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Cannibal Metaphysics

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Edited and Translated by Peter Skafish

CANNIBAL METAPHYSICS

FOR A POST-STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO

translated and edited by Peter Skafish

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by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

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Table of Contents

PART FOUR
The Cannibal Cogito

Everything must be interpreted as intensity
—*Anti-Oedipus*

Chapter One

A Remarkable Reversal

I once had the intention of writing a book that would have been something of a homage to Deleuze and Guattari from the point of view of my discipline; it would have been called *Anti-Narcissus: Anthropology as Minor Science*. The idea was to characterize the conceptual tensions animating contemporary anthropology. From the moment I had the title, however, the problems began. I quickly realized that the project verged on complete contradiction, and the least misstep on my part could have resulted in a mess of not so anti-narcissistic provocations about the excellence of the positions to be professed.

It was then that I decided to raise the book to the rank of those fictional works (or, rather, invisible works) that Borges was the best at commenting on and that are often far more interesting than the visible works themselves (as one can be convinced of in reading the accounts of them furnished by that great blind reader). Rather than write the book itself, I found it more opportune to write about it as if others had written it. *Cannibal Metaphysics* is therefore a beginner's guide to another book, entitled *Anti-Narcissus*, that because it was endlessly imagined, ended up not existing—unless in the pages that follow.

The principal objective of *Anti-Narcissus*, in order to place my mark on the "ethnographic" present, is to address the following question: what do anthropologists owe, conceptually, to the people they study? The implications of this question would doubtlessly seem clearer were the problem approached from the other end. Are the differences and mutations internal to anthropological

theory principally due to the structures and conjunctures (criticohistorically understood) of the social formations, ideological debates, intellectual fields and academic contexts from which anthropologists themselves emerge? Is that really the only relevant hypothesis? Couldn't one shift to a perspective showing that the source of the most interesting concepts, problems, entities and agents introduced into thought by anthropological theory is in the imaginative powers of the societies—or, better, the peoples and collectives—that they propose to explain? Doesn't the originality of anthropology instead reside there, in this always-equivocal but often fecund alliance between the conceptions and practices that arise from the worlds of the so-called "subject" and "object" of anthropology?

The question of *Anti-Narcissus* is thus epistemological, meaning political. If we are all more or less agreed that anthropology, even if colonialism was one of its historical *a prioris*, is today nearing the end of its karmic cycle, then we should also accept that the time has come to radicalize the reconstitution of the discipline by forcing the process to its completion. Anthropology is ready to fully assume its new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought.

But perhaps not *everyone* is in agreement. There are those who still believe that anthropology is the mirror of society. Not, certainly, of the societies it claims to study—of course no one is as ingenuous as that anymore (whatever ...)—but of those whose guts its intellectual project was engendered in. We all know the popularity enjoyed in some circles by the thesis that anthropology, because it was supposedly exoticist and primitivist from birth, could only be a perverse theater where the Other is always "represented" or "invented" according to the sordid interests of the West. No history or sociology can camouflage the complacent paternalism of this thesis, which simply transfigures the so-called others into fictions of the Western imagination in which they lack a speaking part. Doubling this subjective phantasmagoria with the familiar appeal to the dialectic of the objective production of the Other by the colonial system simply piles insult upon injury, by proceeding as if every "European" discourse on peoples of non-European tradition(s) serves only to illumine our "representations of the other," and even thereby making a certain theoretical postcolonialism

the ultimate stage of ethnocentrism. By always seeing the Same in the Other, by thinking that under the mask of the other it is always just "us" contemplating ourselves, we end up complacently accepting a shortcut and an interest only in what is "of interest to us"—ourselves.

On the contrary, a veritable anthropology, as Patrice Maniglier has put it, "returns to us an image in which we are unrecognizable to ourselves," since every experience of another culture offers us an occasion to engage in experimentation with our own—and far more than an imaginary variation, such a thing is the putting into variation of our imagination (Maniglier 2005b: 773-4). We have to grasp the consequences of the idea that those societies and cultures that are the object of anthropological research influence, or, to put it more accurately, coproduce the theories of society and culture that it formulates. To deny this would be to accept a particular kind of constructivism that, at the risk of imploding in on itself, inevitably ends up telling the same simple story: anthropology always poorly constructed its objects, but when the authors of the critical denunciations put pen to paper, the lights came on, and it begin to construct them correctly. In effect, an examination of the readings of Fabian's *Time and the Other* (1983) and its numerous successors makes it impossible to know if we are once again faced with a spasm of cognitive despair before the inaccessibility of the thing in itself or the old illuminist thaumaturgy where an author purports to incarnate a universal reason come to scatter the darkness of superstition—no longer that of indigenous peoples, rest assured, but of the authors who proceeded him. The de-exoticization of the indigenous, which is not so far from all this, has the counter-effect of a rather strong exoticization of the anthropologist, which is also lurking nearby. Proust, who knew a thing or two about time and the other, would have said that nothing appears older than the recent past.

Disabling this type of epistemo-political reflex is one of the principal objectives of *Anti-Narcissus*. In order to accomplish this, however, the last thing we should do is commit anthropology to a servile relationship with economics or sociology whereby it would be made, in a spirit of obsequious emulation, to adopt the metanarratives promulgated by these two sciences, the principal function of which would seem to be the repressive recontextualization

of the existential practice(s) of all the collectives of the world in terms of "the thought collective" of the analyst (Englund and Leach 2000: 225-48).[1] The position argued here, on the contrary, affirms that anthropology should remain in open air continuing to be an art of distances keeping away from the ironic recesses of the Occidental soul (while the Occident may be an abstraction, its soul definitely is not), and remain faithful to the project of the externalization of reason that has always so insistently pushed it, much too often against its will, outside the stifling bedroom of the Same. The viability of an authentic endoanthropology, an aspiration that has for numerous reasons come to have first priority on the disciplinary agenda, thus depends in a crucial way on the theoretical ventilation that has always been favored by exoanthropology—a "field science" in a truly important sense.

The aim of *Anti-Narcissus*, then, is to illustrate the thesis that every nontrivial anthropological theory is a *version* of an indigenous practice of knowledge, all such theories being situatable in strict structural continuity with the intellectual pragmatics of the collectives that have historically occupied the position of object in the discipline's gaze.[2] This entails outlining a performative description of the discursive transformations of anthropology at the origin of the internalization of the transformational condition of the discipline as such, which is to say the (of course theoretical) fact that it is the discursive anamorphosis of the ethnoanthropologies of the collectives studied. By using the example, to speak of something close at hand, of the Amazonian notions of perspectivism and multinaturalism—the author is an Americanist ethnologist—the intention of *Anti-Narcissus* is to show that the styles of thought proper to the collectives that we study are the motor force of anthropology. A more profound examination of these styles and their implications, particularly from the perspective of the elaboration of an anthropological concept of the concept, should be capable of showing their importance to the genesis,

1. See also Lévi-Strauss' distinction between anthropology, a "centrifugal science" adopting "the perspective of immanence," and economics and sociology, the "centripetal sciences" that attribute a "transcendental value" to the societies of the observer (1978[1964]: 307-8).

2. This does not at all mean that the former and the latter are epistemologically homogeneous from the point of view of the techniques in play and the problems implied. See Strathern (1987).

now underway, of a completely different conception of anthropological practice. In sum, a new anthropology of the concept capable of counter-effectuating a new concept of anthropology, after which the descriptions of the conditions of the ontological self-determination of the collectives studied will absolutely prevail over the reduction of human (as well as nonhuman) thought to a *dispositif* of recognition: classification, predication, judgment, and representation.... Anthropology as comparative ontography (Holbraad 2003: 39–77)—*that* is the true point of view of immanence.[3] Accepting the importance of and opportunity presented by this task of thinking thought otherwise is to incriminate oneself in the effort to forge an anthropological theory of the conceptual imagination, one attuned to the creativity and reflexivity of every collective, human or otherwise.

Thus the intention behind the title of the book I am describing is to suggest that our discipline is already in the course of writing the first chapters of a great book that would be like its *Anti-Oedipus*. Because if Oedipus is the protagonist of the founding myth of psychoanalysis, our book proposes Narcissus as the candidate for patron saint or tutelary spirit of anthropology, which (above all in its so-called "philosophical" version) has always been a little too obsessed with determining the attributes or criteria that fundamentally distinguish the subject of anthropological discourse from everything it is not: *them* (which really in the end means us), the non-Occidentals, the nonmoderns, the nonhumans. In other words, what is it that the others "have not" that constitutes them as non-Occidental and nonmodern? Capitalism? Rationality? Individualism and Christianity? (Or, perhaps more modestly, *pace* Goody: alphabetic writing and the marriage dowry?) And what about the even more gaping absences that would make certain others nonhumans (or, rather, make the nonhumans the true others)? An immortal soul? Language? Labor? The *Lichtung*? Prohibition? Neoteny? Metaintentionality?

3. This perspective on immanence is not exactly the same as that of Lévi-Straus in the passage cited above.

All these absences resemble each other. For in truth, taking them for the problem is exactly the problem, which thus contains the form of the response: the form of a Great Divide, the same gesture of exclusion that made the human species the biological analogue of the anthropological West, confusing all the other species and peoples in a common, privative alterity. Indeed, asking what distinguishes us from the others—and it makes little difference who "they" are, since what really matters in that case is only "us"—is already a response.

The point of contesting the question, "what is (proper to) Man?" then, is absolutely not to say that "Man" has no essence, that his existence precedes his essence, that the being of Man is freedom and indetermination, but to say that the question has become, for all-too obvious historical reasons, one that it is impossible to respond to without dissimulation, without, in other words, continuing to repeat that the chief property of Man is to have no final properties, which apparently earns Man unlimited rights to the properties of the other. This response from our intellectual tradition, which justifies anthropocentrism on the basis of this human "impropriety," is that absence, finitude and lack of being [*manque-à-être*] are the distinctions that the species is doomed to bear, to the benefit (as some would have us believe) of the rest of the living. The burden of man is to be the universal animal, he for whom there exists a universe, while nonhumans, as we know (but how in the devil do we know it?), are just "poor in world" (not even a lark …). As for non-Occidental humans, something quietly leads us to suspect that where the world is concerned, they end up reduced to its smallest part. We and we alone, the Europeans,[4] would be the realized humans, or, if you prefer, the grandiosely unrealized: the millionaires, accumulators, and configurers of worlds. Western metaphysics is truly the *fons et origio* of every colonialism.

In the event that the problem changes, so too will the response. Against the great dividers, a minor anthropology would make small multiplicities proliferate—not the narcissism of small differences but the anti-narcissism of continuous variations; against all the finished-and-done humanisms, an "interminable humanism" that constantly challenges the constitution of

4. I include myself among them out of courtesy.

humanity into a separate order (see Maniglier 2000: 216-41). I will re-emphasize it: such an anthropology would make multiplicities proliferate. Because it is not at all a question, as Derrida opportunely recalled (2008), of preaching the abolition of the borders that unite/separate sign and world, persons and things, "us" and "them," "humans" and "nonhumans"—easy reductionisms and mobile monisms are as out of the question as fusional fantasies—but rather of "unreducing" [*irréduire*] (Latour) and undefining them, by bending every line of division into an infinitely complex curve. It is not a question of erasing the contours but of folding and thickening them, diffracting and rendering them iridescent. "This is what we are getting at: a generalized chromaticism" (D. G. 1987). Chromaticism as the structuralist vocabulary with which the agenda for its posterity will be written.

