeding. Being fed feels ethically pleasing in the Waiwai experience, most probably because it erases that perceived interval between self and other.

Let us then focus not so much on signs of gender difference, nor any gender division of labor construed from the myth. Perhaps even the so-called defendable inherent rights we modernists often attribute to the nature of the body could be deferred in this translation. That is, natural “ownership” of such an identity, which authorizes the moral responsibility to possessable rights made to be associated to such an identity, could here be suspended as a human universal.

Even the presumptuous deployment of such a translation of property as a “general analytical category” (Brightman et al. 2016, 6) should safely be reserved as part of our modernist fealty to the virtues of rationalist thought. The dangers involved in the kinds of slippage that can occur in any distinction “between ‘ownership’ and a general area of inquiry implying the investigation of conceptions of (and) rights in things, persons and so forth, and ‘private property’ as a specific mode of ownership with implications of possessive individualism and a particular construction of the subject/object distinction” (ibid) seem far too risky (if for no other reason than that most modernists, beyond us anthropologists, do not recognize they are living their lives within generalized objectified categories of being). Let us, more cautiously, prefer to highlight a Waiwai valued social ethic placed on concorporated difference, which the act of eating defecated manioc initiates into a dutiful agency.

As with village living, farming consumes the interval between differences necessary for convivial life. Conorporated difference ingests the interval between self and other. In addition, being one with the other, such that the other’s alterity enters the seamless sociality necessary for harmonious living, should not be foregrounded as the reconciliation of a contradiction. In our modernist dialectical thought process, such reconciliation of difference usually arrives at the cost of alterities’ defeat. The war metaphor (or War Machine) provides us with our means for explaining the context of oppositional differences and their roles in the triumph of the self. Taking into account Waiwai sensibilities, or their semiotic code of subjectivity, let us instead attempt to entertain a translated alternative of being that does not foreground the deep antagonistic divide between self and other, with that sense of superiority of the self that comes along with conquests of the other, but rather one that seeks felt contentment in the self-same.

Nevertheless, what about the following?

So now when you are pulling out the cassava root, and the cassava stick, you have to plant it back. If you just leave it so, then the cassava will beat you up, it will beat you, and some days you will suffer with pain in your arms. (L. Mentore 2012, 147)

Even though Laureta’s statement seems to imply retribution coming directly from the personage of the manioc if humans do not correctly replant it, and that she considers this a form of “punishment,” let us not give to her use (and continued use) of this term what we would in our application of the word. (Recall the warning mentioned above by Strathern about English-speaking place-holders.) Instead of measured payback for an offense of dis-
obedience, that is, as a sought-after balanced return for the wrong committed, let us consider “punishment” to mean, in this Waiwai instance, the unpleasant sensations felt by the body as a result of a general breakdown or “lack of flow” (following Wagner 1977) in proper social relations. It is the feeling they express in the term karipera (not feeling well, or sick). The whole community notices this feeling almost immediately when one of its members does not rise from their hammock in the morning as expected. Visitations take place immediately to inquire about the wellbeing of the karipera toto. The immediate community suspicion of the illness is that people have not exchanged proper relations of contentment, and avoiding any accusation of being the one guilty of such transgression could be cynically interpreted as the explanation for the concern displayed by those visiting the sick. For the Waiwai body to be in herwa (pain) is to be placed there by the intentionality of someone else’s ill will. Thus, in the myth, not recycling the life of the plant—in other words, denying it the capacity of proper life by denying it its ability to feed—initiates its ill will that brings forth the continuing severance between plant and farmer as well as the latter’s feeling of pain from the unrequited expectant sense of wellbeing.

