



World News of Natural Sciences

An International Scientific Journal

WNOFNS 64 (2026) 151-175

EISSN 2543-5426

Between being and having: existential philosophy and relational indigenous ontologies

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the philosophical and ontological foundations of Indigenous thought in Brazil, examining how ancestral knowledge, cosmologies of reciprocity, and relational ethics articulate alternative understandings of existence. Drawing on interviews with Indigenous leaders and knowledge keepers from diverse ethnic groups, the study analyzes practices such as agriculture, extractivism, art, and body painting as expressions of a philosophy that unites being and having. Supported by theoretical perspectives from anthropologists such as Tim Ingold, Philippe Descola, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro; philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Erich Fromm, Emmanuel Levinas, and Martin Heidegger; and the historian Carlo Ginzburg, this research adopts a qualitative and hermeneutic approach to interpret these practices as forms of knowledge and resistance. The analysis reveals that Indigenous ontologies conceive life as an interdependent network in which humans, non-humans, and the environment coexist through reciprocity and care. The article argues that, in Indigenous philosophy, *to have* only finds meaning when rooted in *being* — a relational mode of existence that challenges Western logics of possession and accumulation. Ultimately, it proposes that Indigenous epistemologies offer critical pathways for rethinking sustainability, ethics, and the very condition of being-in-the-world.

Keywords: Indigenous philosophy, ontology, decolonial thought, relational epistemologies

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge does not reveal itself immediately, nor is it limited to manuals or species catalogues. It is like an underground river, silent, flowing through generations, carrying memories, gestures, and meanings that escape the hurried perception of the modern world. To learn from this knowledge is not merely to accumulate information; it is to incorporate ways of being, to listen to the world, to perceive life in its details, and to interpret signals that reveal relationships, intentions, and stories. Every step in the forest, every fallen leaf, every murmur of the river constitutes a living alphabet, communicating far beyond mere data: it conveys profound senses of existence.

Land management, tracking animals, listening to the wind and rain are not simply survival practices; they are modes of being in the world, in which each action reverberates and every being is recognized as an interlocutor. This knowledge does not crystallize; it flows, reinvents itself, and transforms with each generation, preserving collective memory, sustaining spiritual bonds, and adapting to the changes of time. Indigenous knowledge is dynamic and integrative. It combines empiricism and myth, technique and poetry, intuition and calculation, while preserving historical continuity, strengthening spiritual bonds, and re-signifying the territory. Time, in this understanding, is neither linear nor chronological: it is fluid and pulsating; the past remains present, the future announces itself, and the present is realized through the conscious practice of existing.

The historian Carlo Ginzburg, in proposing the “evidential paradigm” in an essay entitled “*Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario*” (1979), later published in English as “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm” in the book *Myths, Emblems, Clues* (1986), where he formulates the idea of a method based on clues, traces, and minimal signs to reconstruct historical realities, provides a useful lens to understand part of this perception: the hunter interprets tracks not as mere physical signs but as ontological messages that reveal invisible worlds and relationships. For Indigenous peoples, this interpretation is a daily practice: every footprint, every sprout breaking through the soil, every sound is a living message that demands attention, patience, and sensitivity. The anthropologist Tim Ingold reinforces this idea by emphasizing that the experience of the world is built through sensitive engagement with it, rather than through abstractions or attempts at control.

In Amerindian perspectivism, as articulated by the anthropologist Viveiros de Castro, the forest is not a backdrop but an interlocutor. The jaguar has a voice, the fish carries intentions, and the tree rises as a subject of memory. The territory becomes a living network of reciprocities, where inhabiting also means being inhabited. It is in this constant dialogue that knowledge is constructed: there is no separation between practice, experience, and cosmology; every everyday gesture is also a philosophical, poetic, and spiritual act.

A central dimension of this knowledge is the tension between being and having. While Western logic often equates possessing, accumulating, and controlling with wealth and power, in Indigenous traditions being is shaped through participation and correspondence with the world. For these communities, wealth does not reside in material goods but in the interweaving of meanings that connects humans to the cosmos. When the desire to have outweighs the priority of being, the world impoverishes; when being guides desire, having becomes sharing, care, and recognition of the other — human or nonhuman — as an integral subject of reality.

The philosopher Heidegger speaks of care as the essence of being; in the Indigenous context, this attentiveness manifests in the sensitive observation of the web of life and in the

preservation of the relations that sustain the flow of existence. Every act of reciprocity, every conscious action, every patient observation is an ontological act, a recognition that to exist is to participate in a living web. This ethic transcends the local, offering a universal invitation to rethink our relationship with the world.

This study proposes a philosophical–anthropological reflection on Indigenous ontology and its implications for the categories of being and having. By analyzing everyday practices — hunting, extraction, art, corporeality, and ritual — it highlights a relational ethic capable of subverting the Western logic of possession. Structured in chapters, the work explores both symbolic and material dimensions of Indigenous life — including the *xerimbabo*, extraction practices, woven art, body painting, hunting, and myth — showing that knowledge emerges from experience and coexistence with the other, whether human or nonhuman.

In Indigenous cosmologies, being precedes and guides having: to possess is not to dominate but to share; to create is not to accumulate but to prolong life in community. By articulating practices, cosmologies, and epistemologies, the study proposes a fruitful dialogue between Indigenous thought and Western philosophy, highlighting the urgent need to rethink categories such as property, production, and art in light of an ethic grounded in care, reciprocity, and impermanence.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This analysis adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and interpretative approach, combining empirical field data with theoretical frameworks from anthropology, philosophy, and phenomenology. It is grounded in attentive, dialogical listening to Indigenous peoples from diverse Brazilian ethnicities, whose cosmologies, practices, and narratives inform reflections on the relations between being and having in knowledge, art, and engagement with the natural world.

The analysis draws on data from studies conducted between 2010 and 2025 on the impacts of various infrastructure projects on Indigenous peoples and their territories. These studies were authorized by both the Indigenous communities and the National Indigenous Peoples Foundation (FUNAI), and involved Indigenous peoples from the Amazon — including the Apiaká, Arara (Ukarãngmâ), Juruna (Yudjá), Kayabi (Kawaiwete), Tenharim (Kagwahiva), and Mura — as well as groups from the Cerrado, including the Bororo (Boe), Guarani Kaiowá, and Xavante (A'uwê).

Data collection combined open and semi-structured interviews with participant observation, allowing for flexible, natural dialogue and immersion in daily and ritual practices. Participants included elders, spiritual leaders, artisans, hunters, fishers, and women responsible for food cultivation and preparation — recognized as custodians of their communities' traditional knowledge. This approach captured diverse perspectives, reflecting the richness and complexity of Indigenous cultural and ecological knowledge systems.

Semi-structured interviews balanced thematic guidance on symbolic dimensions of being and having with participants' discursive autonomy, enabling narratives to emerge spontaneously and relationally. Participant observation included rituals, body painting, agricultural and extractive activities, and craft production, conceived as spaces of learning and ontological expression, where gesture and discourse intertwine.

Empirical data were analyzed hermeneutically and phenomenologically, drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to interpret meanings within Indigenous practices and narratives without reducing them to Western categories. This approach preserved the internal logic of Indigenous cosmologies, recognizing them as autonomous systems of thought.

The theoretical framework integrated: Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian perspectivism, emphasizing beings as agents with their own perspectives; Tim Ingold's anthropology of perception, highlighting knowledge as sensory and practical engagement; Martin Heidegger's ontology of care, conceiving being as openness and responsibility; Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, integrating body and consciousness; and Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of alterity, framing the encounter with the other as the basis of moral responsibility.

Triangulating empirical and theoretical perspectives allowed the interpretation of data not merely as ethnographic records but as expressions of a living philosophy, revealing convergences between Indigenous thought and Western reflections on reciprocity, care, and belonging.