The draft of *Anti-Narcissus* has begun to be completed by certain anthropologists who are responsible for a profound renewal of the discipline. Although they are all known figures, their work has not at all received the recognition and diffusion it deserves—even, and especially in the instance of their own countries of origin. I am referring in the last case to the American Roy Wagner, who should be credited with the extremely rich notion of "reverse anthropology," a dizzying semiotics of "invention" and "convention," and his visionary outline of an anthropological concept of the concept; but I am also thinking of the English anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, to whom we owe the deconstruction/potentiation of feminism and anthropology, just as we do the central tenets of an indigenous aesthetic and analysis forming the two flanks of a Melanesian anti-critique of Occidental reason, and even the invention of a properly post-Malinowskian mode of ethnographic description; and to that Bourguignon Bruno Latour and his transontological concepts of the collective and the actor-network, the paradoxical movement of our never-having-been modern, and the anthropological re-enchantment of scientific practice. And to these can be added many others, recently arrived, but who will

go unnamed since it would be largely impossible to do otherwise without some injustice, whether by omission or commission.[5]

But well before all of them (cited or not) there was Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work has a face turned toward anthropology's past, which it crowns, and another looking into and anticipating its future. If Rousseau, by the former's account, ought to be regarded as the founder of the human sciences, then Lévi-Strauss deserves to be credited not only with having refounded them with structuralism but also with virtually "un-founding" them by pointing the way toward an anthropology of immanence, a path he only took "like Moses conducting his people all the way to a promised land whose splendor he would never behold" and perhaps never truly entered.[6] In conceiving anthropological knowledge as a transformation of indigenous practice—"anthropology," as he said, "seeks to elaborate the social science of the observed"—and the *Mythologiques* as "the myth of mythology," Lévi-Strauss laid down the milestones of a philosophy to come (Hamberger 2004: 345) one positively marked by a seal of interminability and virtuality.[7]

Claude Lévi-Strauss as the founder, yes, of *post*-structuralism.... Just a little more than ten years ago, in the afterward to a volume of *L'Homme* devoted to an appraisal of the structuralist heritage in kinship studies, the dean of our craft made this equally penetrating and decisive statement:

> One should note that, on the basis of a critical analysis of the notion of affinity, conceived by South American Indians as the point of articulation between opposed terms—human and divine, friend and foe, relative and stranger—our Brazilian colleagues have come to extract what could be called a metaphysics of predation. [...] Without a doubt, this approach is not free from the dangers that threaten any hermeneutics: that we insidiously begin to think on behalf of

5. An exception must be made for Tim Ingold, who (along with Philippe Descola, about whom we will have occasion to speak later) is doubtlessly the anthropologist who has done the most to undermine the ontological partitions of our intellectual tradition, particularly those that separate "humanity" from the "environment" (see Ingold 2000). However insightful, Ingold's work as a whole nonetheless owes a great deal to phenomenology, which means that its relations with the concepts and authors at the heart of the present book are largely indirect.

6. This allusion to Moses can be found in *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (L.-S. 1987a).

7. On the philosophy to come of Lévi-Strauss, see Klaus Hamberger (2004).

> those we believe to understand, and that we make them say more than what they think, or something else entirely. Nobody can deny, nonetheless, that it has changed the terms in which certain big problems were posed, such as cannibalism and headhunting. From this current of ideas, a general impression results: whether we rejoice in or recoil from it, philosophy is once again center stage. No longer our philosophy, the one that my generation wished to cast aside with the help of exotic peoples; but, in a remarkable reversal [*un frappant retour des choses*], theirs. (L.-S. 2000: 719-20)

The observation marvelously sums up, as we will see, the content of this present book, which is, in fact, being written by one of these Brazilian colleagues.[8] Indeed, not only do we take as one of our ethnographic axes this properly metaphysical use South American Indians make of the notion of affinity, but we sketch, moreover, a reprise of the problem of the relation between, on the one hand, the two philosophies evoked by Lévi-Strauss in a mode of non-relation—"ours" and "theirs"—and, on the other hand, the philosophy to come that structuralism projected.

For whether we rejoice in it or recoil from it, what is really at stake is philosophy.... Or, rather, the re-establishment of a certain connection between anthropology and philosophy via a new consideration of the transdisciplinary problematic that was constituted at the imprecise frontier between structuralism and poststructuralism during that brief moment of effervescence and generosity of thought that immediately preceded the conservative revolution that has, in recent decades, showed itself particularly efficacious at transforming the world, both ecologically and politically, into something perfectly suffocating.

A double trajectory, then: an at once anthropological and philosophical reading informed, on the one hand, by Amazonian thought—it is absolutely essential to recall what Taylor (2004: 97) has stressed are "the Amerindian foundations of structuralism"—and, on the other, by the "dissident structuralism" of Gilles Deleuze (Lapoujade 2006). The destination, moreover, is also double, comprising the ideal of anthropology as a

8. See my (2001a) "A propriedade do conceito: sobre o plano de imanência amerindio" for another commentary on this passage, which has also been brilliantly discussed by Maniglier (2005a).

permanent exercise in the decolonization of thought, and a proposal for another means besides philosophy for the creation of concepts.

But in the end, anthropology is what is at stake. The intention behind this tour through our recent past is in effect far more prospective than nostalgic, the aspiration being to awaken certain possibilities and glimpse a break in the clouds through which our discipline could imagine, at least for itself qua intellectual project, a denouement (to dramatize things a bit) other than mere death by asphyxia.

Chapter Two

Perspectivism

Such a requalification of the anthropological agenda was what Tânia Stolze Lima and I wanted to contribute to when we proposed the concept of Amerindian *perspectivism* as the reconfiguration of a complex of ideas and practices whose power of intellectual disturbance has never been sufficiently appreciated (even if they found the word relevant) by Americanists, despite its vast diffusion in the New World.[9] To this we added the synoptic concept of *multinaturalism*, which presented Amerindian thought as an unsuspected partner, a dark precursor if you will, of certain contemporary philosophical programs, like those developing around theories of possible worlds, others that refuse to operate within the vicious dichotomies of modernity, or still others that, having registered the end of the hegemony of the kind of critique that demands an epistemological response to every ontological question, are slowly defining new lines of flight for thought under the rallying cries of transcendental empiricism and speculative realism.

The two concepts emerged following an analysis of the cosmological presuppositions of "the metaphysics of predation" evoked

9. For the chief formulations of the idea, see Tânia Stolze Lima, "The Two and Its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tuna Cosmology" (1999[1996]), and *Um Peixe Olhou para Mim: O Povo Yudjá e a Perspectiva* (2005). See also Viveiros de Castro "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism" (1998), 'Perspectivisimo e multinaturalismo na América indígena' (2002a), "Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation" (2004a), and "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Cosmologies" (2004b). In what follows, I repeat themes and passages from these articles already known to the anthropological public, but which other readers will benefit from having reprised.

in the last chapter. We found that this metaphysics, as can be deduced from Lévi-Strauss' summary of it, reaches its highest expression in the strong speculative yield of those indigenous categories denoting matrimonial alliance, phenomena that I translated with yet another concept: *virtual affinity*.[10] Virtual affinity is the schematism characteristic of what Deleuze would have called the "Other-structure"[11] of Amerindian worlds and is indelibly marked by cannibalism, which is an omnipresent motif in their inhabitants' relational imagination. Interspecific perspectivism, ontological multinaturalism and cannibal alterity thus form the three aspects of an indigenous alter-anthropology that is the symmetrical and reverse transformation of Occidental anthropology—as symmetrical in Latour's sense as it is reverse in the sense of Wagner's "reverse anthropology." By drawing this triangle, we can enter into the orbit of one of the philosophies of "the exotic peoples" that Lévi-Strauss opposed to ours and attempt, in other words, to realize something of the imposing program outlined in the fourth chapter, "Geophilosophy," of *What Is Philosophy?* ... even if it will be at the price—but one we should always be ready to pay—of a certain methodological imprecision and intentional ambiguity.

Our work's perfectly contingent point of departure was the sudden perception of a resonance between the results of our research on Amazonian cosmopolitics—on its notion of a perspectivist multiplicity intrinsic to the real—and a well-known parable on the subject of the conquest of the Americans recounted by Lévi-Strauss in *Race and History*:

> In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards sent out investigating commissions to ascertain whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter were engaged in the drowning of white prisoners in order to verify, through prolonged watching, whether or not their corpses were subject to putrification. (L.-S. 1978b[1952]: 329)

10. Viveiros de Castro 2001b; 2002b. See below, chapter 11.

11. Deleuze 1990a.

In this conflict between the two anthropologies, the author perceived a baroque allegory of the fact that one of the typical manifestations of human nature is the negation of its own generality. A kind of congenital avarice preventing the extension of the predicates of humanity to the species as a whole appears to be one of its predicates. In sum, ethnocentrism could be said to be like good sense, of which perhaps it is just the apperceptive moment: the best distributed thing in the world. The format of the lesson is familiar, but that does not lessen its sting. Overestimating one's own humanity to the detriment of the contemptible other's reveals one's deep resemblance with it. Since the other of the Same (of the European) shows itself to be the same as the Other's other (of the indigenous), the Same ends up unwittingly showing itself to be the same as the Other.

The anecdote fascinated Lévi-Strauss enough for him to repeat it in *Tristes Tropiques*. But there he added a supplementary, ironic twist, this time noting a difference (rather than this resemblance) between the parties. While the Europeans relied on the social sciences in their investigations of the humanity of the other, the Indians placed their faith in the natural sciences; and where the former proclaimed the Indians to be animals, the latter were content to suspect the others might be gods. "Both attitudes show equal ignorance," Lévi-Strauss concluded, "but the Indian's behavior certainly had greater dignity" (1992: 76). If this is really how things transpired,[12] it forces us to conclude that, despite being just as ignorant on the subject of the other, the other of the Other was not exactly the same as the other of the Same. We could even say that it was its exact opposite, if not for the fact that the relation between these two others of humanity—animality and divinity—is conceived in indigenous worlds in completely different terms than those we have inherited from Christianity. The rhetorical contrast Lévi-Strauss draws succeeds because it

12. As Marshall Sahlins observed in *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (1995), the association of colonial invaders with local divinities, a phenomenon observed in diverse encounters between the Moderns and indigenous peoples, says much more about what the Indians thought about divinity than about what they thought of Europeanness or modernity.

appeals to *our* cosmological hierarchies rather than those of the Taino.[13]

In any case, consideration of this disequilibrium was what led us to the hypothesis that Amerindian ontological regimes diverge from those widespread in the West precisely with regard to the inverse semiotic functions they respectively attribute to soul and body. The marked dimension for the Spanish was the soul, whereas the Indian emphasized the body. The Europeans never doubted that the Indians had bodies—animals have them too—and the Indians in turn never doubted that the Europeans had souls, since animals and the ghosts of the dead do as well. Thus the Europeans' ethnocentrism consisted in doubting that the body of the other contained a soul formally similar to the one inhabiting their own bodies, while the ethnocentrism of the Indians, on the contrary, entailed doubting that the others' souls or spirits could possess a body materially similar to theirs.[14]

◊ In the semiotic terms of Roy Wagner, a Melanesianist who will quickly reveal himself to be a crucial intercessor in the theory of Amerindian perspectivism, the body belongs to the innate or spontaneous dimension of European ontology ("nature"), which is the counter-invented result of an operation of conventionalist symbolization, while the soul would be the constructed dimension, the fruit of a "differentiating" symbolization that "specifies and renders concrete the conventional world by tracing radical distinctions and concretizing the singular individuals of this world" (Wagner 1981: 42). In indigenous worlds, on the contrary,

13. The anecdote was taken from Oviedo's *History of the Indians*; it would have taken place in Hispanolia, in the inquiry undertaken in 1517 by priests of the order of St. Jerome in the colonies, and Puerto Rico, with the submergence of a young Spaniard, who was caught and then drowned by Indians. It is an argument that, moreover, demonstrates the necessity of pushing the archaeology of the human sciences back until at least the controversy of Valladolid (1550–51), the celebrated debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda on the subject of the nature of American Indians. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (1982).

14. The old notion of the soul has been going incognito ever since it was rechristened as culture, the symbolic, mind, etc.... The theological problem of the soul of others became the philosophical puzzle of "the problem of other minds," which currently extends so far as to include neurotechnological inquiries on human consciousness, the minds of animals, the intelligence of machines (the gods have apparently transferred themselves into Intel microprocessors). In the last two cases, the question concerns whether certain animals would not, after all, have something like a soul or a consciousness—perhaps even a culture—and, reciprocally, if certain material non-autopoietic systems lacking, in other words, a true body could show themselves capable of intentionality.

the soul "is experienced as … a manifestation of the conventional order implicit in everything" and "sums up the ways in which its possessor is similar to others, over and above the ways in which he differs from them" (Wagner 1981: 94); the body, on the contrary, belongs to the sphere of what comes from the responsibility of agents and is one of the fundamental figures of something that has to be constructed against a universal and innate ground of an "immanent humanity" (Wagner 1981: 86-9).[15] In short, European praxis consists in "making souls" (and differentiating cultures) on the basis of a given corporeal-material ground—nature—while indigenous praxis consists in "making bodies" (and differentiating species) on the basis of a socio-spiritual continuum, itself also given … but in myth, as we will see.