We should not automatically try to interpret the cassava’s violence in terms of a “punishment,” as the penalty paid for the transgression of lacking respect toward the personhood of the manioc shoot. In other words, let us place in abeyance our tendency to consider it a mechanism for maintaining order. Punishment for breaking the “law” of providing long-term sustenance was not what Laureta sought to reference. Concern for the farmers’ obedience to the “rules” so they could plant future crops was not what the manioc person signaled as significant for their disapproval. In what we can glean from the ethnographies about Indigenous Amazonian egalitarian political power and its uses of violence, we can interpret the mention of suffering and pain in the arms here as the felt experiences of denied moral agency (Clastres 1989; Overing and Passes 2000). In other words, it is not retribution from on high for disobedience to supreme laws, but the consequence of exposure to the everyday contingent forces that expect, but do not receive, the equivalence of balance they seek. Proper behavior toward those who feed one is not a protocol commandment whose disobedience brings down the wrath of transcendent moral mandates. It is less a rational outcome of law and more the immediate pleasure of felt reality in performing the beautiful, pleasing thing. “That is why whenever we pull cassava, we always plant it back and get a second crop” (L. Mentore 2012, 147). The reward for doing good things, for example, occupying and reoccupying the pleasurable spaces for feeding and being fed, is the joy felt for the “second crop:” the rhythmic repetition of life.

Let us also include our ethnographer’s added observation: “It was imperative that we neatly extract the tubers from the baskets and stack them. To neglect to do so would invite difficult and painful childbirths” (ibid). Once again, let us not try to translate this as a directive for neatness as a commandment and the explanation for non-compliance as a form of punishment. This temptation would indicate the prolonged legacy of the biblical tradition that frequently seeps into our modernist semiotics of subjectivity despite our abundant rationalist edicts about the “death of God” (Vattimo 2005, 43-54). Instead, we could best think of such an Indigenous Waiwai aesthetic of neatness not as seeking an orderliness indicative of righteous obedience to the perfectibility of a supreme way of being, but as the properly felt engagement between the embodiment of plant and human life, directly associated with the female body and its agential capacity for bringing life into the world. The directive and its compliance are not a cause-and-effect observation but a recognized agreement between different entities made pleasing to the senses.

Again, the warning for a moment of deferment. Rather than an Indigenous aesthetic translated through a modernist faith in the semiotics of our subjectivity that holds to the logical operator of an a priori law necessary for “a process of control and appropriation” (Brightman
et al. 2016, 15), let us instead reserve the judgment on an Indigenous pleasure in “alimentary relations” that would see it as being guilty of “nurture as a process of control” (ibid). Even with all the vainglorious claims about the so-called progress in anthropological knowledge that have accompanied the progression from such statements as “The biological needs of the individual make it essential that, from the very start, each of us, both as child and as adult, shall be continuously in relation with others. All such relationships entail domination and submission” (Leach 1977, 19) to statements such as “In some cases, the act of giving food may imply asymmetrical relations between non-kin or between ‘becoming’ kin” (Brightman et al. 2016, 14); even after all the historical disavowals of biological determinism, our modernist devotion to scientific Reason seems to keep us consistently faithful to the supremacy of Truth that keeps precedence as an absolute.

The stated “imperative” proceeding from the Waiwai perceptions of balance and harmony does not necessarily stem from any prospect of hierarchical punishment or retribution. Nor, indeed, from a translated “central mechanism for producing mastery relations” (ibid, 15), which is better suited to our modernist master-pet relations and those between coach and athlete, famously termed “affectionate domination” (Tuan 1984). What we would instead translate as the deep coding for being in the world is Waiwai people’s acknowledgment of the moral virtues deriving from practices that can and do traverse and even reduce the interval between self and other without the presence of domination. Different embodied species can become one by what we deem the agency protocols, which vital spirit proffers to its material bodies. The means to understand this kind of sociality rest with appreciating the extent to which Waiwai thought can include the contribution of non-human bodies’ vital subjectivity to their wellbeing. The bodies of plants and animals eaten by the Waiwai display their evidential capacity to feed the human body. We should read the so-called “origin myth” of manioc, therefore, less as being about legal precedence or ancestorial beginnings and more about the intellectual lines drawn between moral aesthetics and how much this has to do with the felt experience of being pleasantly alive in the world. Add to this the suspension of the judgment that all differences must supersede a supreme force that brings such differences into existence and always triumphs as the confirming Truth for their existence.