The methodology rests on three complementary axes:

- ✓ Ethnographic listening — recording and interpreting Indigenous narratives on daily, artistic, and spiritual practices;
- ✓ Phenomenological analysis — understanding body, sensoriality, and gesture as knowledge;
- ✓ Philosophical dialogue — engaging Indigenous ontologies with Western concepts of being and having.

This framework treats Indigenous knowledge as a philosophical and cosmological experience in its own right, not as an exotic object, offering insights into relational ethics, sustainability, alterity, and contemporary modes of inhabiting the world.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The jay – between being and having

On a summer afternoon in the Amazon rainforest, while resting beneath a tree, a jay landed near me. Its unexpected presence revealed a moment of suspension between being and having: to contemplate or to capture the image? The impulse to photograph became a metaphysical dilemma — to record is to possess, and every possession implies loss. As the poet Fernando Pessoa wrote, “to possess is to lose; to feel without possessing is to keep, for it is to extract the essence of a thing.” Photography, a symbol of having, contended with the direct experience of being.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger observes that the human tends to “have the world” rather than dwell in it authentically. By objectifying the moment, we turn lived experience into a frozen image — a simulacrum of eternity [1, 2]. Memory, though fragile, preserves more truth than the technical record: to remember is to relive in flow; to photograph is to imprison on the surface. In front of the jay, renouncing the camera meant preserving the living bond of the encounter.

The true treasure lies not in the object, but in the experience. Being flourishes in the vulnerability of the instant; having arises as an attempt to deny the flow. For the philosopher Erich Fromm, fixation on having leads to alienation, while being leads to fulfillment [3]. The

philosopher Roland Barthes reinforces that “the lived instant is fuller than the technical fixation of the image.” [4-6] Thus, to have is to accumulate; to be is to live. By choosing being, one already possesses the essential.

When the jay departed, the lesson remained: true experience requires detachment and presence. Being, as Heidegger proposes, manifests in *Gelassenheit* — letting-be, openness to the event. Eternity lies not in the photograph, but in the gaze that dares not to imprison the world. The philosopher Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), affirms that “the gaze does not capture the world, but participates in it.” The simple act of observing becomes a gesture of reciprocity.

The jay symbolizes living, unsymbolized otherness — an expression of nature’s being. To photograph transforms the lived into representation — being into an object of signification. The dilemma between contemplation and recording expresses the conflict between direct experience and mediated representation. Having is appropriation; being is openness to flow. Silence and the instant are spaces of unmediated meaning, where experience escapes language.

From a semiotic perspective, the encounter with the jay is pre-semiotic — pure presence. Photography, in turn, is semiosis — the transformation of presence into sign. Heidegger proposes that we must “dwell in the world” rather than “have it,” which, in semiotic terms, means living meaning instead of objectifying it.

In many Indigenous cosmologies, especially Amazonian ones, nature is a subject of relations. The forest, rivers, and animals possess language and agency — expressions of animism [7]. As the anthropologists Philippe Descola and Eduardo Kohn observe, humans and non-humans share interiorities and communication, challenging the Western paradigm centered on the human. In anthropologist Viveiros de Castro’s view, meaning is relational and experience is symbiotic. Thus, the jay is not an object to be photographed, but a presence with its own sense — an encounter between two modes of being.

While in Western logic photographing is to dominate the instant, in Indigenous logic observing is to participate in the world. The gesture of not photographing resembles a shamanic attitude, recognizing otherness and the sacredness of presence. This renunciation of technical capture restores Heidegger’s notion of *dwelling* — being-in-the-world in coexistence. The silence shared with the jay becomes a form of communication that transcends language and affirms presence as a living mediation.

The semiological analysis of this episode reveals a reapproach of the human to ancestral wisdom. The encounter with the jay symbolizes the passage from the “world of possession” to the “world of relation,” where to live is to participate rather than to dominate. Thus, the episode proposes a reflection on image and meaning in light of Indigenous epistemologies, in which seeing is inseparable from being.

The invisible forest – between myth and presence

The “metaphysical beings” of Indigenous narratives reveal the forest as radical otherness: to inhabit it is not to possess it, but to coexist with invisible presences. The invisible finds there its most visible dwelling — not in tangible forms, but in the narratives that name it. Such beings are not fragile inventions, but modes of presence that remind humans that the forest is a subject, not a backdrop. Heidegger reminds us that *being* (*Dasein*) is not about possessing or controlling, but about existing in relation to the world. When humans recognize that the forest holds mysteries beyond ownership, they reconnect with the totality of being.

Viveiros de Castro, in developing Amerindian perspectivism, shows that the forest is a territory inhabited by multiple subjects and perspectives. The “invisibility” of these entities is relational: they exist in encounter, in narrative, and in collective memory. To dwell in the forest is to live among presences that escape the logic of utility yet affirm themselves as radical alterities. In this cosmology, all beings — human, animal, or spirit — share interiority and intentionality, differing only in their appearances [8].

Philippe Descola broadens this view by proposing ontologies that break with the nature/culture dichotomy, allowing us to understand the forest as a symbolic and relational space. Eduardo Kohn, in his book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2013), argues that forests and other living entities “think,” and that it is necessary to rethink anthropology to include these non-human interactions. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, in *The Falling Sky* (2010), describe the Xapiri, spirits of the Yanomami forest [9], as invisible presences that sustain life and collective memory.

For Erich Fromm, between being and having lies an essential logic: to *have* the forest is to reduce it to commodity or map; to *be with* the forest is to recognize it in its multiplicity and its own voice. The desire to have imprisons; being liberates, for it welcomes even the improbable as real.

In encounters with Amazonian peoples, the forest appears as a territory both concrete and symbolic, where word and presence intertwine. The “metaphysical animals” inhabit language — invisible to the retina yet vivid to the imagination. For the Juruna Indigenous people who live in the Xingu River basin in eastern Amazonia, entities such as *Capelobo* and *Mapinguari* are not mere myths but guarantors of the sacredness of space [10]. Myth, far from superstition, is collective memory that transforms fear into reverence and narrative into ethics.

Among the Kagwahiva, an Indigenous group that lives in southern Amazonas, in the region of the Madeira River, beings such as *Anhağa'avukuhua*, *Mbaira*, *Kwatazin*, *Manti*, *Kwataí*, or *Pejogwauhua* [10] manifest in metamorphic and multiform ways. Such “spiritual” encounters, according to Viveiros de Castro, express unique conceptions of power, sociability, and truth [11]. These entities inhabit not only bodies but symbolic dimensions, serving as mediators between the human and the natural. Metaphor and metamorphosis are resources to express their ontological fluidity and their resistance to conceptual fixation.

These myths configure an ontology of the forest as a subject of rights and as a territory inhabited by social and spiritual forces. Their entities express a living dynamic, always in transformation, reaffirming the vitality of Indigenous imagination. More than physical metamorphoses, they represent symbolic modes of relation and care, articulating narratives that promote cultural and ecological preservation.

Drawing on Goethe’s reflections on the relationship between phenomenon and essence, the philosopher Rudolf Steiner would later formulate the idea that the visible points toward the invisible, that the sensible world is the luminous expression of a deeper order. In this sense, the encounter between being and having manifests as the tension between the invisible and the tangible: having seeks to capture, being welcomes the mystery. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard reminds us that the forest, as both lived and imagined space, cannot be reduced to measurements or fences.

While having subjugates, being recognizes the forest as a territory of presences and symbols. Thus, inhabited space becomes a space of coexistence — where the invisible reveals itself as living presence.

The forest as living otherness

The forest is not a resource to be possessed, but a space where the visible and the invisible intertwine. Trees, animals, and tutelary forces coexist, establishing their own limits and laws. For the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon, the human is a guest — never the master — of the territory; their presence depends on rituals of permission that acknowledge the sovereignty of nature. Hunting is not merely the taking of lives, but participation in a system of ethical, affective, and spiritual reciprocities.