Wagner's conceptually dense and quite original theoretical system resists didactic summary; thus we request that the reader directly engage its most elegant and realized presentation in *The Invention of Culture*. *Grosso modo*, the Wagnerian semiotic can be said to be a theory of human and nonhuman practice conceived as exhaustively consisting in the reciprocal, recursive operation of two modes of symbolization: (1) a collectivizing, conventional (or literal) symbolism where signs are organized in standardized contexts (semantic domains, formal languages, etc.) to the extent that they are opposed to a heterogeneous plane of "referents"—that is, they are seen as symbolizing something other than themselves; and (2) a differentiating, inventive (or figurative) mode in which the world of phenomena represented by conventional symbolization is understood to be constituted by "symbols representing themselves," that is, events that simultaneously manifest as symbols and referents, thereby dissolving the conventional contrast. It should be observed, first of all, that the world of referents or the "real" is defined here as a semiotic effect: what is other to a sign is another sign having the singular capacity of "representing itself." The mode of existence of actual entities qua events or occasions is a tautegory. It should be stressed that the contrast between the two modes is itself the result of a conventionalist operation (and perception): the distinction between invention and convention is itself conventional, but at the same time every convention is produced through a counter-invention. The contrast is thus intrinsically recursive, especially if we understand that human cultures are fundamentally in conflict over the mode of symbolization they (conventionally) privilege as an element appropriated for action or invention, in reserving to the other the function of the "given." Cultures, human macrosystems of conventions, are distinguished by what they define as belonging to the sphere of the responsibilities of agents—the mode of the constructed—

15. Here I am myself "innovating" on Wagner, who does not raise in *The Invention of Culture* the question of the status of the body in the "differentiating" cultures.

and by what belongs (because it is counter-constructed as belonging) to the world of the given or non-constructed.

> The core of any and every set of cultural conventions is a simple distinction as to what kind of contexts—the nonconventionalized ones or those of convention itself—are to be deliberately articulated in the course of human action, and what kind of contexts are to be counter-invented as "motivation" under the conventional mask of "the given" or "the innate." Of course [...] there are only two possibilities: a people who deliberately differentiate as the form of their action will invariably counter-invent a motivating collectivity as "innate," and a people who deliberately collectivize will counter-invent a motivating differentiation in this way. (Wagner 1981: 51)

The anthropological chiasm Lévi-Strauss opened up via the Antilles incident is in accord with two characteristics of Amazonian cosmology recently distinguished by its ethnography. First, it unexpectedly confirmed the importance of an economy of *corporeality* at the very heart of those ontologies recently redefined (in what will be seen to be a somewhat unilateral fashion) as animist.[16] I say "confirmed" because this was something that had already been abundantly demonstrated in the *Mythologiques*, as long as they are taken literally and thus understood as a mythic transformation of the mythic transformations that were their object. In other words, they describe, in prose wedding Cartesian rigor to Rabelaisian verve, an indigenous anthropology formulated in terms of organic fluxes, material codings, sensible multiplicities, and becomings-animal instead of in the spectral terms of our own anthropology, whose juridical-theological grisaille (the rights, duties, rules, principles, categories and moral persons conceptually formative of the discipline) simply overwhelms it.[17]

16. The theme of animism was recently reanimated by Philippe Descola (1992, 1996) who of course pays unstinting attention to Amazonian materials.

17. See A. Seeger, R. DaMatta and E. Viveiros de Castro, 1979 for a first formulation of the problematic of corporeality in indigenous America. Because it explicitly relied on the *Mythologiques*, this work was developed without the least connection to the theme of embodiment that would take anthropology by storm in the decades to follow. The structuralist current of Amerindian ethnology, deaf to what Deleuze and Guattari called the "at once pious and sensual" appeal to phenomenological "fleshism"—the appeal to "rotten wood," as a reader of *The Raw and The Cooked* would say—always thought incarnation from the perspective of the culinary triangle rather than the holy Trinity.

Second, Amazonianists have also perceived certain theoretical implications of this non-marked or generic status of the virtual dimension or "soul" of existents, a chief premise of a powerful indigenous intellectual structure that is *inter alia* capable of providing a counter-description of the image drawn of it by Western anthropology and thereby capable, again, of "returning to us an image in which we are unrecognizable to ourselves." This double, materialist-speculative twist, applied to the usual psychological and positivist representation of animism, is what we called "perspectivism," by virtue of the analogies, as much constructed as observed, with the philosophical thesis associated with this term found in Leibniz, Nietzsche, Whitehead and Deleuze.

As various ethnographers have noted (unfortunately too often only in passing), virtually all peoples of the New World share a conception of the world as composed of a multiplicity of points of view. Every existent is a center of intentionality apprehending other existents according to their respective characteristics and powers. The presuppositions and consequences of this idea are nevertheless irreducible to the current concept of relativism that they would, at first glance, seem to evoke. They are, in fact, instead arranged on a plane orthogonal to the opposition between relativism and universalism. Such resistance on the part of Amerindian perspectivism to the terms of our epistemological debates casts suspicion on the transposability of the ontological partitions nourishing them. This is the conclusion a number of anthropologists arrived at (although for very different reasons) when asserting that the nature/culture distinction—that first article of the Constitution of anthropology, whereby it pledges allegiance to the ancient matrix of Western metaphysics—cannot be used to describe certain dimensions or domains internal to non-Occidental cosmologies without first making them the object of rigorous ethnographic critique.

In the present case, such a critique demanded the redistribution of the predicates arranged in the paradigmatic series of "nature" and "culture": universal and particular, objective and subjective, physical and moral, the given and the instituted, necessity

and spontaneity, immanence and transcendence, body and spirit, animality and humanity, and so on. The new order of this other conceptual map led us to suggest that the term "multinaturalism" could be used to designate one of the most distinctive traits of Amerindian thought, which emerges upon its juxtaposition with modern, multiculturalist cosmologies: where the latter rest on the mutual implication between the unicity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures—the first being guaranteed by the objective universality of bodies and substance, and the second engendered by the subjective particularity of minds and signifiers (cf. Ingold 1991)—the Amerindian conception presupposes, on the contrary, a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies. "Culture" or subject as the form of the universal, and "nature" or object as the particular.

The ethnography of indigenous America is replete with references to a cosmopolitical theory describing a universe inhabited by diverse types of actants or subjective agents, human or otherwise—gods, animals, the dead, plants, meteorological phenomena, and often objects or artifacts as well—equipped with the same general ensemble of perceptive, appetitive, and cognitive dispositions: with the same kind of soul. This interspecific resemblance includes, to put it a bit performatively, the same mode of apperception: animals and other nonhumans having a soul "see themselves as persons" and therefore "are persons": intentional, double-sided (visible and invisible) objects constituted by social relations and existing under a double, at once reflexive and reciprocal—which is to say collective—pronominal mode. What these persons see and thus are as persons, however, constitutes the very philosophical problem posed by and for indigenous thought.

The resemblance between souls, however, does not entail that what they express or perceive is likewise shared. The way humans see animals, spirits and other actants in the cosmos is profoundly different from how these beings both see them and see themselves. Typically, and this tautology is something like the degree zero of perspectivism, humans will, under normal conditions, see humans as humans and animals as animals (in the case of spirits, seeing these normally invisible beings is a sure indication that the conditions are not normal: sickness, trance and other "altered states"). Predatory animals and spirits, for their part, see

humans as prey, while prey see humans as spirits or predators. "The human being sees himself as what he is. The loon, the snake, the jaguar, and The Mother of Smallpox, however, see him as a tapir or a pecari to be killed," remarks Baer apropos the Matsiguenga of Amazonian Peru (Baer 1994). In seeing *us* as nonhumans, animals and spirits regard themselves (their own species) as human: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their houses or villages, and apprehend their behavior and characteristics through a cultural form: they perceive their food as human food—jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the worms in rotten meat as grilled fish—their corporeal attributes (coats, feathers, claws, beaks) as finery or cultural instruments, and they even organize their social systems in the same way as human institutions, with chiefs, shamans, exogamous moieties and rituals.

Some precisions prove necessary. Perspectivism is only rarely applied to all animals (even as it encompasses nearly all other beings, and at the very least the dead), as the species it seems most frequently to involve are the big predators and scavengers, like jaguars, anacondas, vultures and harpies, and the typical prey of humans—wild boar, monkeys, fish, deer and tapirs. In fact, one of the fundamental aspects of perspectivist inversions concerns the relative, relational status of predator and prey. The Amazonian metaphysics of predation is a pragmatic and theoretical context highly favorable to perspectivism. That said, there is scarcely an existent that could not be defined in terms of its relative position on a scale of predatory power.

For if all existents are not necessarily *de facto* persons, the fundamental point is that there is *de jure* nothing to prevent any species or mode of being from having that status. The problem, in sum, is not one of taxonomy, classification or so-called ethnoscience.[18] All animals and cosmic constituents are intensively and virtually persons, because all of them, no matter which, can reveal themselves to be (transform into) a person. This is not a simple logical possibility but an ontological potentiality. Personhood

18. Compare with what Lienhardt says on the heteroclite collection of species, entities and phenomena that served the clan-divinities of the Dinka of Sudan. "The Dinka have no theory about the principle upon which some species are included among clan-divinities, and some omitted. There is no reason, in their thought, why anything might not be the divinity of some clan" (1961: 110).

and perspectiveness—the capacity to occupy a point of view—is a question of degree, context and position rather than a property distinct to specific species. Certain nonhumans actualize this potential more fully than others, and some, moreover, manifest it with a superior intensity than our species and are, in this sense, "more human than humans" (see Irving 1960). Furthermore, the question possesses an essentially *a posteriori* quality. The possibility of a previously insignificant being revealing itself (to a dreamer, sick person or shaman) as a prosopomorphic agent capable of affecting human affairs always remains open; where the personhood of being is concerned, "personal" experience is more decisive than whatever cosmological dogma.

If nothing prevents an existent from being conceived of as a person—as an aspect, that is, of a biosocial multiplicity—nothing else prevents another human collective from *not* being considered one. This is, moreover, the rule. The strange generosity that makes peoples like Amazonians see humans concealed under the most improbable forms or, rather, affirm that even the most unlikely beings are capable of seeing themselves as humans is the double of the well-known ethnocentrism that leads these same groups to deny humanity to their fellow men [*congénères*] and even (or above all) to their closest geographical or historical cousins. In contrast with the courageously disenchanted maturity of the old Europeans and their longstanding resignation to the cosmic solipsism of the human condition (a bitter pill for them, however sweetened it is by the consolation of intraspecific intersubjectivity), it is as if our exotic people perpetually oscillate between two infantile narcissisms: one of small differences between fellow people(s) [*congénères*] that often resemble each other too much, and another of big resemblances between entirely different species. We see how the other(s) can never win: at once ethnocentric and animist, they are inevitably immoderate, whether by omission or commission.

The fact that the condition of the person (whose universal apperceptive form is human) could be "extended" to other species while "denied" to other collectives of our own immediately suggests that the concept of the person—a center of intentionality constituted by a difference of internal potential—is anterior and logically superior to the concept of the human. Humanity is in

the position of the common denominator, the reflexive mode of the collective, and is as such derived in relation to the primary positions of predator and prey, which necessarily implicates other collectives and personal multiplicities in a situation of perspectival multiplicity.[19] This interspecific resemblance or kinship arises from the deliberate, socially produced suspension of a given predatory difference and does not precede it. This is precisely what Amerindian kinship consists of: "reproduction" as *the intensive stabilization and/or deliberate non-achievement of predation*, in the fashion of the celebrated Batesonian (or Balinese) intensive plateau that so inspired Deleuze and Guattari. It is not by chance that in another text of Lévi-Strauss' that deals with cannibalism, this idea of identity-by-subtraction receives a formulation perfectly befitting Amerindian perspectivism:

> [T]he problem of cannibalism ... would not be a search for the "why? of the custom, but, on the contrary, for the "how?" of the emergence of this lower limit of predation by which, perhaps, we are brought back to social life. (L.-S. 1987b: 113; see also L.-S. 1981: 690)

This is nothing more than an application of the classic structuralist precept that "resemblance has no reality in itself; it is only a particular instance of difference, that in which difference tends toward zero" (L.-S. 1981: 38).[20] Everything hinges on the verb "to tend," since, as Lévi-Strauss observes, difference "is never completely annulled." We could even say that it only blooms to its full conceptual power when it becomes as slight as can be: like the difference between twins, as an Amerindian philosopher might say.