So, from this possible Waiwai-influenced provocation, could we in anthropology now go so far as to reconsider such an example of human agency not from a process of subordination of subjectivities dominated by a coding of sexual embodiment to produce the necessary alliances for sociality, or even of life lived without the determinant of sexual desire? A life, at its depth, not governed by the deployed powers of sexuality? Indeed, how can we now pay penance for our constant solicitation and coterminous refusal of that “rule of rules” (Foucault 1990, 109) in our theorizing of comparative socialites?

If one considers the threshold of all culture to be prohibited incest, then sexuality has been, from the dawn of time, under the sway of law and right. By devoting so much effort to an endless reworking of the transcultural theory of the incest taboo, anthropology has proved worthy of the whole modern deployment of sexuality and the theoretical discourse it generates. (ibid, 109-10)

The Waiwai joy of living together as concorporates, as if living together in the same mother’s womb, does not have the precedent of a sexual causality, at least not one generated by reference to biology. Feeling the pleasure of such unity is not traced in their semiotic codes to meanings of sexual desire or generative genes and their power of productivity. Yes, to become beautiful, adorned by the “clothes” of the animals and plants they eat, is to give agency to that which traverses the interval between self and other. Feeling this way, even beyond the periodically sustained ceremonial displays of collective joy, occurs daily with the individual acts of nourishment practiced by all. Not a day goes by without the display of trust and the felt experience of joy that comes from shared eseresma (meals).
Meals are not merely for nourishment or survival but for the contentment of living in yenpori (beauty). Joy is not merely a feeling that comes because of a longing to fill an ever-present vacuous space in subjectivity. There is kichichito (danger) in living without joy, which happens when suffering supplants joy successfully. Such suffering brings with it a remaking of the world that translates the feeling of life as ugly and unpleasant. Again, this is the case not because of the notion that such űrwa (pain) denies one the capacity for bearing testimony to one's life, as in death, but because it does not provide one with access to what is pleasing to those one lives with, and who expect to find the joy of one's presence for their enjoyment of living.

In our translation of the Waiwai semiotics of being,

let us strive to reimagine subjectivity,
empowered by the vibrant agency of others.
Not a closed-off, self-protective entity of alterity,
but a singular force
with the desired outcome of replication
achieved by contributing to the vital movement
beyond the self,

the continuum of which depends
upon the successful positioning
of separate similar entities.

The "second crop" is not the product
of a unique and independent preceding source,
but the replication of the self-same,
capacitated by its ongoing singular vitality.

In the case of the Waiwai, as mentioned above, this singular vitality we can translate as ekati. It exists before and after the body's materiality has decomposed or been consumed. The closest equivalent we can find in our cultural coding for a meaningful translation of this continuity in plants would be perhaps the one our Western botanists call the "clonal propagation" of the manioc stalk (see L. Mentore in this special issue).

The double-action of this continuity analogy in the growth of manioc we can apprehend in the Waiwai practice of separating the mature tuber from its stalk to feed hungry bodies while keeping the inedible stalk for replanting and growing more tubers. The growth of future tubers for food relies upon the severance and replication of stalks. As L. Mentore explains, the manioc stalk signifies the mother category like the tuber does that of the "child," with the fertile capacity to make the latter through the dutiful replication of the mother stalk. The becoming of a mother necessitates the being of the child. In the Waiwai analogy, we can consider the necessary social identity of the mother not in terms of generative precedence, ancestry, or the anticipation of life's cessation, but as the ongoing movement of ever-present spiritual vitality. Taking care of the stalks, like caring for a mother, is beautiful and feels pleasing because it is about the harmonious sustainability of an aesthetically pleasing life—a life, that is, that does not, for the Waiwai, get translated as belonging exclusively or inherently to one's body, and hence does not become imagined as owned by one's body. Hence the warning that any responsibility one can have for such life of the body should not, in our anthropological translation, be interpreted as coming from possessing a subjectivity as a "definitive property" (Strathern 1990, 135) intrinsic to the body. The Waiwai understanding of how ekati manifests itself in the world seems to suggest that in its contribution to life, it is always already that...
which vitalizes all embodied entities. The question for them appears to be what the spiritually vitalized corporality intends concerning the felt quality of living.