The death of an animal or environmental exploitation is only legitimized when inscribed within the forest's "invisible grammar," where violence is transfigured into ritual. The forest asserts its condition as a subject: it does not offer itself as a stockpile of resources, but as a moral instance capable of punishing those who attempt to possess it without respect. What is at stake is not only physical survival, but the continuity of the pact that sustains balance among worlds. True power resides in recognizing the otherness of the forest and its visible and invisible guardians.

Between being and having lies an essential paradox: the desire to possess transforms the forest into an object and breaks the bond with it; being, on the other hand, participates and coexists, embraces otherness, and inscribes itself in the pact that maintains cosmic equilibrium. As Viveiros de Castro observes, in Indigenous cosmologies nature is a living otherness with which reciprocity is established — a cosmos endowed with its own sovereignty and inhabited by protective entities. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, in *The Falling Sky* (2010), reinforces this view by describing the forest as a morally structured entity, where humans and spirits share responsibility for the maintenance of life.

Indigenous wisdom teaches that freedom and the continuity of existence depend on respectful coexistence: those who seek only to *have* lose the bond; those who choose to *be with* the forest partake in the eternity of the invisible. The Arara Indigenous people who live in the Xingu River basin in eastern Amazonia affirm that "the forest is a temple: each tree, a living column; each animal, an altar in motion." The hunter does not invade but negotiates. His action is a ritual of belonging: each arrow carries prayer and commitment, and the death of the animal becomes a passage governed by codes that unite human and non-human in a single moral bond.

The forest does not surrender to those who wish to dominate it; it offers itself under the condition of reciprocity, imposing invisible sanctions on those who break the pact. Illness or accident becomes a warning from the sacred order. True power lies not in human dominion, but in recognizing the sovereignty of the forest and its protectors. Thus, according to an ecological and cosmological ethic, exploitation is only legitimate when inscribed in codes of reciprocity that transcend utilitarian and economic logic.

The forest is a living totality: every trunk, trace, or silence is a sign of existence. For the Amazonian peoples, the point is not to contemplate nature as object, but to inhabit a system in which the human and the non-human are interwoven. Their beliefs in protective entities are not superstition, but a form of spiritual intelligence that grounds an ethic of coexistence and respect for mystery. The freedom the forest offers is both concrete and symbolic: it is born from communion with what exceeds the human.

Between being and having, the forest reveals its enigma. The desire to *have* turns the biome into exploitable property, erasing the bonds that sustain it; *being* recognizes that freedom lies in living with the mystery, in accepting the presence of visible and invisible entities. *Having* appropriates and exhausts; *being* shares and perpetuates. Heidegger emphasizes that the authentic experience of being is not achieved through possession or control, but through

dwelling in the world in its finitude and impermanence. Indigenous ethics echo this ontology: to respect mystery and otherness is the condition of coexistence.

Thus, Indigenous wisdom reminds us: those who seek only to *have* the forest lose its spirit; those who dare to *be with* it — recognizing its otherness and living the invisible pact — find the eternity of the invisible in every sound, shadow, and gesture of the forest.

The forest as a space of otherness and ontological experience

The forest constitutes a multifaceted space — physical, symbolic, and ontological — where humans and entities coexist through relationships of mediation and reciprocity. For the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon, it is not a mere habitat, but a locus of interaction and recognition of otherness. The Indigenous perception of the forest dissolves the boundary between human and nature: both are part of a living network in which each being possesses autonomy and transformative power.

In Heidegger's phenomenology, *being* is realized through dwelling in the world and openness to what transcends mere corporeality, not through appropriation or control. From this perspective, the forest becomes a space of ontological experience, where the human participates in a flow that surpasses them. To venture into it symbolizes a passage toward states of communion with the cosmos, in which the human experiences the continuity between the visible and the invisible.

Indigenous cosmogony conceives the world as a relational web among humans, animals, and spirits, with porous and mutable boundaries. Within this universe, the jaguar occupies a central role as an archetype of power and metamorphosis — an entity endowed with agency and morality, capable of teaching, warning, and ordering. This view reflects the Amerindian perspectivism described by Viveiros de Castro in *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2017) and *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011) [12] as well as the narratives of Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, in *The Falling Sky* (2010), which present the forest as a field of exchange between ontological dimensions.

The Kagwahiva Indigenous people recount that certain jaguars — especially those with only one eye — are shamans from other villages, ready for war. These narratives reveal how Indigenous symbolic imagination regulates conduct and translates experiences of fear, power, and vulnerability. Such knowledge weaves together ecological observation, spiritual perception, and an ethic of coexistence, forming an experiential understanding that integrates humans and the forest.

The logic emerging from these cosmologies shows that *being* is realized through interaction with the world, while *having* manifests as a form of belonging and dialogue. To possess is not to accumulate, but to recognize one's place within the vital dynamics of the territory. Heidegger asserts that to dwell is the authentic mode of existence; likewise, Viveiros de Castro shows that nature, in Indigenous cosmologies, is a living otherness with which one interacts reciprocally.

Thus, *having*, far from designating possession, expresses participation in *being* — a way of existing that integrates human, animal, and cosmos. Between being and having, the forest reveals its wisdom: those who seek only to possess break the primordial bond with the world; those who dwell, in the Heideggerian sense of *Dasein*, find meaning, transformation, and continuity in the invisible. In this horizon, the forest is not an object but a dimension of *being* itself — a field of ontological revelation that guides action and experience. *Having*, then, is redefined as recognition and participation, not domination.

Relational and experiential perceptions of the natural world

The perception of the natural world goes beyond the objective observation of phenomena: it constitutes a construction that is simultaneously mental, ethical, and experiential. Each cultural classification shapes values and modes of interaction, revealing that nature is not a homogeneous set of autonomous realities, but a plural space inhabited by multiple entities whose meanings vary according to cultural perspectives. For many Indigenous communities, recognizing these beings is essential to social and ecological harmony, for human singularity emerges from interaction with a living network of relationships and meanings.

Between *being* and *having* unfolds a logic that transcends the opposition between possession and absence. *Being* is not reduced to isolated materiality but is realized in relation to the world and to the invisible forces that sustain life. *Having*, far from mere appropriation, expresses the desire to understand and participate in this web of existences, becoming an extension of *being* itself — a gesture of recognition and dialogue with reality.

This vision converges with Heidegger's philosophy, for whom *being-in-the-world* implies dwelling in openness and belonging, not domination. Similarly, the Amerindian perspectivism formulated by Viveiros de Castro understands nature as living otherness endowed with agency, where humans and non-humans participate as legitimate interlocutors. Indigenous rituals and narratives, by combining ecological observation and symbolic perception, configure a relational epistemology in which ethics, cognition, and cosmology intertwine.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold complements this approach by asserting that knowing the environment means interacting with it bodily and practically, rather than merely classifying it. To inhabit the forest, therefore, is to engage in dialogue with its entities and to assume the responsibilities that such coexistence entails.

Thus, *being* and *having* do not oppose but interpenetrate as modes of existence. *Having*, when understood as an extension of *being*, becomes ethical participation and recognition of otherness; *being*, in turn, is realized through relational experience, in respect for the plurality of worlds and the agency of the beings that compose the web of life. To dwell in the world is, therefore, an ontological practice: to live in relation with what exceeds the human, cultivating balance, responsibility, and meaning.

Silence as the dwelling of being

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty shows that the world is not a collection of objects before a subject, but the very field in which experience unfolds — where body and world intertwine in a living unity. From this perspective, the way the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon inhabit the forest reveals an existence deeply rooted in the environment: the human is not *before* nature but *within* it, in a sensitive and reciprocal relationship. The balance they maintain with their surroundings arises from a perceptual wisdom — a being-in-the-world that recognizes the co-implication between human life and nature.

During a walk along the banks of the Xingu River in eastern Brazilian Amazonia, an Arara Indigenous man described the “tone of the forest”: when the heat stills the birds and the wind, silence itself becomes a presence. “It is in this silence that we feel the forest alive,” he said, “because it teaches us to listen and to respect its entities.” Silence, therefore, is not an absence but a sensitive fullness — a space of listening and communion. As Merleau-Ponty

notes, perception is not the mere reception of stimuli but a bodily and affective relation with the world — a dwelling in both the visible and the invisible.