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19. "Human" is a term designating a relation, not a substance. Primitive peoples' celebrated designations of themselves as "the human beings" and "the true men" seem to function pragmatically, if not syntactically, less as *substantives* than as *pronouns* marking the subjective position of the speaker. It is for this reason that the indigenous categories of collective identity possess this great contextual variability so characteristic of pronouns, marking the self/other contrast through the immediate kinship of the "I" with all other humans, or, as we have seen, with all other beings endowed with consciousness. Their sedimentation as "ethnonyms" seems to be mostly an artifact produced through interactions with the ethnographer.

20. The precept is classic, but few of the so-called "structuralists" truly understood how to push the idea to its logical conclusion and thus beyond itself. Might that be because they would be pulled with it into the orbit of *Difference and Repetition*?

The notion that actual nonhumans possess an invisible prosopomorphic side is a fundamental supposition of several dimensions of indigenous practice, but it is only foregrounded in the particular context of shamanism. Amerindian shamanism could be defined as the authorization of certain individuals to cross the corporeal barriers between species, adopt an exospecific subjective perspective, and administer the relations between those species and humans. By seeing nonhuman beings as they see themselves (again as humans), shamans become capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in the trans-specific dialogue and, even more importantly, of returning from their travels to recount them; something the "laity" can only do with difficulty. This encounter or exchange of perspectives is not only a dangerous process but a political art: diplomacy. If Western relativism has multiculturalism as its public politics, Amerindian shamanic perspectivism has multinaturalism as its cosmic politics.

Shamanism is a mode of action entailing a mode of knowledge, or, rather, a certain ideal of knowledge. In certain respects, this ideal is diametrically opposed to the objectivist epistemology encouraged by Western modernity. The latter's telos is provided by the category of the object: to know is to objectify by distinguishing between what is intrinsic to the object and what instead belongs to the knowing subject, which has been inevitably and illegitimately projected onto the object. To know is thus to desubjectify, to render explicit the part of the subject present in the object in order to reduce it to an ideal minimum (and/or to amplify it with a view to obtaining spectacular critical effects). Subjects, just like objects, are regarded as the results of a process of objectification: the subject constitutes or recognizes itself in the object it produces, and knows itself objectively when it succeeds in seeing itself "from the outside" as a thing. Our epistemological game, then, is objectification; what has not been objectified simply remains abstract or unreal. The form of the Other is the thing.

Amerindian shamanism is guided by the inverse ideal: to know is to "personify," to take the point of view of what should be known or, rather, *the one* whom should be known. The key is

to know, in Guimarães Rosa's phrase, "the who of things," without which there would be no way to respond intelligently to the question of "why." The form of the Other is the person. We could also say, to utilize a vocabulary currently in vogue, that shamanic personification or subjectivation reflects a propensity to universalize the "intentional attitude" accorded so much value by certain modern philosophers of mind (or, more accurately, philosophers of *modern* mind). To be more precise, since the Indians are perfectly capable of adopting "physical" and "functional" attitudes *sensu* Dennett (1978) in everyday life, we will say that here we are faced with an epistemological ideal that, far from seeking to reduce "ambient intentionality" to its zero degree in order to attain an absolutely objective representation of the world, instead makes the opposite wager: true knowledge aims to reveal a maximum of intentionality through a systematic and deliberate abduction of agency. To what we said above about shamanism being a *political* art we can now add that it is a political *art*.[21] For the good shamanic interpretation succeeds in seeing each event as being, in truth, an *action,* an expression of intentional states or predicates of an agent. Interpretive success, then, is directly proportional to the successful attribution of intentional order to an object or *noeme*.[22] An entity or state of things not prone to subjectivation, which is to say the actualization of its social relation with the one who knows it, is shamanically insignificant—in that case, it is just an epistemic residue or impersonal factor resistant to precise knowledge. Our objectivist epistemology, there is no need to recall, proceeds in the opposite direction, conceiving the intentional attitude as a convenient fiction adopted when the aimed-for object is too complex to be decomposed into elementary physical

21. The relation between artistic experience and the process of the "abduction of agency" was analyzed by Alfred Gell in *Art and Agency* (1998).

22. I am referring here to Dennett's notion of the n-ordinality of intentional systems. A second-order intentional system is one in which the observer ascribes not only (as in the first order) beliefs, desires and other intentions to the object but, additionally, beliefs, etc. about other beliefs (etc.). The standard cognitive thesis holds that only humans exhibit second- or higher-order intentionality. The shamanistic "principle of the abduction of a maximum agency" runs afoul of the creed of physicalist psychology: "Psychologists have often appealed to a principle known as 'Lloyd Morgan's Canon of Parsimony,' which can be viewed as a special case of Occam's Razor: it is the principle that one should attribute to an organism as little intelligence or consciousness or rationality or mind as will suffice to account for its behavior" (Dennett 1978: 274).

processes. An exhaustive scientific explanation of the world, it is thought, should be capable of reducing every object to a chain of causal events, and these, in turn, to materially dense interactions (through, primarily, action at a distance).

Thus if a subject is an insufficiently analyzed object in the modern naturalist world, the Amerindian epistemological convention follows the inverse principle, which is that an object is an insufficiently interpreted subject. One must know how to personify, because one must personify in order to know. The object of the interpretation is the counter-interpretation of the object.[23] The latter idea should perhaps be developed into its full intentional form—the form of a mind, an animal under a human face—having at least a demonstrable relation with a subject, conceived as something that exists "in the neighborhood" of an agent (see Gell 1998).

Where this second option is concerned, the idea that nonhuman agents perceive themselves and their behavior under a human form plays a crucial role. The translation of "culture" in the worlds of extrahuman subjectivities has for its corollary the redefinition of several natural objects and events as indexes from which social agency can be inferred. The most common case is the transformation of something that humans regard as a brute fact into another species' artifact or civilized behavior: what we call blood is beer for a jaguar, what we take for a pool of mud, tapirs experience as a grand ceremonial house, and so on. Such artifacts are ontologically ambiguous: they are objects, but they necessarily indicate a subject since they are like frozen actions or material incarnations of a nonmaterial intentionality. What one side calls nature, then, very often turns out to be culture for the other.

Here we have an indigenous lesson anthropology could benefit from heeding. The differential distribution of the given and the constructed must not be taken for an anodyne exchange, a simple change of signs that leaves the terms of the problem intact. There is "all the difference of/in the world" (Wagner 1981: 51) between a world that experiences the primordial as bare transcendence

23. As Marilyn Strathern observes of an epistemological regime similar to that of Amerindians: "The same convention requires that the objects of interpretation—human or not—become understood as other persons; indeed, the very act of interpretation presupposes the personhood of what is being interpreted. [...] What one thus encounters in making interpretations are always counter-interpretations" (1991: 23).

and pure anti-anthropic alterity—as the nonconstructed and noninstituted opposed to all custom and discourse[24]—and a world of immanent humanity, where the primordial assumes a human form. This anthropomorphic presupposition of the indigenous world is radically opposed to the persistent anthropocentric effort in Western philosophies (some of the most radical included) to "construct" the human as the nongiven, as the very being of the nongiven (Sloterdijk 2000). We should nevertheless stress, against fantasies of the narcissistic paradises of exotic peoples (a.k.a. Disney anthropology), that this presupposition renders the indigenous world neither more familiar nor more comforting. When everything is human, the human becomes a wholly other thing.

So there really are more things in heaven and earth than in our anthropological dream. To describe this multiverse, where every difference is political (because every relation is "social"), as though it were an illusory version of our universe—to *unify* them by reducing the inventions of the first to the conventions of the second—would be to decide for a simplistic and politically puerile conception of their relationship. Such facile explanations end up engendering every sort of complication, since the cost of this ersatz ontological monism is its inflationary proliferation of epistemological dualisms—emic and etic, metaphoric and literal, conscious and unconscious, representation and reality, illusion and truth (I could go on…). Those dualisms are dubious not because all such conceptual dichotomies are in principle pernicious but because these in particular require, if they are to unify (any) two worlds, discriminating between their respective inhabitants. Every Great Divider is a mononaturalist.

24. "Yet nature is different from man: it is not instituted by him and is opposed to custom, to discourse. Nature is the primordial–that is, the nonconstructed, the noninstituted" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 3-4).

Chapter 3

Multinaturalism

"We moderns possess the concept but have lost sight of the plane of immanence...." (D. G. 1994: 104). All the foregoing is merely the development of the founding intuition, deductively effectuated by indigenous theoretical practice, of the mythology of the continent, which concerns a milieu that can rightly be called prehistorical (in the sense of the celebrated absolute past: the past that has never been present and which therefore is never past, while the present never ceases to pass), and that is defined by the ontological impenetrability of all the "insistents" populating and constituting this milieu—the templates and standards of actual existents.

As the *Mythologiques* teach us, the narrativization of the indigenous plane of immanence articulates in a privileged way the causes and consequences of speciation—the assumption of a specific corporeality—by the personae or actants therein, all of whom are conceived as sharing a general unstable condition in which the aspects of humans and nonhumans are inextricably enmeshed:

> I would like to ask a simple question. What is a myth?
> It's the very opposite of a simple question [...]. If you were to ask an American Indian, he would most likely tell you that it is a story of the time before men and animals became distinct beings. This definition seems very profound to me. (L.-S. and Éribon: 1991: 139)

In fact, the definition is profound, even if showing this requires taking a slightly different direction than the one Lévi-Strauss had in mind in his response. Mythic discourse registers the movement

by which the present state of things is actualized from a virtual, precosmological condition that is perfectly transparent—a chaosmos where the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of beings do not yet conceal each other. Far from evincing the primordial identification between humans and nonhumans commonly ascribed to it, this precosmos is traversed by an infinite difference (even if, or because, it is internal to each person or agent) contrary to the finite and external differences constituting the actual world's species and qualities. Whence the regime of qualitative multiplicity proper to myth: the question, for example, of whether the mythic jaguar is a block of human affects having the form of a jaguar or a block of human affects having a human form is strictly undecidable, as mythic "metamorphosis" is an event, a change on the spot: an intensive superposition of heterogeneous states rather than an extensive transposition of homogenous states. Myth is not history because metamorphosis is not a process, was not yet a process and will never be a process. Metamorphosis is both anterior and external to the process of process—it is a figure (a figuration) of becoming.

The general line traced by mythic discourse thus describes the instantaneous sorting of the precosmological flux of indiscernibility that occurs when it enters the cosmological process. Following that, the feline and human dimensions of jaguars (and of humans) will alternately function as figure and potential ground for each other. The original transparence or infinitely bifurcated *complicatio* gets explicated in the invisibility (of human souls and animal spirits) and opacity (of human bodies and animal somatic "garb"[25]) that mark the constitution of all mundane beings. This invisibility and opacity are, however, relative and reversible, even as the ground of virtuality is indestructible or inexhaustible; the great indigenous rituals of the recreation of the world are precisely *dispositifs* for the counter-effectuation of this indestructible ground.