It would, therefore, be somewhat ingenuous for us to translate their caring by nourishment as the mastery of power over life; here, the process of living as an owned property of individual bodies, necessary for the continuation of life, appears as a weak deductive category for cross-cultural comparison. By their translation, the living body cannot be the object of a power possessed, but it can ideally be the site of pleasurable feelings capable of a value exercised by the worth of living. Helping the life of manioc tubers as they would the life of humans is a duty that observes the distinction between the continuous demise of the tuber and the survival of the stalk, as with the death of the body but not the spirit. However, death, in their example, is best not placed in opposition to life where its possessed power gets mastered and regularly defeated by life. Our translation of what we are calling their cloned motherhood, in the constant movement of its replication, should help leave behind the temptation for us modernists to be still thinking in bio-determinant terms of genealogies and cognatic descent, or even in the analogic terms of suggestive sexual “flow” (Wagner 1977). The luxurious abundance of manioc fields we can reimagine as kiriwani if we can successfully translate the spiritual flow of Waiwai felt joy without reliance upon our continued loyalty to the flow of cellular bio-power. With such a deferral, we might understand the kiriwani image as the successful replication of the self-same, and perhaps as the evidential love of the self-same; that is, as the village space, where the shared ekati of the manioc person exhibits the ideal of living well together.

This reimagining would have to include the aesthetic Waiwai appeal for epeka (what we might call consanguine sibling kindred, but, as with cognatic descent, be prepared to suspend our modernist biological implication of such identities)—living together as if individual members of the village all came from the same woman's womb. Even the so-called affinal outsider must, with extended intimacy and convivial effort, become concorporated into the harmony of the self-same. We should regard long, successful marriages among the Waiwai as the ideal of a constant and reoccurring intimacy created from feeding and eating between husband and wife—the movement of a process that seeks to transform affinal difference into a sibling-like similarity; the so-called “axiom of amenity” (Fortes 2006, 24) carried over from the uterine space to the residential space, pleasurable to the senses more so than to the logical functioning of thought. Here, one could say that the more familiar Amazonian anthropological discourse of the predatory affinal enemy can, in our coding, succumb to the conviviality of consanguinity. Could we even go so far as to argue for an Indigenous love aesthetic of the self-same and set in abeyance our past anthropological preference for that heterosexual binary logic of complementary opposition? Indeed, could the love for the self-safe manifest in the fertility of replication be more beneficial to social analysis than any appeal to the binary opposition of reproductive biology (see Overing and Passes 2000)? When analyzing Indigenous Amazonian sociality, should we now hesitate to follow our Western privileging of the incest taboo and its heterosexual imperative of difference operational in its prohibition? If we can, perhaps the Indigenous aesthetic for the love of the self-same could undermine our long-held faith in the theory of the gift and its requirement of a permanent severance between entities before any exchange or relationality can occur. The logic of repetition does not need the other-with-alterity to traverse the interval between self and other. In this latter paradigm, the replication of the other is always already in the process of becoming present. Conjoined before any severance, the state of shared existence does not require the exchange of essence to bring about social commonality. Anthropological discourses about “structures” and “systems” remain sealed in the hermeneutics of our rationalist thoughts. Their relevance sustains our philosophical aesthetics, but can it be said to do the same for Indigenous life?
The consequence of confession

Confessing at the outset to the guilt of an anthropological reading has provided a means for identifying obedience to our disciplinary commandments of translation and the appealing appearance of responsibility our semiotic codes have for our interpretative conclusions. Our devotion to Reason helps clear the ground for love being given the status of rationally appropriated Truth. That such love could be deployed as a kind of “violence” in our interpretative descriptions of modernist subjectivity, as well as those we create from translations of Indigenous Amazonian codes, we should not ignore.