Within this horizon, the Amazonian Indigenous universe embodies the *intertwining* between subject and world: the body perceives because it belongs to the landscape, and the landscape reveals itself through the body that lives it. A footprint in the soil, a fallen leaf, the course of an *igarapé* (stream) — these are signs of a reality that manifests before words. The Indigenous way of being is, therefore, a living phenomenology of dwelling — knowledge arises from coexistence, not objectification.

As Heidegger reminds us, to dwell in the world is to let oneself be touched by its unveiling. The Indigenous person does not *possess* the forest; they *dialogue* with it, in a relationship akin to the perspectivism of Viveiros de Castro, in which humans and non-humans share worlds and affections. In this context, silence is more eloquent than noise, for it creates the space where life manifests itself in subtlety.

The desire to *have* dissolves before the logic of *being*. Fulfillment lies not in accumulation but in perception — in participation in the flow of life. As the philosopher Ailton Krenak affirms, “we must relearn to listen to the Earth, for only then does existence find meaning.” *Having* thus becomes a gesture of understanding and harmony with a world that both sustains and surpasses the human.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, in Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer [13], illuminates this experience: to understand is always a mode of being, and the human is already immersed in a field of prior meanings. Indigenous peoples do not *explain* the forest — they *interpret* it by living. Every gesture, name, and ritual constitutes a symbolic reading of the real, and the silence of the forest is both text and presence — a word of being.

Philosophical ecology, by dissolving the boundary between nature and culture, broadens this vision by recognizing the world as a web of ontological interdependencies. Amazonian balance, then, is not merely ecological adaptation, but ethical and ontological cohabitation with rivers, trees, winds, and spirits.

Amerindian perspectivism reinforces this symmetry: all beings share the condition of subject, differing only in bodily and perceptual form. For the jaguar, blood is drink; for the fish, water is air; for the human, the forest is both home and mirror. It is a relational ontology in which to see is to coexist.

The Indigenous way of being thus expresses a *hermeneutics of the lived world*, in which to understand is also to care. Philosophical ecology finds here its ethical dimension: a phenomenological respect for the appearance of the other — human or non-human. By intertwining phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Amerindian perspectivism, one understands that the forest is not a backdrop but an *event of meaning* — a manifestation of presences that mutually interpret one another. The peoples of the Amazon inhabit this multiplicity as those who read and are read by the world, in a communion where every leaf, trace, and silence is also a word of being.

Being, memory, and the forest: a relational ontology

The Indigenous experience can be understood as a dance between time, space, and memory, in which there is no separation between being and environment. Every plant, tree, or sound of the forest forms a verse in a collective story in constant transformation. Heidegger reminds us that to dwell in the world is not to dominate it, but to let oneself be guided by what reveals itself within it; likewise, the Indigenous way of life is an active perception of the world,

where sociability, labor, and cosmology compose a network of meanings that sustains life in its material and spiritual dimensions.

Heidegger's concept of *being-in-the-world* (*In-der-Welt-sein*) expresses this inseparability between subject and environment: *Dasein* does not merely contemplate the world but constitutes it through its openness to it. To dwell, as Heidegger writes in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1951), "is the way in which mortals are on the earth." Indigenous living exemplifies this dwelling — not as possession, but as relationship and care — in contrast with the modern view of the technical domination of space.

Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), expands this understanding by showing that body, space, and environment form an existential unity. Perception is embodied experience: "I am my body." Thus, the world is not a collection of neutral objects but a field of meaning woven through gestures, sounds, and memories. Each element of the forest, therefore, carries presence and significance — part of a shared narrative between humans and non-humans.

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty converge in reading the Indigenous experience as an originary mode of being-in-the-world, in which nature and culture, body and territory, individual and community are integrated in reciprocity. To dwell, in this context, is to care, to listen, and to respond to what the world offers — a relational ontology grounded in sensitivity and belonging.

The forest, therefore, is not an inert backdrop but a co-author of history. Every human gesture transforms it and is transformed by it. Tim Ingold calls this way of living the *dwelling perspective* — a way of inhabiting in correspondence with the environment, where the human both weaves and is woven by the landscape [14]. Ancestral knowledge manifests as concrete and spiritual experience, continuously transmitted and re-created between the visible and the invisible.

Within this ethics of dwelling, the desire to *have* dissolves before the desire to *understand* and *integrate*. Being does not seek to dominate but to participate and learn from the world. As Viveiros de Castro observes, in Amerindian cosmologies reality is a multiplicity of interdependent perspectives, where the human coexists with entities endowed with agency. Being is defined in relation, and *having* becomes a gesture of belonging, learning, and care.

Forest, freedom, and belonging: an ontology of dwelling

The forest is not a mere physical space, but a territory of freedom and meaning, where Indigenous peoples find not only resources but the pulse of life that sustains their culture and memory. The transformations of the territory cannot be measured solely by hectares of deforestation or lost species, but by the widening distance between being and its essence — between the freedom to coexist with the world and the loss of connection to it.

Happiness, within this horizon, does not arise from accumulation but from the full experience of belonging to both nature and culture. Heidegger, in discussing *being-in-the-world*, reminds us that to exist is to dwell in the world through openness and care, not to submit it to the logic of possession. The Indigenous way of life confirms this perspective: the relationship with the forest is ethical and sensitive, grounded in reciprocity and cohabitation.

Tim Ingold, in proposing the *dwelling perspective* [14], understands life as a continuous dialogue with the environment, in which the human both transforms and is transformed by the landscape. This vision echoes the Indigenous experience, in which the desire to *have* becomes the desire to *belong* and to integrate oneself into the flow of life.

As Ailton Krenak affirms, fulfillment lies not in accumulation but in cultivating bonds with the Earth, for “life is not useful,” but a force of relation and care. Freedom and happiness, in this context, emerge from listening to the land and preserving that which sustains being.

The secrets of plants: knowledge, memory, and resistance

In the heart of the forest, every plant holds a story, bearing witness to centuries of observation, care, and the transmission of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is not utilitarian, but a sensitive reading of the forest, woven into the everyday gestures of cultivation, fishing, and gathering. As Ingold affirms, knowledge is lived experience — not an accumulation of data, but a correspondence between body and environment. Each practice, in this sense, constitutes a silent act of resistance against the productivist logic that turns the world into a commodity, reaffirming the value of respect and perceptive attunement to one’s surroundings.

When the territory is fragmented, it is not only the ecological balance that is broken, but also the symbolic network that sustains Indigenous existence. Plants, animals, and rivers form a mosaic of memories, techniques, and cosmologies that, according to Viveiros de Castro, weave humans and non-humans into ethical and ontological networks. These forms of knowledge constitute an epistemological heritage that coexists with Western science in an authentic *ecology of knowledges*.

As sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues [15], recognizing this ecology means understanding that Indigenous knowledge is not archaic but a contemporary source of ethics, memory, and identity. Fulfillment, therefore, does not arise from possession but from harmony — from the living bond between being and that which sustains life.

Philosophy of being and indigenous ontologies of nature

Among many Indigenous peoples, relationships with nature are structured as dialogues and reciprocities: trees, rivers, and animals are not resources, but partners in a living network of meanings. To hunt, plant, or fish is not merely a utilitarian act, but one of listening and recognition, in which knowledge and feeling intertwine in the construction of a shared world.

This logic contrasts with that of accumulation and possession. *Having* does not signify domination, but integration — the desire to understand and to participate in the balance of life. True wealth lies in the bond and in the ethics of care that sustain the continuity between being and environment.

Heidegger pointed out that existence is realized not through control, but through *dwelling* — a sensitive openness and attentiveness to the world. Rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology, this notion is grounded in *care* (*Sorge*) and in listening to Being, in opposition to modern objectification. Indigenous cosmologies echo this understanding: to dwell is to care, to participate, and to respond to the life of the Earth. In both horizons, *being-in-the-world* is relation and co-responsibility.