The differences coming into effect within myths are, again, infinite and internal, contrary to the external, finite differences between species. What defines the agents and patients of mythic

25. The motif of perspectivism is nearly always accompanied by the idea that the visible form of each species is a simple envelope (a "clothing") hiding an internal human form that is only accessible, as we have seen, to the gaze of members of the same species, or certain perspectival "commutators," like shamans.

events is their intrinsic capacity to be something else. In this sense, each persona infinitely differs from itself, given that it is initially supposed by mythic discourse only in order to be replaced, which is to say transformed. Such "self-"difference is the characteristic property of the notion of "spirit," which is why all mythic beings are conceived of as spirits (and as shamans), and every finite mode or actual existent, reciprocally, can manifest as (for it was) a spirit when its reason to be is recounted in myth. The supposed lack of differentiation between mythic subjects is a function of their being constitutively irreducible to essences or fixed identities, whether generic, specific, or even individual.[26]

In sum, myth proposes an ontological regime ordered by a fluent intensive difference bearing on each of the points of a heterogeneous continuum, where transformation is anterior to form, relations superior to terms, and intervals interior to being. Each mythic subject, being a pure virtuality, "was already previously" what it "would be next" and this is why it is not something actually determined. The extensive differences, moreover, introduced by post-mythic speciation (*sensu lato*)—the passage from the continuous to the discrete constituting the grand (my)theme of structural anthropology—is crystallized in molar blocks of infinitely internal identity (each species is internally homogeneous, and its members are equally and indifferently representatives of the species as such).[27] These blocks are separated by external intervals that are quantifiable and measurable, since differences between species are finite systems for the correlation, proportioning, and permutation of characteristics of the same order and same nature.

26. I have in mind the detotalized, "disorganized" bodies that roam about Amerindian myths: the detachable penises and personified anuses, the rolling heads and characters cut into pieces, the eyes transposed from anteaters to jaguars and *vice versa*, etc.

27. As we know, myths contain various moments where this convention is "relativized" (in the sense of Wagner's 1981 book) since, given that infinite identity does not exist, difference is never entirely annulled. See the humorous example from *The Origin of Table Manners* on the subject of poorly matched spouses: "What do the myths proclaim? That it is wicked and dangerous to confuse physical differences between women with the specific differences separating animals from humans, or animals from each other.... [A]s human beings, women, whether beautiful or ugly, all deserve to obtain husbands. [...] When contrasted in the mass with animal wives, human wives are all equally valid; but if the armature of the myth is reversed, it cannot but reveal a mysterious fact that society tries to ignore: all human females are not equal, for nothing can prevent them from being different from each other in their animal essence, which means that they are not all equally desirable to prospective husbands" (L.-S. 1979: 76).

The heterogeneous continuum of the precosmological world thus gives way to a discrete, homogeneous space in whose terms each being is only what it is, and is so only because it is not what it is not. But spirits are the proof that all virtualities have not necessarily been actualized, and that the turbulent mythic flux continues to rumble beneath the apparent discontinuities between types and species.

Amerindian perspectivism, then, finds in myth a geometrical locus where the difference between points of view is at once annulled and exacerbated. In this absolute discourse, each kind of being appears to other beings as it appears to itself—as human—even as it already acts by manifesting its distinct and definitive animal, plant, or spirit nature.[28] Myth, the universal point of flight of perspectivism, speaks of a state of being where bodies and names, souls and actions, egos and others are interpenetrated, immersed in one and the same presubjective and preobjective milieu.

The aim of mythology is precisely to recount the "end" of this "milieu"; in other words, to describe "the passage from Nature to Culture," the theme to which Lévi-Strauss attributed a central role in Amerindian mythology. And contrary to what others have said, this was not without reason; it would only be necessary to specify that the centrality of this passage by no means excludes its profound ambivalence—the *double sense* (in more than one sense) it has in indigenous thought, as becomes evident the farther one advances through the *Mythologiques*. It is likewise important to emphasize that what results from this passage is not exactly what has been imagined. The passage is not a process by which the human is differentiated from the animal, as the evolutionist Occidental vulgate would have it. *The common condition of humans and animals is not animality but humanity.* The great mythic division shows less culture distinguished from nature than nature estranged from itself by culture: the myths recount how animals lost certain attributes humans inherited or conserved. Nonhumans are ex-humans—and not humans are ex-nonhumans. So where our popular anthropology regards humanity as standing upon animal foundations ordinarily occluded by culture—having

28. "No doubt, in mythic times, humans were indistinguishable from animals, but between the non-differentiated beings who were to give birth to mankind on the one hand and the animal kingdom on the other, certain qualitative relationships pre-existed, anticipating specific characteristics that were still in a latent state" (L.-S. 1981: 588).

once been entirely animal, we remain, at bottom, animals—indigenous thought instead concludes that having formerly been human, animals and other cosmic existents continue to be so, even if in a way scarcely obvious to us.[29]

The more general question raised for us, then, is why the humanity of each species of existent is subjectively evident (and at the same time highly problematic) and objectively non-evident (while at the same time obstinately affirmed). Why is it that animals see themselves as humans? Precisely because we humans see them as animals, while seeing ourselves as humans. Peccaries cannot see themselves as peccaries (or, who knows, speculate on the fact that humans and other beings are peccaries underneath the garb specific to them) because this is the way they are viewed by humans. If humans regard themselves as humans and are seen as nonhumans, as animals or spirits, by nonhumans, then animals should necessarily see themselves as humans. What perspectivism affirms, when all is said and done, is not so much that animals are at bottom like humans but the idea that as humans, they are at bottom something else—they are, in the end, the "bottom" itself of something, its other side; they are different from themselves. Neither animism, which would affirm a substantial or analogic resemblance between animals and humans, nor totemism—which would affirm a formal or homological resemblance between intrahuman and interanimal differences—perspectivism affirms an intensive difference that places human/nonhuman difference *within each existent*. Each being finds itself separated from itself, and becomes similar to others only through both the double subtractive condition common to them all and a strict complementarity that obtains between any two of them; for if every mode of existent is human for itself, none of them are human to each other such that humanity is reciprocally reflexive (jaguars are humans

29. The revelation of this ordinarily hidden side of beings (which is why it is conceived in different ways as "more true" than its apparent side) is intimately associated with violence in both intellectual traditions: the animality of humanity, for us, and the humanity of the animal, for the Amerindians, are only rarely actualized without destructive consequences. The Cubeo of the Northwest Amazon say that "the ferociousness of the jaguar has a human origin" (Irving Goldman).

to other jaguars, peccaries see each other as humans, etc.), even while it can never be mutual (as soon as the jaguar is human, the peccary ceases to be one and vice versa).[30] Such is, in the last analysis, what "soul" means here. If everything and everyone has a soul, nothing and no one coincides with itself. If everything and everyone can be human, then nothing and no one is human in a clear and distinct fashion. This "background cosmic humanity" renders the humanity of form or figure problematic. The "ground" constantly threatens to swallow the figure.

But if nonhumans are persons who see themselves as persons, why then do they not view all other kinds of cosmic persons as the latter view themselves? If the cosmos is saturated with humanity, why is this metaphysical ether opaque, or why is it, at best, like a two-way mirror, returning an image of the human from only one of its sides? These questions, as we anticipated apropos the Antilles incident, grant us access to the Amerindian concept of the body. They also make it possible to pass from the quasi-epistemological notion of perspectivism to a veritable ontological one—multinaturalism.

The idea of a world that comprises a multiplicity of subjective positions immediately evokes the notion of relativism. Frequent mention, both direct and indirect, is made of it in descriptions of Amerindian cosmologies. We will take, almost at random, the conclusion of Kaj Arhem, an ethnographer of the Makuna. After describing the perspectival universe of this Northwest Amazonian people in minute detail, he concludes that the idea of a multiplicity of perspectives on reality entails, in the case of the Makuna, that "every perspective is equally valid and true" and "a true and correct representation of the world does not exist" (1993: 124).

This is no doubt correct, but only in a certain sense. There is a high probability that the Makuna would say, on the contrary, that where humans are concerned, there *is* a true and accurate representation of the world. If a human begins to see, as a vulture would, the worms infesting a cadaver as grilled fish, he will draw the following conclusion: vultures have stolen his soul, he himself is in the course of being transformed into one, and he and his kin will cease being human to each other. In short, he is gravely ill, or

30. We can thus see that if for us "man is a wolf to man," for the Indians, the wolf can be man for wolves—with the proviso that man and wolf cannot be man (or wolf) simultaneously.

even dead. In other words (but this amounts to the same thing), he is en route to becoming a shaman. Every precaution, then, has to be taken to keep perspectives separate from each other on account of their incompatibility. Only shamans, who enjoy a kind of double citizenship in regard to their species (as well as to their status as living or dead), can make them communicate—and this only under special, highly controlled conditions.[31]

But an important question remains. Does Amerindian perspectivist theory in fact postulate a plurality of *representations* of the world? It will suffice to consider the testimony of ethnographers in order to perceive that the situation is exactly the inverse: all beings see ("represent") the world *in the same way*; what changes is *the world they see*. Animals rely on the same "categories" and "values" as humans: their worlds revolve around hunting, fishing, food, fermented beverages, cross-cousins, war, initiation rites, shamans, chiefs, spirits.... If the moon, serpents, and jaguars see humans as tapirs or peccaries, this is because, just like us, they eat tapirs and peccaries (human food par excellence). Things could not be otherwise, since nonhumans, being humans in their own domain, see things as humans do—like we humans see them in our domain. But the things *they see* when they see them *like we do* are *different*: what we take for blood, jaguars see as beer; the souls of the dead find a rotten cadaver where we do fermented manioc; what humans perceive as a mud puddle becomes a grand ceremonial house when viewed by tapirs.

At first glance, this idea would appear to be somewhat counterintuitive, seeming to unceasingly transform into its opposite, like the multistable objects of psychophysics.[32] Gerald Weiss, for example, describes the world of the Peruvian Amazonian Ashakinka people as "a world of relative semblances, where different kinds of beings see the same things differently" (Weiss 1972: 170). Once again, this is true, but in a different way than intended. What Weiss "does not see" is precisely the fact that different types of beings see the same things differently is merely a consequence of

31. To paraphrase F. Scott Fitzgerald, we could say that the sign of a first-rank shamanic intelligence is the capacity to simultaneously hold two incompatible perspectives.

32. The Necker cube is the perfect example, since its ambiguity hinges on an oscillating perspective. Amazonian mythology contains numerous cases of characters that, when encountered by a human, change rapidly from one form to another—from human (seductive) to animal (terrifying).

the fact that different types of beings see different things in the same way. What, after all, counts as "the same thing?" And in relation to who, which species, and in what *way*?

Cultural relativism, which is a multiculturalism, presumes a diversity of partial, subjective representations bearing on an external nature, unitary and whole, that itself is indifferent to representation. Amerindians propose the inverse: on the one hand, a purely pronominal representative unit—the human is what and whomever occupies the position of the cosmological subject; every existent can be thought of as thinking (it exists, therefore it thinks), as "activated" or "agencied" by a point of view[33]—and, on the other, a real or objective radical diversity. Perspectivism is a multinaturalism, since a perspective is not a representation.

A perspective is not a representation because representations are properties of mind, whereas a *point of view is in the body.* The capacity to occupy a point of view is doubtlessly a power of the soul, and nonhumans are subjects to the extent to which they have (or are) a mind; but the difference between points of view—and a point of view is nothing but a difference—is not in the soul. The latter, being formally identical across all species, perceive the same thing everywhere. The difference, then, must lie in the specificity of the body.

Animals perceive in the same way as us but perceive different things than we do, because their bodies are different than ours. I do not mean by this physiological differences—Amerindians recognize a basic uniformity of bodies—but the affects, or strengths and weakness, that render each species of the body singular: what it eats, its way of moving or communicating, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary, timid or fierce, and so on. Corporeal morphology is a powerful sign of these differences, although it can be quite deceiving; the human figure, for instance, can conceal a jaguar-affection. What we are calling "body," then, is not the specific physiology or characteristic anatomy of something but an ensemble of ways or modes of being that constitutes a *habitus*, ethos, or ethogram. Lying between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms

33. The point of view creates not its object, as Saussure would say, but rather the subject itself. "Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pregiven or defined subject; to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view" (D. 1993: 19).

is a middle, axial plane that is the body qua bundle of affects and capacities, and that is at the origin of perspectivism. Far from being the spiritual essentialism of relativism, perspectivism is a corporeal mannerism.