Our desires often come at the cost of their fulfillment. There may be forms of reality resistant to our thoughts. However, perhaps most disconcerting is that understanding the other in our terms frequently conceals our capacity for emotional life. We must hide our guilt for loving Reason as if such love would betray Reason and its objective of providing us with knowledge uncontaminated by the inferiority of falsehoods. Herein lies the basis of our intellectual elitism and what we can identify as the fault line of our “discriminatory aesthetics” (Gow 1996, 222); or, as argued here, our devotion to the superiority of rational Truth and our derision for the inferior falsity of irrationality. It has long been the anthropological tradition not merely to translate, but to convert our translations of other people's cultural codes into our reasoned interpretation. It is an aesthetic that modernity has claimed as its own.

Offering the view that “[c]omparing and contrasting, but not judgment, are one of the central concerns of anthropology” (ibid, 219) attempts to make evident how the Euro-American research methodology already holds a highly prescriptive aesthetic and “is primarily discriminatory” (ibid, 271). Our cultural sensibility as to what counts as inclusion or exclusion in ethnographic description has its making and preemptive value in our semiotic codes. Refraining from casting judgment determined by our moral codification would deny us our sense of presence and that vulnerability to the precedence of codes, which simultaneously bring meaning and its incurred violence into play. With deferred judgment, however, we could regard the example of the Waiwai appreciation of life presented in their discourse and experience of manioc as drawing forth and emphasizing feelings more than thought. We can translate their “responsibility-based ethical systems” claiming to emphasize feeling good about life neither in terms of confined, bounded spaces nor in lineal descent, but as shared mutual doubling. Their recognition of what we would refer to as the rhizome-like potency of tubers, which contributes to the repetition of stalks, suggests a continuity not dependent upon planted seeds. Like children of mothers, tubers grow concorporately with each other as siblings.

The Waiwai mark off their growth area with *wakpo* (sticks laid on the ground in a line across communal fields). The *wakpo* does not demarcate farm plots from each other but implies the confluence between separate plots: indeed, that which functions as the traversal between differences. In their coding, even the subterranean tubers navigate the variance between each other (in the way *ekatï* traverses the differences between entities living in the world) and do so without the surface marks of division more reminiscent of our notion of territoriality. Concorporeal life is an ideal of shared happy subjectivity, while severance only functions to make possible the continued life of the “mother stalk.” It is challenging, if not ingenuous, to apprehend any seed of private property in such a semiotic code of subjectivity. The Waiwai self does not possess an objectified sense of individuality that can be said to own the body it occupies. Moreover, except by logical extension to our “rights-based ethical system,” we could not without discrimination give them an inherent juridical right to their embodiment. In the same way, we cannot regard the farms divided by *wakpo* as the private property of their farmers. However, perhaps this feature of felt conviviality could explain its beauty, in that its appeal stems from its capacity to be relinquished and become conjoined with relationally positioned otherness.
Tubers and children live their lives as a means of conjoining and dissipating differences. A happy life is the reality of feeling alive in the presence of others as one’s trusted double being. The current Amazonian scholarship on unstable bodies fits the Waiwai sense of feeling alive with spiritual subjectivity and familiar bodies (Stolze Lima 1996; Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998). The safety of living with familiar bodies intensifies with the constant daily effort of feeding and being concorporately located to be fed as a transformational tactic. Care and love of the bodies one lives with, plant, animal, or human, function to halt any possibility of their negative change, that is, to stabilize them in the condition of goodwill. Conviviality forestalls ill will. In the practice of everyday living with others and with repetitive care of such others, understood as needing in the first instance a presentation of the embodied self as trustworthy, the stranger, the enemy, and the in-law, if in intimate contact, can be transformed into the familiarity of the self-same. More than rational thoughts, good feelings become the Waiwai concern for a pleasurable life.

Unable to overcome the stubborn resistance of the embodied reality of felt experience to any representational thought, we are left simply with the mere usefulness of anthropological representations for making meaning.

One such usefulness must surely be the knowledge that there are other ways to be human in the world not expressed in any sense of superiority, the discriminating sensibility that has brought our planet to the brink of its foreseeable life.
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References