Amerindian perspectivism, formulated by Viveiros de Castro, extends this comprehension by recognizing agency and interiority in all beings, forming an ontological web without hierarchies. Humans, rivers, and forests are relational subjects that share a common field of meaning.

In a convergent way, Ingold — in his dwelling perspective — shows that human life is constituted through the continuity between technique, sensibility, and belonging, a view that

resonates with the ecophenomenology of philosophers Merleau-Ponty [16] and David Abram [17], for whom body and world are intertwined in lived experience.

To dwell, therefore, is to participate: a relational ontology grounded in care, reciprocity, and communion between humans and the more-than-human. This perspective rejects the commodification of the world and proposes an ethical and aesthetic presence, where knowledge, practice, and sensibility unite in the continuity of life.

The bow and the arrow

The bow bends, the arrow rests, the body aligns: the Kagwahiva hunter becomes an extension of the forest. Every gesture is a dialogue with the environment — the tension of the bow, the wind, the ground, the breath — composing a unity of body, attention, and world. The shot is not merely a technical result, but the expression of this perceptive and sensorial fusion.

Hunting is learning and embodied memory: knowledge manifests itself through gestures and through attentive listening to the surroundings. Each shot is unique, requiring adjustment and presence. In real practice, the hunter anticipates movements, coordinates with the community, and respects the rhythm of the forest. Knowledge is, therefore, lived experience — the convergence of body, mind, and environment.

From this practice emerges a cognitive logic in which *having* — the success of the hunt or the food obtained — is not accumulation, but integration. *Being* is realized in harmony and attentiveness to the flow of life. Heidegger pointed out that being manifests in dwelling and in listening to the world, not in possession; Merleau-Ponty adds that the body is the condition for the possibility of being-in-the-world. Thus, technique, body, and environment are not separate, but compose an ethical and sensorial mode of existence.

Within the perspectivism and multinaturalism of Viveiros de Castro, Indigenous knowledge reveals itself as a way of dwelling in relation. The bow, the arrow, and the body are not instruments of domination, but extensions of a single field of life, where human and forest share agency. To hunt is an act of ontological communication: the forest is not a backdrop, but an interlocutor. Knowledge, far from abstraction, is performative participation — to know is to act-with, to exist in resonance with life.

The experience of the Kagwahiva hunter thus reveals an ontology of relation: the human does not dominate the forest but recognizes themselves as part of its breath. To learn is to exist; and to exist is, always, to be in relation.

Dwelling in the landscape: indigenous architecture as phenomenological practice

Indigenous houses are not built merely with wood and thatch, but with attention, memory, and dialogue with the surroundings. Every element — from the choice of the soil to the orientation of the dwelling — expresses a sensitive reading of the landscape. Architecture thus becomes a form of practical poetry, where body, gaze, and territory intertwine in harmony.

Indigenous constructive knowledge goes beyond technical mastery: it is situated and transmitted experience, grounded in observation and interpretation of the environment. *Having* is not confused with possession, but with understanding and integration. To possess means to comprehend and to respond creatively to the world, transforming it without destroying it. From this arises a cognitive logic in which *being* is realized through conscious practice and ethical connection with the environment.

Heidegger reminds us that *being* manifests itself in *dwelling* — in care and attentiveness to space, rather than control over it. Ingold, in a convergent view, sees the building of a home as a way of being-in-the-world, an expression of the living interaction between body and environment. Bachelard adds that the house is more than a physical shelter: it is a space of memory, imagination, and care, where being finds its anchor and recognition.

The Indigenous house, therefore, is less an object than a gesture: a way of dwelling that integrates technique, experience, and world, revealing an ethical and phenomenological mode of existence in relation to the landscape.

The understanding of space

For Indigenous peoples, the forest is a living space where the visible and the invisible intertwine in a web of meanings accessible only to sensitive attention and a prepared heart. The *evidential paradigm* described by Carlo Ginzburg becomes here a mode of existence: the Indigenous person reads the wind, the mist, the silence, or the footprints as signs of a truth in motion. Every detail is a narrative, and dreams and visions connect the material and spiritual worlds.

Within this horizon, knowledge and experience are inseparable. Indigenous knowing integrates empirical science, cultural memory, and cosmology, making the body and perception instruments for reading reality. The invisible is not abstraction, but a presence that guides and regulates life, sustaining practices of care and balance with the environment.

From this experience arises a cognitive logic in which *having* does not mean possession, but attunement with the world. True wealth lies in perceiving, understanding, and participating in vital flows, recognizing the bond that unites being with its surroundings. The desire to *have* transforms into the desire to *belong* and to interpret the signs that reveal the continuity between human and nature.

Heidegger asserts that *being* manifests itself through dwelling in the world, grounded in care and attentiveness rather than possession. Ingold expands this view by conceiving knowledge as a practice of attention and participation in the flow of life. Ginzburg contributes by proposing the evidential reading as a method to decipher the invisible [18]; and Viveiros de Castro, through Amerindian perspectivism, shows that humans, animals, and spirits share a common relational field of communication and reciprocity.

Thus, learning to read the forest is learning to be: an Indigenous phenomenology of space that transforms dwelling into an ethical, sensitive, and ontological practice, where the visible and the invisible coexist in continuous dialogue.

The indigenous gaze upon the forest

The Indigenous gaze upon the world is at once sensitive and complex, intertwining humans, animals, plants, and rivers in a network of reciprocities. Hunting, planting, or gathering are not mere acts of subsistence, but forms of dialogue with the vital forces that sustain existence. The forest, in this sense, is a living map of meanings, and Indigenous knowledge takes shape as a patrimonial technology, accumulated through observation, practice, and memory.

This traditional knowledge is a dynamic organism that integrates astronomy, medicine, climate, and environmental management within a cosmology uniting body, mind, and territory. Natural spaces are not resources but symbolic and spiritual territories where empiricism and

reverence intertwine. Indigenous sociability — articulated through economy, labor, and ritual — reveals that the meaning of life lies in relation: with others and with the environment. As Viveiros de Castro emphasizes, Amazonian multinaturalism shifts the logic of possession toward a logic of being-with, grounded in interdependence between humans and non-humans.

From this worldview arises a cognitive logic in which *being* is realized through understanding and harmony with the world, not through accumulation. *Having* — food, shelter, knowledge — is legitimate only when aligned with the rhythm of nature and the ethics of care. Heidegger reminds us that *being* reveals itself through dwelling and attentiveness, not possession; Ingold adds that to know is to participate in the vital flow of relations. Descola, in turn, shows that in Indigenous cosmologies, the relationship with nature is ethical and performative, founded on mutual recognition among humans, animals, and spirits.

Indigenous knowledge results from centuries of observation and experimentation and thus requires respect and ethical cooperation on the part of Western science. As a condition of epistemic justice, it is essential to guarantee the self-determination of Indigenous peoples and the collaborative nature of research [19]. However, forced displacement, territorial loss, and landscape fragmentation threaten the continuity of these knowledge systems — conditions further worsened by the dynamics of colonization and globalization. Confronting these vulnerabilities is an urgent task to ensure the vitality of Indigenous cultures and ecologies [20].

The cultivation field as practical philosophy

The cultivation field (*roça*) is more than a productive space: it is a territory of listening, attentiveness, and ancestral memory. Each act of cultivation — from clearing the undergrowth to controlled burning and planting — expresses a dialogue with the earth, where action and time are transformed into wisdom. Fire, far from being destructive, marks the vital cycle that renews the soil and recalls the circularity of existence. Planting and harvesting demand patience and attunement to the rhythms of nature; the harvest is the fruit not only of human labor but of the reciprocity between human will and the generosity of the land.