Multinaturalism does not suppose a Thing-in-Itself partially apprehended through categories of understanding proper to each species. We should not think that Indians imagine that there exists a something=X, something that humans, for example, would see as blood and jaguars as beer. What exists in multinature are not such self-identical entities differently perceived but immediately relational multiplicities of the type blood/beer. There exists, if you will, only the limit between blood and beer, the border by which these two "affinal" substances communicate and diverge.[34] Finally, there is no X that would be blood to one species and beer to another; just a "blood/beer" that from the very start is one of the characteristic singularities or affections of the human/jaguar. The resemblance Amazonians frequently draw between humans and jaguars, which is that both of them drink "beer," is only made so that what creates the difference between humans and jaguars can be better perceived. "One is either in one language *or* another—there is no more a background-language than a background-world" (Jullien 2008, 135). In effect, one is *either* in the blood *or* in the beer, with no one drinking a drink-in-itself. But every beer has a background-taste of blood and vice-versa.

We are beginning to be able to understand how *Amerindian perspectivism* raises the problem of translation, and thus how to address the problem of translating perspectivism into the onto-semiotic terms of Occidental anthropology. In this way, the possession of similar souls implies the possession of analogous concepts on the part of all existents. What changes from one species of existent to another is therefore body and soul as well as the referents of these concepts: the body is the site and instrument of the referential disjunction between the "discourses" (the semiograms) of each species. Amerindian perspectivism's problem is thus not

34. Etymologically, the affine is he who is situated *ad-finis*, whose domain borders on mine. Affines are those who communicate by borders, who hold "in common" only what separates them.

to find the referent common to two different representations (the Venus behind the morning star and the evening star) but instead to circumvent the equivocation that consists in imagining that a jaguar saying "manioc beer" is referring to the same thing as us simply because he means the same thing as us. In other words, perspectivism presumes an epistemology that remains constant, and variable ontologies. The same "representations," but different objects. One meaning, multiple referents. The goal of perspectivist translation—which is one of the principle tasks of shamans—is therefore not to find in human conceptual language a *synonym* (a co-referential representation) for the representations that other species employ to indicate the same thing "out there"; rather, the objective is to not lose sight of the difference concealed by the deceiving *homonyms* that connect/separate our language from those of other species. If Western anthropology is founded on the principle of interpretive charity (goodwill and tolerance as what distinguishes the thinker from the rest of humanity in its exasperation with the other), which affirms a natural synonymy between human cultures, Amerindian alter-anthropology contrarily affirms a counter-natural homonymy between living species that is at the source of all kinds of fatal equivocations. (The Amerindian principle of precaution: a world entirely composed of living foci of intentionality necessarily comes with a large dose of bad intentions.)

In the end, the concept of multinaturalism is not a simple repetition of anthropological multiculturalism. Two very different conjugations of the multiple are at stake. Multiplicity can be taken as a kind of plurality, as happens in invocations of the "the multiplicity of cultures" of beautiful cultural diversity. Or, on the contrary, multiplicity can be the multiplicity *in* culture, or culture *as* multiplicity. This second sense is what interests us. The notion of multiculturalism becomes useful here on account of its paradoxical character. Our macroconcept of nature fails to acknowledge veritable plurality, which spontaneously forces us to register the ontological solecism contained in the idea of "several natures" and thus the corrective displacement it imposes. Paraphrasing a formula of Deleuze's on relativism (1993: 21), we could say that Amazonian multinaturalism affirms not so much a variety of natures as the naturalness of variation—variation *as* nature. The

inversion of the Occidental formula of multiculturalism bears not simply on its constitutive terms—nature and culture—as they are mutually determined by their respective functions of unity and diversity, but also on the values accorded to term and function themselves. Anthropological readers will recognize here, of course, Lévi-Strauss' canonical formula (1963e[1955]: 228): perspectivist multinaturalism is a transformation, through its double twist, of Occidental multiculturalism, and signals the crossing of a historico-semiotic threshold of translatability and equivocation—a threshold, precisely, of perspectival transformation.[35]

35. For "the crossing of a threshold" in Lévi-Strauss, see 2001: 29; see also the essential commentary on this by Mauro Almeida (2008).

Chapter Four

Images of Savage Thought

In calling perspectivism and multinaturalism an indigenous cosmopolitical theory, I am using the word "theory" by design.[36] A widespread tendency in the anthropology of the past several decades has consisted in refusing savage thought [*la pensée sauvage*] the status of a veritable theoretical imagination. What this denial primarily enlightens us about is a certain lack of theoretical imagination on the part of anthropologists. Amerindian perspectivism, before being a possible object of a theory extrinsic to it—a theory, for example, conceived as the derived epistemological reflex of a more primary animist ontology (Descola 2013) or an emergent phenomenological pragmatics peculiar to the "mimetic" cultures of hunting peoples (Willerslev 2004)—invites us to construct other theoretical images of theory. Anthropology cannot content itself with describing in minute detail "the indigenous point of view" (in the Malinowskian sense) if it is only subsequently going to be gratified to identify, in the best critical tradition, the blind spots in that perspective, and thereby absorb it in the point of view of the observer. Perspectivism demands precisely the opposite, symmetric task, which is to discover what a point of view is *for* the indigenous: the *concept* of the point of view at work in Amerindian cultures, which is also the indigenous point of view on the anthropological concept of the point of view.

36. There is no need to recall that cosmopolitics is a term that lays claim to a link with the work of Isabelle Stengers (2010[1996]) and Bruno Latour. The latter, for his part, adopted the Amazonian concept of mulitnaturalism in order to designate the nonviability, from a cosmopolitical perspective, of the modernist couplet of multiculturalism/mononaturalism.

Obviously, the indigenous concept of the point of view does not coincide with the concept of the point of view of the indigenous, just as the point of view of the anthropologist cannot be the same as that of the indigenous (this is not a fusion of horizons) but only its (perspectival) relation with the latter. This relation, moreover, is one of reflexive dislocation. Amerindian perspectivism is an intellectual structure containing a theory of its own description by anthropology—for it is precisely another anthropology, superimposed over ours.[37] That is exactly why perspectivism is not, *pace* Descola, a subtype of animism, i.e., a schema of practice whose reasons can be known only by the reason of the anthropologist. It is not a type but a concept, and the most interesting use for it consists not so much in classifying cosmologies that appear exotic to us but in counter-analyzing those anthropologies that have become far too familiar.

Apart from a lack of theoretical imagination (a factor that should never be underestimated) there are other, quite often contradictory reasons for the common acceptance of the double standard that denies the nonmoderns the power, or perhaps the impotence, of theory: the tendency, on the one hand, to define the essence of indigenous practice in terms of Heideggerian *Zuhandenheit*, and, on the other, the refusal to grant what Sperber calls "semi-propositional representations" the status of authentic knowledge, a move which takes the savage mind [*la pensée sauvage*] hostage each time it threatens to slip free of the modest, reassuring limits of encyclopedic categorization.

37. As Patrice Maniglier said, "Because structure is most rigorously defined as a system of transformation, it cannot be represented without making its representation a part of itself (2000, 238). Concerning this point, Anne-Christine Taylor offers the following felicitous definition of anthropology: "A discipline that aims at placing side by side the point of view of the ethnologist and that of the subjects of the inquiry in order to make from this an instrument of knowledge." What still needs to be emphasized is that said juxtaposition requires a deliberate conceptual effort, given that the points of view in question mostly work at cross purposes with each other, and that the point where they join is not the geometrical space of human nature but rather the crossroads of equivocation (see below). The Korowai of Western New Guinea conceive the relation of mutual invisibility and inverse perspectives between the world of the living and that of the dead via the image of tree trunk that has fallen onto another (Stasch 2009: 27).

The problem resides in the fact that the faculty of thought is identified with "the system of judgment," and knowledge with the model of the proposition. Whether from its phenemenologico-constructivist or cognitivo-instructionist wings, contemporary anthropology has long discoursed on the severe limitations of this model in accounting for intellectual economies of the non-Occidental variety (or, if you prefer, of the nonmodern, nonliterate, nondoctrinal, and other "constitutive" absence varieties). In other words, anthropological discourse has devoted itself to the paradoxical enterprise of heaping proposition upon proposition on the subject of the nonpropositional essence of the discourse of the others, going on endlessly about what supposedly goes without saying. We find ourselves (theoretically) content when indigenous peoples confirm their putatively sublime disdain for self-interpretation and even scarcer interest for cosmologies and systems: the absence of indigenous interpretation has the big advantage of allowing for the proliferation of anthropological interpretations of that absence, and their disregard for cosmological architecture permits for the construction of beautiful anthropological cathedrals wherein societies are arranged according to their greater or lesser disposition toward systematicity. In short, the more practical the indigenous, the more theoretical the anthropologist. Let me add that this nonpropositional mode is conceived as being so strongly dependent on its "contexts" of transmission and circulation as to stand diametrically opposite to what scientific discourse, in its miraculous capacity for universalization, is imagined to be. So while we are all necessarily circumscribed by our "circumstances" and "relational configurations," *theirs* are (and how!) even more systematically circumscribed—more circumstantial, more configured—than others.

The point, though, is first of all not to dispute the thesis that nondomesticated thought is inherently nonpropositional; this is not a fight to re-establish the others' right to a rationality that they never claimed themselves. Lévi-Strauss' profound idea of *savage thought* should be understood to project another *image of thought*, not yet another *image of the savage*. What is being contested, then, is the implicit idea that the proposition should continue to serve as the prototype of rational enunciation and the atom of theoretical discourse. The nonpropositional is regarded as being

essentially primitive, as non- or even anti-conceptual. The thesis, naturally, could be defended in a way "for" (and not just "against") these Others that lack concepts. This absence of the rational concept, that is, could be taken as a positive sign of the existential disalienation of the peoples in question—the manifestation of a state in which knowledge and action, thought and sensation, and so on are inseparable. Yet even if done "for" them, this would still be to concede way too much to the proposition and to reaffirm a totally archaic concept of the concept that persists in conceiving it as an operation subsuming the particular in the universal (as an essentially classificatory and abstracting process). But instead of deciding on that basis to reject the concept, the task is to know how to detect the infraphilosophical in the concept, and, reciprocally, the virtual conceptuality in the infraphilosophical. To put it another way, we have to arrive at an anthropological concept of the concept that takes for granted the extrapropositionality of every creative ("savage") thought in its integral positivity, and that develops in a completely different direction those traditional notions of category (whether innate or acquired), representation (propositional or semi-propositional), and belief (like flowers, simple or divided).

Multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism is one of the anthropological contenders for this concept of the concept. It has not, however, been received that way in certain academic milieus.[38] Most often, it has been construed as a descriptive generalization of certain properties of the content of a discursive object radically external to anthropological discourse and thus incapable of producing structural effects within the latter. Little surprise, then, that we have witnessed discussions more or less animated by the question of whether the Bororo or Kuna are indeed perspectivist (as if it could be demonstrated that "perspectivists" are traipsing around the forest); some have even asked, in the spirit of *The Persian Letters*, "How can one be perspectivist?" Reciprocally, the skeptics have not refrained from mocking declarations that perspectivists are nowhere to be found, that the whole affair merely concerns longstanding knowledge about minor details of Amerindian mythologies, and that perspectivism is not an indigenous theory but just some special effect of certain

38. The Amerindianists to whom I presented these ideas about their ideas quickly perceived their implications for the relations of force between indigenous "cultures" and the Occidental "sciences" that would circumscribe and administer them.

pragmatic constraints whose principles escape the parties concerned, who are supposed to talk to jaguars without realizing that it is because they talk to jaguars that jaguars seem to talk back (a disorder of language, that's all…). From *the second it started*, all of this thwarted the possibility of a serious consideration of the consequence of perspectivism for anthropological theory, which is the transformation it imposes on the entire practice of the concept in the discipline: in a word, the idea that the ideas indicated by this label constitute not yet another object for anthropology but another idea of anthropology, an alternative to Western "anthropological anthropology," whose foundations it subverts.

◊ In part, the naturalist (or rather, analogist) interpretation of perspectivism, which treats the latter as merely one property among others of a certain, animist schema of objectivation of the world, has opened a path in our local anthropological space on the basis of the large place Philippe Descola grants it in his magnum opus, *Beyond Nature and Culture*. It would be impossible here to do this monumental work justice, which often turns its focus to my own work; the divergences between us that I have found necessary to mark below are expressed in the context of a longstanding, mutually enriching dialogue that presupposes profound agreement on our part concerning many other anthropological questions.

In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola reprises, corrects, and completes the panorama laid out in *The Savage Mind* by refining the concept of totemism by juxtaposing it with three other "ontologies" or "modes of identification" (the synonymy, it should be noted, is not without interest): "animism," "analogism," and "naturalism." The author constructs a four-part matrix in which the four basic ontologies are distributed according to how they configure the relations of continuity or discontinuity between the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of different species of beings[39]—dimensions conceived in terms of the neologisms "physicality" and "interiority." This matrix translates, as Descola generously notes, a particular schema that I proposed in my article on Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998/1996). In that text (the one partially reprised in the second chapter of the present book), I drew perhaps an all too-brief distinction between two internally contrastive

39. The different species are reduced, in the final analysis, to the human/nonhuman polarity. Modern naturalism, for example, is said to be "one of the possible expressions of the more general schemas that govern the objectivization of the world and of others" (Descola 2013: xviii). Although the duality between nature (the world) and culture or society (other) is subjected to critique, it continues, perhaps inevitably, to function as a background presupposition.

ontological schemas, which are, first, the combination of metaphysical continuity (the generic soul) and physical discontinuity (the specific body) between kinds of existents that are proper to indigenous psychomorphic multinaturalism and, second, the combination of physical continuity and metaphysical discontinuity typical of modern anthropocentric multiculturalism, where humans, even as they communicate with the rest of creation via corporeal matter, are absolutely separated from it on account of their spiritual substance (and its contemporary avatars).[40] This contrast is of course largely reminiscent of Descola's animist and naturalist schemas; but for him, it is necessary to add two other cases, where "parallel" relations of either continuity or discontinuity between the physical and the metaphysical predominate, in order to engender the two other schemas of, respectively, totemism and analogism (2013: 121).[41]

The original impetus behind *Beyond Nature and Culture* was probably the same one that guided so many anthropologists and philosophers of our generation: dissatisfaction with structuralism's sometimes unilateral interest in the discontinuist/classificatory, metaphoric/symbolic, totemic/mythological side of the savage mind, which worked toward the detriment of its continuist/transcategorical, metonymic/indexical, pragmatic/ritual side. In short, years of proceeding alongside Lévi-Strauss had us suspecting that the time had come to re-explore Lévy-Bruhl's path—without forgetting, (as was also the case with Méséglise and Guermantes), that there was not just one way to join their itineraries (which, in any case, were not as far from the narrator's perspective as was believed). Animism, the first of the ontologies Descola identified, was a step in this very direction. It will suffice to recall that animism has as a basic presupposition the idea that nonhuman beings are persons, i.e., the terms of social relations: in contrast with totemism, a system of classification that signifies intrahuman relations through natural diversity, animism deploys social

40. When contrasted with Descola's previous works on the spiritual/mental continuity between beings in "animistic" worlds, one of the great breakthroughs of *Beyond Nature and Culture* is its diacritical inclusion of the corporeal dimension. My dear friend and colleague could thus rightfully declare to me, as the Canaque Boesoou so memorably had to Maurice Leenhardt, that "What I brought to theory was the body!"

41. I have not hidden my reservations about whether these two parallel schemas are in fact well founded (or at least about the question of whether they belong to the same ontotypological category as the two internally contrastive schemas). The problem is that they presuppose mutually independent definitions of interiority and physicality that function to substantialize them, while the internally contrastive schemas simply require "positional" values determinable through an internal contrast where one pole functions as the figure or ground for the other. This marks an important difference between Descola's animism and what I call perspectivism: the latter should not be taken for a type or particular specification of the former but rather as a *mode of functioning* of the distinction between soul and body.

categories to signify the relations between humans and nonhumans alike. There would thus be a single series—that of persons—instead of two, while the relations between "nature" and "culture" would involve metonymic contiguity rather than metaphoric resemblance.[42]

Where my own work is concerned, I attempted to escape what seemed to me the excessively combinatory dimension of *The Savage Mind* by valorizing the "minor" pole of the rather problematic opposition Lévi-Strauss draws there between totemism and sacrifice (see below, chapters 8 and 9). What I put in the column of sacrifice in my analysis of Amerindian shamanism and cannibalism, Descola attributed to animism, and it was largely due to this conceptual "synonymy" that we fed each other's work so well: we thought we were talking about the same things.... But where I was aiming, well beyond sacrificial metonymies, for an "other" of classificatory reason, or, more precisely, a noncombinatory or alogical interpretation of the central notion of structuralism—transformation—the author of *Beyond Nature and Culture* followed a quite different trajectory. While attenuating the generic sense Lévi-Strauss granted to the notion of totemism (by which it ends up being synonymous with all acts of signification), the procedure by which the four basic ontologies are deduced is clearly of an inspiration that is totemic in Lévi-Strauss' sense instead of "sacrificial."[43] Descola conceives his object as a closed combinatory play whose objective is to establish a typology of schemas of practice—forms of objectivation of the world and the other—by means of finite rules of composition. In this sense, the book could also be said to be as much analogistic as totemist, which is no surprise, given that its contribution to classic structuralism consists of splitting Lévi-Straussian totemism into the two subtypes of totemism *sensu* Descola and analogism. Without casting any doubt on the fact that the definition of analogism magnificently accommodates a series of phenomena and civilizational styles (particularly those of several peoples once considered "barbaric"), it should nonetheless be said that the place analogism most exists is in *Beyond Nature and Culture* itself, a book of admirable erudition and analytic fineness but whose theory and method are completely analogist. Hence its penchant and taste for total classifications, identifications, systems of correspondence, properties, schemas of micro/macrocosmic projections.... In effect, its design makes it impossible for Descola's system to not predominately express one of the four ontologies he identifies: the very idea of identification is an analogist idea. An animist or naturalist would probably have some

42. As I already mentioned, the introduction of differential corporeality rendered this model more complex.

43. In Descola's book, sacrifice also received a more restrained or literal interpretation, as it is considered a characteristic of analogist rather than animist ontology.

different ideas—like perspectivist ideas, which the present work's ideas are versions of.

The problem, for me, is not how to extend and thus amplify structuralism but how to interpret it intensively, and thus in a "post-" structural direction. We could say, then, that if the challenge Descola confronted and overcame was that of rewriting *The Savage Mind* after having profoundly assimilated *The Order of Things*, mine was to know how to rewrite the *Mythologiques* on the basis of everything that *A Thousand Plateaus* disabused me of in anthropology.[44]

That being said, perspectivism is not allergic to every problematic of classification, and does not necessarily condemn it for logocentrism or comparable sins. In fact, if one examines things up close, the rest of us anthropologists are also a little analogist, and in this sense, perspectivism is the reduplication or intensification of the classificatory libido, particularly inasmuch as its characteristic problem can be put as follows: *What happens when the classified becomes the classifier?* What happens when it is no longer a matter of ordering the species which nature has been divided into but of knowing how these species themselves undertake this task? And when the question is raised: which nature do they thereby make (how do jaguars objectivate "the world and the other?"). What happens when the question becomes to know how the totemic operator functions from the point of view of the totem? Or, more generally (but exactly in the same sense), what happens when we ask indigenous people what anthropology is?

Anthropology is "social" or "cultural," (or rather, should be), not in contradistinction with "physical" or "biological" anthropology but because the first question it should be dealing with is that of working out what holds the place of the "social" or "cultural" for the people that it studies; what, in other words, the anthropologies of those peoples are if the latter are taken as the agents, instead of the patients, of theory. This is equivalent to

44. The proximity of *Beyond Nature and Culture* to *The Order of Things* should not prevent us from remarking that Foucault's great book shows itself to be radically implicated in (and complicated by) its own periodization, while the question of knowing if *Beyond Nature and Culture* ever situates itself in its own typology or, on the contrary, excludes itself as a mode of thought from the modes of thought it identifies, seems to me to find a clear response in the book. It should also be noted that the difference between our respective references to the Lévi-Straussian corpus is just as (if not more) significant than the difference between the Kantianism of *The Order of Things* and the post-correlationist nomadology of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

saying that doing anthropology is not much more than comparing anthropologies—but also nothing less. Comparison, then, would not only be our principal analytic tool but also our raw material and ultimate horizon, what we compare always and already being more comparisons in the same sense that, in structuralist method (the one of the *Mythologiques*) the object of every transformation is just another transformation, and not some original substance. (Things could not be otherwise, once every comparison is seen to be a transformation.) If culture, according to Strathern's elegant processual definition "consists in the way people draw analogies between different domains of their worlds" (1992a: 47), then every culture is a gigantic, multidimensional process of comparison. As for anthropology, if it, following Roy Wagner, "studies culture through culture," then "whatever operations characterize our investigations must also be general properties of culture" (1981: 35). In brief, anthropologist and native alike are engaged in "directly comparable intellectual operations" (Herzfeld 2001: 7), and such operations are, more than anything else, comparative. Intracultural relations, or internal comparisons (the Strathernian "analogies between domains"), and intercultureal relations, or external comparisons (Wagner's "invention of culture") are in strict ontological continuity.

But direct comparability does not necessarily entail immediate translatability, just as ontological continuity does not mean epistemological transparency. So then how do we render the analogies drawn by Amazonian peoples in terms of our own analogies? What happens to our comparisons when they are compared to indigenous comparisons?

I will propose *equivocation* as a means of reconceptualizing, with the help of Amerindian perspectivist anthropology, this emblematic procedure of our academic anthropology. The operation I have in mind is not the explicit comparison of two or more sociocultural entities external to the observer, done with the intention of detecting constants or concomitant variations having a nomothetic value. While that has certainly been one of anthropology's most popular modes of investigation, it remains just one among others at our disposal, and is merely a "regulative rule" of the discipline's method. Comparison as I conceive it, on the contrary, is a "constitutive rule" of method, the procedure involved

when the practical and discursive concepts of the observed are translated into the terms of the observer's conceptual apparatus. So when I speak of comparison, which is more often than not implicit and automatic—making it an explicit topic is an essential moment of anthropological method—the anthropologists' discourse is included as one of its terms, and it should be seen as being at work from the first moment of fieldwork or even of the reading of an ethnographic monograph.

These two comparative modalities are neither independent of each other nor equivalent. The first of them is often extolled for providing an objectifying triangulation of the dual imaginary of ego and other (which ostensibly marks the second operation) and thus granting access to properties entirely attributable to the observed, yet is less innocent than it appears. We have a triangle which is not truly triangular—2+1 does not necessarily make 3—because it is always the anthropologist (the "1") who defines the terms by which two or more cultures foreign to his own (and also often to each other) will be related. When the Kachin and the Nuer are compared, it is not at the request of the Kachin or the Nuer, and what the anthropologist does by means of this usually disappears from the comparative scene, by concealing the problem that he himself (im)posed on the Kachin and the Neur so that it would seem that both parties are comparing each other.... They then exist only internally to anthropological discourse and are seen as having a common objectivity as sociocultural entities that would be comparable by virtue of a problem posed by another sociocultural entity that, in deciding the rules of the comparative game, reveals itself to stand outside its bounds. And if this recalls Agamben's idea of the state of exception, it's because *that's the idea* (the very same one)....

Contrary to learned *doxa*, then, the symmetrization internal to the object, which is achieved through its comparative pluralization, does not confer on it some magic power of symmetrizing the subject-object relation or of transforming the subject into a pure comparative mind. Nor does this by itself render explicit the other, subjacent comparison that, as we saw, *implicates* the observer in his relation with the observed.

This kind of implication is also known as *translation*. It has, of course, become a cliché to say that translation is the distinctive

task of cultural anthropology.[45] The real problem is to know precisely what translation can or should be, and how to undertake it. Yet this is where things become complicated, as Talal Asad has shown (1986) in terms that I will adopt (or translate) here. In anthropology, comparison is in the service of translation, and not the reverse. Anthropology compares for the sake of translation, and not in order to explain, generalize, interpret, contextualize, say what goes without saying, and so forth. And if, as the Italian saying goes, translation is always betrayal, then any translation worthy of the name, to paraphrase Benjamin (or rather, Rudolf Pannwitz) betrays the destination language, and not that of the source. Good translation succeeds at allowing foreign concepts to deform and subvert the conceptual apparatus of the translator such that the *intentio* of the original language can be expressed through and thus transform that of the destination. *Translation, betrayal... transformation.* In anthropology, this process was called myth, and one of its synonyms was structural anthropology.