Transmitted through coexistence and practice, the knowledge of cultivation constitutes a *practical philosophy* — an ethics and aesthetics of everyday life. It teaches that the desire for food and abundance can only be fulfilled through care and understanding of rhythms that surpass the human. Heidegger affirms that *being* is realized through care and attentive dwelling in the world, not through appropriation; Ingold adds that to know is to participate in the vital flow, integrating body, experience, and environment.

From this perspective, *being* and *having* are not opposites: the being who understands transforms desire into care, and care into fulfillment. The *roça* thus becomes a metaphor for existence — a space where learning is relational and having is synonymous with harmony and balance. As Viveiros de Castro and Descola observe, in Amazonian cosmologies knowledge does not seek to dominate but to coexist; it is an epistemology of reciprocity, in which *being* flourishes by desiring wisely, possessing consciously, and living in constant dialogue with the world that sustains it.

Territory and territoriality

The Indigenous territory is more than a physical space: it is a living body, woven from memories, myths, and experiences transmitted through generations. Every tree, river, and shadow holds stories that sustain the bond between humans and nature. The forest is not a

resource but an interlocutor — a source of knowledge revealed through daily practice: in gathering, hunting, agriculture, and rituals that integrate labor and spirituality.

To learn from nature is to learn to listen to it. Indigenous knowledge, as Viveiros de Castro emphasizes, combines practical experience and cosmology: it is not acquired through memorization, but through embodied and relational living. Children and youth learn by observing their elders, assimilating not only techniques but also the connections among species, mythical forces, and stories that structure the world.

Within this logic, the desire to *have* — food, security, well-being — becomes attention and responsibility. Heidegger already indicated that *being* is defined by care, not by appropriation; authentic *having* arises from integration with natural cycles and the recognition of the interdependence between knowledge, experience, and affection.

The territory, therefore, is also the territory of *being*: to exist is to dialogue, to desire is to understand. *Being* and *having* cease to be opposites and become expressions of the same ethical and sensitive consciousness. Fulfillment is not found in possession but in ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual integration with the world. As Ingold observes, to dwell in a territory is to participate in its rhythms and stories — an exercise of perception, embodiment, and care in harmony with the living flow of life.

Traditional knowledge

Indigenous traditional knowledge is more than a set of techniques: it constitutes a way of being formed through attentive listening to the land and reciprocity with the world. Passed down through generations, it is organized like a living cartography — every tree, river, and star serves as a repository of memory and guidance. Among the Apiaká and Kayabi, Indigenous peoples who inhabit the southern Amazon, cosmology is an embodied experience: the sacred permeates daily life, and work expresses sharing and community. As Ingold observes, Indigenous knowledge emerges from gesture, practice, and sensory experience.

The indigenous being is anchored in relationship, not possession. To have is to participate: to have the forest is to be of the forest, to have the territory is to be the territory. Desire, far from representing lack, expresses continuity and connection — to desire to have the land is to desire to continue being the land. Viveiros de Castro shows that, in Amerindian cosmologies, subject and object are inseparable; all existence is defined by reciprocity. Thus, knowing, having, and being are dimensions of the same vital flow that integrates memory, practice, and spirituality.

These knowledges constitute an epistemological heritage of singular value, as they articulate ways of life, spirituality, and ecology within a relational logic, distinct from the nature/culture dualism of modern epistemology. Ailton Krenak reminds us that, for Indigenous peoples, “there is no humanity without nature,” reaffirming the unity between humans and the Earth. In *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World* (2019), Krenak strongly criticizes the separation between “Humanity” and “Nature”: “I do not perceive anything that is not nature. Everything is nature. The cosmos is nature. Everything I am able to think of is nature.” In this sense, Boaventura de Sousa Santos proposes an “ecology of knowledges,” which recognizes the legitimacy of multiple forms of knowledge and fosters horizontal dialogues among them, overcoming the hegemony of the Western scientific model.

Amerindian perspectivism, according to Viveiros de Castro, breaks with the idea of the universality of knowledge and reveals ontologies based on multiplicity and intersubjectivity. Meanwhile, Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, in *The Falling Sky* (2010), highlight the spiritual

and political character of these knowledges, as forms of resistance to environmental and cultural destruction. Recognizing indigenous knowledge as an autonomous epistemology means breaking with the colonial paradigm and affirming the coexistence of diverse rationalities, founded on respect and reciprocity between worlds and ways of knowing.

Knowledge and traditions

Indigenous knowledge and traditions constitute subtle and persistent forms of resistance against Western logic. Their strength lies less in opposition than in continuity: each ritual, gesture, and daily practice weaves collective memory into the living land.

Among the Arara and Juruna, Indigenous people who live in the Xingu River basin in eastern Amazonia, culture is dynamic and relational — the landscape is not a backdrop, but a co-authorship between humans and nature. As Descola observes, in Amerindian cosmologies, nature is an active participant, not a resource. In the Kaiowá villages, located in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, on the borders with Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina, the forests function as living archives: knowledge is transmitted through the body, through practice, and through observation, in a pedagogy of shared experience.

From the indigenous perspective, being and having are not opposed: to have is to connect, not to possess. Western thought has separated being — elevated to essence — from having, reduced to materiality. In indigenous epistemologies, however, to have is to prolong life and reaffirm belonging. To have the land is to be rooted; to have a plant is to recognize oneself in its cycle; to have a myth is to be inhabited by it. The desire to have, therefore, does not fragment being, but strengthens it, for that which is desired expresses the continuity of one's own existence.

Heidegger also links being to care rather than appropriation: to dwell in the world is to participate in it. In this way, within indigenous knowledge, being and having form a vital circularity — like waters that flow and return, like fruits that are reborn. Traditional knowledge reveals that to exist is to care, to desire is to integrate, and to learn is to become part of the life flow that sustains both humans and the world.

Indigenous cosmology

Indigenous cosmology is a living constellation connecting sky, earth, and memory, expressed through everyday life, rituals, and collective practices. As Viveiros de Castro observes, in Amerindian cosmologies the world is not divided into isolated domains; each element maintains a continuous relationship with all others. Cosmogony, therefore, does more than narrate origins: it guides ways of being, uniting the natural, human, and spiritual in a single, vital fabric.

This cosmology is inscribed in territory and practices rather than in books or monuments. Every gesture, ritual, and use of the land conveys thought and ethics, revealing an integration of social organization, religiosity, and labor. Water, for example, is more than a resource: it is both an entity and a memory. Among the Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe, an Indigenous people living in southern Bahia, baptism in rivers represents an encounter with invisible forces that reaffirm collective belonging. Txopay Itôhã, the entity that protects water resources, carries both ecological and mysterious connotations, often associated with a “conservationist ethic” that guides ecologically responsible behavior among those who believe in its real existence. Ingold

emphasizes that in traditional ways of life, non-human elements are active agents, participating in the network of relationships that sustain the world.

Spiritual entities, far from being mere fantasy, regulate behavior and preserve ecological and moral balance. This reciprocity dissolves the boundaries between being and having: the Indigenous person “has” the land, rivers, and myths not through ownership, but through coexistence. Being is realized through having—that is, through participation and belonging. Thus, the desire to have does not represent lack, but continuity: to desire narratives, plants, or entities is to desire the perpetuation of collective being.

Heidegger observes that humans are defined by their care for the world; in Indigenous thought, this care is an expression of reciprocity. Viveiros de Castro reinforces that subjects and objects exist in mutual relation. From this cosmology emerges a circular logic: being affirms itself in the having that constitutes it, and having is a mode of being in belonging. Unlike in Western thought, where the desire to have can empty being, here it strengthens it: to possess is to care, and to desire is to continue being.

Knowledge as a philosophy of being

Indigenous knowledge constitutes a philosophy of being, inscribed in everyday life and in practices that intertwine technique, sensibility, and spirituality. It is not limited to utility but expresses a way of existing based on listening and relating to the world. Every gesture—the management of the land, the reading of tracks, the observation of winds—is an interpretation of signs that reveal the reciprocity between humans and the environment.