So to translate Amerindian perspectivism is first of all to translate its image of translation, which is of a "controlled equivocation" ("controlled" in the sense that walking is a controlled way of falling). Amerindian perspectivism is a doctrine of equivocation, of referential alterity between homonymous concepts. Equivocation is the mode of communication between its different perspectival positions and is thus at once the condition of possibility of the anthropological enterprise and its limit.

The indigenous theory of perspectivism emerges from an implicit comparison between the ways the different modes of corporeality "naturally" experience the world as affective multiplicity. Such a theory would thus appear to be a *reverse anthropology*, the inverse of our own ethno-anthropology as an explicit comparison of the ways that different mentalities "culturally" represent a world that would in turn be the origin of these different conceptual versions of itself. A culturalist description of perspectivism therefore amounts to the negation and delegitimation of its object, the retrospective construal of it as a primitive or fetishistic form of anthropological reasoning—an anti- or pre-anthropology.

45. Well, it is a cliché in only *certain* milieus; in others, defenses are frequently made of the idea that the true task of anthropology is not to carry out cultural translation, whatever this would be, but rather to reduce it naturally.

The concept of perspectivism, on the contrary, proposes an inversion of this inversion. Now for the native's turn! Not "the return of the native," as Adam Kuper (2003) ironically called the great ethnopolitical movement inspiring this reflexive displacement (what Sahlins [2000] called "the indigenization of modernity"), but a turn—an unexpected turning, *kairos*, thing, or detour. Not Thomas Hardy, but Henry James, the consummate genius of perspectivism: a turn of the indigenous that would be like the "the turn of the screw"… rather than the "screw the native" seemingly preferred by certain of our colleagues. In Kuper's view, the narrative told here would be a horror story: an *altermondialiste* cognitive anthropology or, as Patrice Maniglier once let drop, an *"altercognitivisme."*

In the end, this is what was at stake in Lévi-Strauss' anecdote about the Antilles incident. It does not comment from a distance on perspectivism but is itself perspectivist. It should be read as a historical transformation, in more than one sense, of several Amerindian myths that thematize interspecific perspectivism. I am thinking, for example, of the tales in which a protagonist lost in the forest happens upon a strange village whose inhabitants invite him to drink a refreshing gourd of "manioc beer," which he accepts enthusiastically … until he realizes, with horrified surprise, that it is full of human blood. Which leads him to conclude, naturally, that he is not really among humans. The anecdote, as much as the myth, turns on a type of communicative disjunction where the interlocutors are neither talking about nor cognizant of the same thing (in the case of the Puerto Rican anecdote, the "dialogue" takes place on the plane of Lévi-Strauss' own comparative reasoning about reciprocal ethnocentrism). Just as jaguars and humans use the same name for different things, the Europeans and the Indians were talking about "humanity" while wondering if this self-description was really applicable to the Other. But what Europeans and Indians understood to be the defining criterion or intension of that concept was radically different. In sum, Lévi-Strauss' anecdote and the myth equally hinge on equivocation.

The Antilles anecdote resembles innumerable others recounted in the ethnographic literature and also present in my own fieldwork. In fact, it encapsulates the anthropological event or situation par excellence. The celebrated episode of Captain Cook in Hawaii, for example, can be viewed, following Sahlins' famous but now-neglected analysis of it, as a structural transformation of the doubled experiment of Puerto Rico: each would be one version of the archetypical anthropological motif of intercultural equivocation. Viewed from indigenous Amazonia, the intercultural is nothing more than a particular case of the interspecific, and history only a version of myth.

It should be stressed that equivocation is not merely one among the numerous pathologies that threaten communication between anthropologists and indigenous peoples, whether linguistic incompetence, ignorance of context, lack of empathy, literalist ingenuity, indiscretion, bad faith, and sundry other deformations or shortcomings that can afflict anthropological discourse at an empirical level.[46] But in contrast with all these contingent pathologies, equivocation is a properly transcendental category, a constitutive dimension of the project of cultural translation proper to the discipline.[47] Not at all a simple negative facticity, it is a condition of possibility of anthropological discourse that justifies the latter's existence (*quid juris?*). To translate is to take up residence in the space of equivocation. Not for the purpose of cancelling it (that would suppose that it never really existed) but in order to valorize and activate it, to open and expand the space imagined not to exist between the (conceptual) languages in contact—a space in fact hidden by equivocation. Equivocation is not what prevents the relation, but what founds and impels it. To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate through differences, in lieu of keeping the Other under gag by presuming an original univocality and an ultimate redundancy—an essential similarity—between what the Other and we are saying.

Michael Herzfeld recently observed that "anthropology is about misunderstandings, including anthropologists' own

46. "Communicative pathologies," from those of the Graal to the Asdiwal, are of course a major topic Lévi-Strauss examines in the *Mythologiques*.

47. These considerations are obviously a paraphrase—a Strathernian analogy between domains—of a well-known passage from Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 51-2).

misunderstandings, because they are usually the outcome of the mutual incommensurability of different notions of common sense—our object of study" (2003: 2). No disagreement here. Well, not exactly: I would insist on the point that, if anthropology in principle exists, it is precisely because "common sense" in not so common. I would also add that the incommensurability of the clashing "notions," far from being an impediment to their comparability, is exactly what permits and justifies it (as Lambek [1998] argues). For only the incommensurate is worth comparing—comparing the commensurate, I think, is a task best left to accountants. Lastly, I will have to say that "misunderstanding" should be conceived in the specific sense equivocation is in perspectivist multinaturalism: an equivocation is not failed interpretation but "excess" interpretation, and is such to the extent that one realizes that there is always more than one interpretation in play. And above all, these interpretations are necessarily divergent, not in relation to imaginary modes of perceiving the world but through their relations with real, perceived worlds. In Amerindian cosmologies, the real world of different species *depends* on their points of view, for the "world in general" *consists* only of different species, being the abstract space of divergence between them *as* points of view. For as Deleuze would say, there are not points of view on things, since things and beings are themselves points of view (1988: 203).

Anthropology, then, is interested in equivocations in the "literal" sense: *inter esse*, betweenness, existing among. But, as Roy Wagner said of his initial time with the Daribi of New Guinea (1981: 20), "their misunderstanding of me was not the same as my misunderstanding them," (which may very well be the best definition of culture ever proposed). The critical point, of course, is not the mere fact that there were empirical misunderstandings, but the "transcendental fact" that they were not the same. The question, accordingly, is not who was wrong and still less who misled whom. Equivocation is not error, deception, or falsehood but the very foundation of the relation implicating it, which is always a relation with exteriority. Deception or error, rather, can be defined as something peculiar to a particular language game, while equivocation is what happens in the interval between different language games. Deception and error assume preconstituted, homogeneous premises, while equivocation not only

presumes heterogeneous premises but also conceives them as heterogeneous and supposes them as premises. More than being determined by its premises, equivocation defines them.

Equivocation, in sum, is not a subjective weakness but a machine for objectification; nor is it an error or illusion (not objectification conceived according to the language of reification, fetishization, and essentialization) but the limit condition of every social relation, a condition that itself becomes superobjectified in the limit case of that relation we call "intercultural," where language games maximally diverge. It should go without saying that such divergence includes the relation between the anthropologist's discourse and that of the indigenous. Thus the anthropological concept of culture, as Wagner argues, is the equivocation that arises as an attempt at resolving intercultural equivocation; and it is equivocal to the extent that it rests on the "paradox created by imagining a culture for people who do not imagine it for themselves" (1981: 27). This is why, even when misunderstandings are transformed into understandings (even when, that is, the anthropologist transforms his initial incomprehension about the indigenous in "their culture," or when the indigenous understand, for example, that what the Whites call a "gift" is in fact "merchandise"), the equivocations do not remain the same. The Other of the Others is always other. And if equivocation is neither error nor illusion nor lie but the very form of the relational positivity of difference, its opposite is not truth but "univocation," the aspiration to exist of a unique, transcendent meaning. Error or illusion par excellence would consist in imagining a univocation lying beneath each equivocation, with the anthropologist as its ventriloquist.

So we really are dealing with something other than a *return of the native*. If there is a return at all, it is Lévi-Strauss' "striking return to things": the return of philosophy to center stage. Not, however, according to his suggestion that this would entail a mutually exclusive choice between our philosophy and theirs (yet another case of homonymy? So much the better!) but in terms of a disjunctive synthesis between anthropology understood as

experimental metaphysics or field geophilosophy, and philosophy conceived as the *sui generis* ethno-anthropological practice of the creation of concepts (D. G. 1994). This traversalization of anthropology and philosophy, which is a "demonic alliance" à la *A Thousand Plateaus*, is established in view of a common objective, which is the entry into a state (a plateau of intensity) of the permanent decolonization of thought.

It would be useful to recall that sociocultural anthropology has always been thoroughly saturated with philosophical problems and concepts, from that philosophical concept of ours—myth—to the quite philosophical problem, evoked by Lévi-Strauss, of how to exit philosophy, which is to say the cultural matrix of anthropology. The question, then, is not of knowing if anthropology should renew its constantly interrupted dialogue with philosophy but of determining which philosophy it should take the time to link into. Clearly it depends both on what one wants and on what one can do. Defining an image of savage thought with the help of Kant, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein is entirely possible. And it is no less the case that direct parallelisms can be established between the contents on both sides: Amazonian cosmologies, for example, have rich, equivocating resemblances to the distinction between the worlds of essence and appearance and could thus seem to lend themselves to a Platonic reading (the sole interest of which, however, would be to show how this Indian Platonism is merely apparent). But everything, I will repeat, depends on the problem that savage thought poses to us, which is the question of what the *interesting* philosophical problems are among all those to be discerned in the innumerable, complex semiopratical arrangements invented by the collectives anthropology has studied.

The philosophy of Deleuze, and more particularly the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that were written with Guattari, is where I found the most appropriate machine for retransmitting the sonar frequency that I had picked up from Amerindian thought. Perspectivism and multinaturalism, which are, again, objects that have been resynthesized by anthropological discourse (indigenous theories, I dare say, do not present themselves in such conveniently pre-packaged fashion!), are the result of the encounter between a certain becoming-Deleuzian of Amerindian ethnology and a certain becoming-Indian of Deleuze and

Guattari's thought—a becoming-Indian that decisively passes, as we will see, through the chapter concerning becomings in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Does that come down to saying that the Indians are Deleuzians, as I once cheekily declared?[48] Yes and no. *Yes*, first because Deleuze and Guattari do not ring hollow when struck with indigenous ideas; second, because the line of thinkers privileged by Deleuze, inasmuch as they constitute a minor lineage within the Western tradition, allows for a series of connections with the outside of the tradition. But in the last analysis, *no*, the Indians are not Deleuzians, for they can just as much be Kantians as Nietzscheans, Bergsonians as Wittgensteinians, and Merleau-Pontyeans, Marxists, Freudians, and, above all, Lévi-Straussians.... I believe that I have even heard them referred to as Habermasians, and in that case, anything is possible.

Yes and no. Obviously, "the problem is poorly posed." Because from the point of view of a multinaturalist counter-anthropology, which is what is at stake, the philosophers are to be read in light of savage thought, and not the reverse: it is a matter of actualizing the innumerable becomings-other that exist as virtualities of our own thinking. To think an outside (*not necessarily* China[49]) in order to run against the grain of the thought of the Outside, by starting from the other end. Every experience of another thinking is an experience of our own.

48. Viveiros de Castro, 2006.

49. *Penser d'un dehors (la Chine)* is the title of one of François Jullinen's books (Jullien and Marchaisse 2000) and is, like the rest of his work, an absolutely paradigmatic reference for *Anti-Narcissus*, even in the rare moments where I do not succeed at being in complete agreement with it.