The evidential paradigm, as Carlo Ginzburg notes, acquires an ontological dimension here: the hunter who reads tracks is not merely seeking food but deciphering messages from being itself. Convergently, Tim Ingold emphasizes that, in traditional societies, knowledge arises from sensitive interaction rather than abstraction or control. In the Amerindian perspectivism described by Viveiros de Castro, the forest is a conversational partner, not merely a backdrop; each being possesses intentionality and a unique perspective, composing a relational cosmology in which to inhabit is also to be inhabited. This knowledge, woven from experience and myth, technique and intuition, preserves the historical and spiritual continuity of peoples, re-signifying the territory as a living network of reciprocities. For the Mura Indigenous people, who live along the banks of the Amazon River, wealth does not lie in possession but in the interweaving of meanings that unite humans with the cosmos.

From this perspective, the dilemma between being and having takes on new significance. While Western thought associates having with accumulation and domination, Indigenous knowledge integrates it into being as relation and care. The desire to have, when guided by being, transforms into sharing and the recognition of the other—human or non-human—as part of the same vital flow. As Heidegger reminds us, care is the authentic way of existing in relation to the world; among Indigenous peoples, it manifests in attention to the web that sustains life.

Thus, Indigenous knowledge transcends the local and presents itself as an ethical and ontological invitation: to relearn how to read the world through its signs and to recognize that to be is to have in reciprocity—to exist in care, presence, and integration with the whole.

Indigenous agriculture

Among Indigenous peoples, agriculture is more than a productive technique: it is a ritual practice and a philosophy of the land. Each seed sown into the soil carries memory, kinship,

and the promise of continuity. Corn, cassava, and beans are not merely food, but beings participating in a relational cosmology, returning to the community the reciprocity of care. To plant, then, is to renew the pact between humans, plants, animals, and spirits, ensuring the regeneration of the territory.

The cultivated field constitutes both space and time: work, social life, and learning are intertwined within it. The agricultural calendar is not abstract but attuned to the ripening of the ears of corn, the flowering of trees, and the signs of the environment. Ingold notes that, in traditional societies, time is inscribed in the rhythms of life and everyday practices—and it is within this flow that the field becomes a living school, where knowledge is transmitted through gesture and observation.

Women occupy a central role in this process, transforming cultivation into a bond and food into collective memory. Cassava, in its many forms, serves as a symbolic language of sharing and continuity. Children learn from an early age this pedagogy of doing, in which work, play, and belonging merge.

Agricultural management, based on the use of fire and fallow periods, reveals a deep ecological understanding: the resting soil regenerates, and the returning forest reaffirms the cycle of life. Such practice, far from being wasteful, expresses an ethic of reciprocity [21]. Viveiros de Castro observes that, in Amerindian cosmologies, the relationship with nature is not one of appropriation but of correspondence — the field, therefore, is a social and cosmological territory, where cultivation sustains both the body and the meaning of existence.

More than subsistence, Indigenous agriculture is an affirmation of identity and sovereignty. It ensures food autonomy and reaffirms the right to continue being, in harmony with the land that nourishes and is nourished. In this horizon, being and having are not opposed: being grounds having, and to possess means to care. When the desire to have is guided by being, it becomes an act of sharing; when separated from it, it degenerates into exploitation.

The lesson that emerges from this universe is both ethical and ontological: the future does not depend on accumulating the world as a resource, but on inhabiting it as a common home, where planting is participating in life and harvesting is reaffirming the commitment to coexist with all beings that compose the cosmos.

Food security, territory, and the ecology of relations

Expanding this view to the broader framework of food security reveals that nourishment among Indigenous peoples extends far beyond the boundaries of cultivated fields. It also encompasses the forest trails where fruits and oils are gathered, the rivers whose subtle rhythms guide fishing, and the hunting grounds where humans engage in careful diplomacy with animal-persons. In this sense, food security is not a technical metric but a relational and cosmopolitical arrangement — a balance sustained by the agency, intentions, and perspectives of many beings.

Agriculture, gathering, hunting, and fishing compose a single ecological fabric, each reinforcing the others. The forest is not a reserve of resources but a partner; the river is not merely a provider but a teacher. This understanding resonates with Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism, which shows that Indigenous cosmologies articulate correspondences among humans and nonhumans rather than separating nature from culture. Hunting becomes an ethical encounter, fishing a dialogue with aquatic worlds, and gathering an act of listening to the forest's offerings. Food security, therefore, depends on maintaining these relationships—not dominating them.

This relational ecology also depends on a fine-grained attentiveness to signs, cycles, and subtle transformations. Here, Carlo Ginzburg's "evidential paradigm" comes into view: Indigenous knowledge unfolds through the interpretation of clues left by animals, plants, and landscapes. Tracks on the soil, the coloration of leaves, the behavior of fish, the flowering of certain trees — each is a trace that guides subsistence and decision-making. To gather, hunt, or fish is not simply to procure food; it is to read the world's inscriptions with precision and care.

In contrast to industrial systems that rely on homogenization, Indigenous food systems build resilience through diversity: diversity of species, of landscapes, of techniques, and of cosmological relations. This multiplicity strengthens the community's capacity to face climate change, erratic seasons, and uncertainty without weakening the ties that bind them to their territory.

Cultivated fields, forest patches, riverbanks, and hunting paths form part of a single "territorial metabolism," where human and nonhuman lives circulate in continuous exchange. Protecting Indigenous territories is therefore inseparable from protecting food security, for it is in these spaces that knowledge, memory, and sustenance are regenerated. These are not merely ecosystems but multinatural worlds — each inhabited and perceived differently by the beings that compose them.

Indigenous food systems reveal an ethics of regeneration rather than extraction. To plant is to renew a pact with the earth; to gather is to receive what the forest offers without exhausting it; to hunt and fish is to engage in reciprocal diplomacy with other-than-human persons. Abundance arises not from control but from relationship.

Thus, food security emerges as ecological attention and philosophical commitment: the ability to inhabit the world through care, reciprocity, and responsiveness. It is a form of dwelling in which sustenance, knowledge, and responsibility are inseparable. Indigenous practices show that the future of food does not lie in maximizing production but in regenerating the conditions for life to flourish.

The human-animal relationship and the ethics of care

Among Indigenous peoples, the relationship between humans and animals goes beyond practical use: it constitutes a philosophy of existence. The *xerimbabo* — an animal raised with affection — teaches because it affects; it is not a commodity, but a conversational partner. Its companionship is a sensitive pedagogy, in which learning means accompanying, observing, and responding to the world. Ingold notes that knowledge arises from this practice of attention, not from theoretical abstraction. In this way, the *xerimbabo* serves as a mediator between nature and culture, a living presence that links everyday learning with cosmology.

Many of these animals are also mythical figures, carriers of narratives that renew collective memory. As Viveiros de Castro reminds us, in the "Amerindian perspective," each being possesses its own agency and intelligence. Sleeping beside the *xerimbabo* is to rest with a story, reaffirming the continuity between human and non-human. This coexistence manifests what Heidegger calls "being-in-the-world": an existence in which beings are not isolated, but in constant relation.

The *xerimbabo* thus reveals an ethics of care that redefines the bond between being and having. In Western thought, the animal tends to be an object of possession; in Indigenous logic, it is a relational partner. The desire to have, when guided by mercantile logic, transforms the animal into a product; when guided by being, it becomes affection, reciprocity, and responsibility. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) emphasizes

that ethics arises in the encounter with the other — here, the animal is that other, calling forth and inviting care.

Among the Xavante, Kagwahiva, and Bororo, the animal is companion, symbol, and teacher. When hunted, it nourishes the body; when raised, it shares life; when narrated, it reveals cosmologies. In this relational ontology, there is no rigid boundary between human and animal: both participate in the same web of agencies. Indigenous zoological classification, far from being taxonomic, is lived experience — each song, track, or presence indicates environmental rhythms and signals, composing an ecological and symbolic reading of the world.

This vision destabilizes the Western dichotomy between human and animal. While Cartesian thought reduces the animal to a mechanism and capitalism turns it into a resource, Indigenous thought recognizes it as a subject of relation. In Heidegger's "being-with," extended to the non-human sphere, existence is always coexistence.

Indigenous logic shows that the real challenge is not to choose between being and having, but to root having in being. To have, in this context, is to participate and respond; not to dominate, but to care. When the desire to have separates from being, it becomes appropriation and emptiness; when it arises from being, it becomes an ethical act of coexistence. Thus, animals teach — silently — that fulfillment occurs only when being guides having, and that to exist is to inhabit the world in reciprocity with all forms of life.

Extractivism

Among Indigenous peoples, the extraction of fruits and timber is not merely a collection technique, but a practice of communion with the forest. To harvest is to listen to the territory, recognize its rhythms, and reciprocate its generosity. Each fruit taken is an offering and a promise, a gesture of reciprocity with the land that gives and must also rest. Ingold observes that human life is woven in coexistence with other beings, in a learning of accompaniment and attention.

Harvesting is thus an exercise of memory and responsibility: one learns from ancestors the right time to gather and the limit of what is necessary, so that others—human and non-human alike — may also share the food. Viveiros de Castro emphasizes that, in Amerindian practices, the logic of reciprocity and care prevails over that of domination. Extractivism therefore becomes a pedagogy of limits, in which the act of harvesting also entails the duty to give back.

In this ethic, the fruit is not a commodity but an expression of being-with-the-forest. The desire to have, when guided by accumulation, transforms abundance into exhaustion; when guided by being, it becomes sharing and continuity. Heidegger had already indicated that humans reveal themselves only in relation to the world, never through the unilateral appropriation of its objects. Indigenous extractivism thus dissolves the boundary between nature and culture, uniting subsistence and belonging: in harvesting, the Indigenous person reaffirms both identity and connection to the territory.

Timber follows the same principle. For the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon, cutting a tree is a dialogue with invisible forces, not a trivial act. Each species carries meaning — light wood for canoes, hard wood for weapons, flexible wood for bows — and its use involves song, permission, and acknowledgment of the life that is being interrupted. Ingold reminds us that materials actively participate in human experience, shaping gestures and knowledge.

While predatory exploitation turns the forest into a stockpile, Indigenous knowledge is founded on reciprocity: timber is a gift, not a possession. Canoes, houses, and bows are not

neutral objects, but extensions of the forest, expressions of continuity between matter and spirit. In the Indigenous view, humans exist only because the tree exists — the being precedes having.

It follows that extractivism and timber management reveal an ontology of care. The desire to have, when rooted in being, generates balance and continuity; when separated from it, it leads to ruin. Indigenous awareness teaches us that to exist is to recognize limits, and that true having flourishes only when it arises from respect for being.

Indigenous art

Indigenous art is the breath of the forest transformed into gesture. In the hands that weave vines and fibers, a cosmology is expressed that does not separate nature and culture, but intertwines them in continuity. Every body painting, ceramic, or adornment is an expression of an ontology in which technique and myth merge. Viveiros de Castro observes that, in Amerindian cosmology, human action is integrated into a network of relations that includes the natural and the spiritual.

Weaving is a central metaphor of this thought: the interlacing of fibers reflects the Indigenous way of thinking about the world. By crossing strands, objects and relationships are simultaneously constructed—between body and territory, practice and symbolism. Ingold emphasizes that artisanal making is also a form of embodied knowledge, in which gesture and thought fuse. In this sense, basketry is writing without words: its patterns communicate myths, lineages, and teachings, functioning as a visual and sensory pedagogy. Merleau-Ponty had already noted that bodily action is a mode of perceptual engagement with the world.

Extracting raw materials from the forest is, for the Indigenous artist, an act of reciprocity. Wood, seeds, and feathers are not inert resources but living presences that consent to being transformed. To create is to prolong the cycle of life, not to interrupt it. The final object—basket, necklace, or instrument — maintains a bond with the being that originated it, reaffirming continuity between human and non-human.

From a philosophical perspective, Indigenous art reflects the relationship between being and having. While in Western logic, owning a work signals property, in Indigenous cosmologies, having exists only as an extension of being. The basket belongs both to the forest and to the artisan; the ornament, to the body and to the bird. The desire to have, mediated by reciprocity, becomes communion. Heidegger reminds us that humans realize themselves in openness to the world, not in the appropriation of objects.

Thus, weaving reveals a fundamental cognitive logic: being is constituted through interlacement with the world. The desire to have, when divorced from this awareness, degenerates into voracity; when guided by care, it becomes continuity and belonging. Indigenous artistic traditions, especially weaving and basketry, configure ways of existing that unite aesthetics, ethics, and cosmology. Being finds fulfillment in shared creation, and having acquires meaning only when recognized as an act of care and communion.

Skin as language: impermanence in indigenous body painting

Among Indigenous peoples, body painting is skin transformed into language: a living surface where the body becomes both text and presence. Each line and color is memory, a symbolic inscription of a cosmology in which living is communicating with the world. Viveiros de Castro observes that, in Amerindian ontology, existence manifests through relationships and signs, not through accumulable objects.

In rituals, painting transforms the body into a collective territory, articulating bonds between humans, ancestors, and spirits. In everyday life, it reaffirms identity as a relational gesture, reminding that the body is a medium of communication and protection. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the body is an embodied expression of perception, a vehicle for knowledge and presence.

The act of painting oneself is also pedagogy: elders teach the young the patterns, the pigments, and their meanings. To paint is to learn how to inhabit the world, recognizing that the body belongs to the community and the cosmos. Each line is teaching, each color, narrative. Ingold emphasizes that human making, by incorporating living materials, constitutes a form of knowledge and a way of being.

Philosophically, the painted body expresses the tension between being and having. In Western logic, painting tends to be an object of possession; among Indigenous peoples, it is lived—it is ephemeral, yet it is precisely in this transitory nature that its strength lies. The desire to have, when oriented toward accumulation, reaches its limit: the pigment fades, but meaning remains. What endures is the shared experience and transmitted knowledge. Heidegger reminds us that humans realize themselves in openness to the world, not in the appropriation of objects.

The painted body is thus a passage between worlds: in it, being is revealed in the ephemeral, and having dissolves into sharing. The impermanence of the pigment expresses an ontology that recognizes time as a collaborator of form, akin to the wabi-sabi aesthetic, which celebrates the beauty of transience. The painted Indigenous person does not “have” a painting — they “are” the painting, a living sign in continuous relation with the world.

Indigenous body painting therefore challenges the Western logic of permanence and possession. The body becomes a dwelling of art and cosmology, and the desire to have transforms into the desire to be. What fades on the skin remains in the spirit: true possession is lived experience, not retained object. Between being and having, painting teaches that to live is to allow the trace to vanish, for the permanence of being resides in the movement of life.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The reflections presented throughout the chapters demonstrate that, in Indigenous cosmologies, being constitutes the foundation of all relations with the world. Having, when guided by this relational ontology, ceases to be appropriation and becomes a gesture of communion. Working the land, managing timber, weaving fibers, painting the body, and coexisting with animals reveal an expanded conception of humanity, in which existence is inseparable from respect for otherness and for nature.

While Western rationality was built upon the distinction between subject and object, culture and nature, Indigenous peoples live a philosophy of correspondence, in which humans recognize themselves as part of the forest, the river, and the cosmos. This perspective reconfigures the meanings of art, economy, and knowledge, understanding them as expressions of being-with rather than as forms of domination.

The analysis thus proposes an epistemological shift: learning from Indigenous peoples is not merely about incorporating ecological knowledge, but about adopting an ontological ethic that recognizes life as a web of relationships. Indigenous thought challenges the paradigm of accumulation and offers pathways toward a more sensitive modernity, founded on reciprocity, attentive listening, and impermanence. Ultimately, what these cosmologies teach is that the

fullness of having is realized only when being guides it—when possessing means caring, sharing, and coexisting.

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