

Уважаемые читатели! Обращаем Ваше внимание на необходимость строгого выполнения правил использования электронных информационных ресурсов. Напоминаем Вам, что использование данных ресурсов разрешено только для научных и образовательных целей, их использование для коммерческих целей строго запрещено.

Dear readers! We would like to pay your attention on the necessity to follow the rules of electronic resources usage. These texts are for educational and scientific purposes only and not for commercial usage.

Radcliffe-Brown Lecture in Social Anthropology, 2005  
(*Proceedings of the British Academy* 139, pp.137-155, 2006)  
**Beyond Nature and Culture**  
Philippe Descola

An anthropological textbook recently published in Cambridge states that ‘hardly anyone in social anthropology today claims to be a follower of Radcliffe-Brown’<sup>1</sup>. It would be hypocritical for a French anthropologist with a structuralist inclination to challenge this kind of opinion, seemingly quite common in the very country of birth of the great scholar whose name this lecture is honouring. On the other hand, the present circumstance affords me perhaps the only appropriate opportunity for confessing that there is at least an aspect of Radcliffe-Brown’s work which I found quite stimulating, although it lead me astray for a while. Radcliffe-Brown’s sociological theory of totemism inspired me some years ago when I was trying to make sense of the peculiar treatment of animals by Amazonian Indians: although actively hunted for food, or feared as predators, animals are nevertheless considered as persons with whom humans can, indeed should, interact according to social rules.

The standard model available at the time for conceptualising relationships between humans and natural kinds was the Lévi-Straussian theory of totemism, that is, the idea that discontinuities between species function as a mental model for organising social segmentation among humans. However, that was patently not the case in Amazonia where the differences between humans and nonhumans are thought to be of degree, not of nature, thus echoing Radcliffe-Brown’s depiction of totemism, in which, to quote his words, ‘the natural order enters into and becomes part of the social order’<sup>2</sup>. According to him, such a conflation is possible because the relations that the Australian Aborigines establish with natural objects and phenomena are similar to those that they establish between themselves, both sets of relations being predicated on their social structures. Here, then, was a straightforward idea that seemed to account quite well for the type of phenomena encountered in Amazonia. But since sociological totemism is not very common there, and is always found combined with forms of individual relationship with animals treated as persons, I constructed a conceptual hybrid, retaining Lévi-Strauss’ theory of totemism for cases like Australia, and using Radcliffe-Brown’s theory of totemism to qualify what was in fact a non-totemic relation with natural kinds, which I christened, not very imaginatively, ‘animism’. If, according to Lévi-Strauss, totemism uses discontinuities between natural kinds in order to map social relations between humans, my Radcliffe-Brownian hypothesis was that animism uses the elementary categories shaping social practice to map relations between humans and natural objects<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge, CUP, 2000), p.73.

<sup>2</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society; essays and addresses* (London, Cohen & West, 1952), p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ph. Descola, ‘Societies of nature and the nature of society’, in A. Kuper (ed.) *Conceptualizing Society* (London, Routledge, 1992), pp. 107-126, and ‘Constructing natures:

Unfortunately, I was quite wrong on both counts. Friendly critics first made me aware of what I should have seen by myself, namely that this too neat inversion in fact ratified the distinction between nature and society inherent in both the Lévi-Straussian and the Radcliffe-Brownian interpretations of totemism, thus not rendering justice to Amazonian cosmologies where such a distinction is irrelevant<sup>4</sup>. I also came to realise that this duality is equally meaningless in the case of totemism, at least Australian totemism, as I will try to show later. Paradoxically, this is a point of view which Lévi-Strauss endorses too, not in *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, of course, but in *La Pensée sauvage*, where he writes, by reference to the totemic system of the Menominee and the Chippewa of the Great Lakes, that, in this case, each totemic group has to be taken in itself, as 'it tends to form a system, not any more with the other totemic groups, but with certain differential properties conceived as hereditary'; 'thus, instead of two images, one social one natural, (...) what will obtain is a unique but fragmented socio-natural image'<sup>5</sup>.

Finally it took me some more time to understand that my initial mistake stemmed from the fact that I had attempted to derive ontological properties ascribed to beings in the world, and hence the latter's distribution into categories, from relational processes materialised in institutions, instead of doing the reverse. True, I was in good company: ever since Durkheim, it has been the standard practice of anthropologists to grant an explanatory privilege to social forms. Necessary at the time to carve out for the emerging social sciences a domain of their own, this privilege made it inevitable that religious beliefs, conceptions of the person or cosmologies be ultimately explainable by the social patterns projected onto reality and by the structuring effect of these patterns on the activities thanks to which this reality is objectified and rendered meaningful. By deriving sociological structures from psychological imperatives, Lévi-Strauss was one of the few who tried to escape from this tendency. But the 'laws of the mind' he evokes are so vague that this derivation could not but be inductive: except in the analysis of myths, Lévi-Strauss always starts from the study of institutions in order to proceed 'towards the intellect', never the reverse. Now a system of relations cannot be understood independently from the elements it connects, provided these elements are taken not as interchangeable individuals or already institutionalised social units, but as entities that are endowed *ab initio* with specific properties that render them able or not to establish certain links between them. This is why I felt the urge to forsake the long-standing sociocentric prejudice and to surmise that social realities – i.e. stabilised relational systems – are analytically subordinated to ontological realities – i.e. the systems of properties that humans ascribe to beings<sup>6</sup>. My lecture will be devoted to trying to substantiate this heterodox opinion<sup>7</sup>.

My starting point rests on a philosophical intuition corroborated by ethnography, combined with a thought experiment for which I can find no justification except that it bears interesting anthropological fruits. I borrow the intuition from Husserl's idea that if humans try

---

Symbolic ecology and social practice', in Ph. Descola and G. Pálsson (eds.), *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 82-102.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment. Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, Routledge, 2000) and E. Viveiros de Castro, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio', *Mana* 2 (2) (1996), pp. 115-144.

<sup>5</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris, Plon, 1962), pp. 154-155, my translation.

<sup>6</sup> True, some non-human species also ascribe properties (at least relational and behavioural features) to humans and other non-humans; but before they can be included in a general theory of ontologies, a lot of ground remains to be covered.

<sup>7</sup> I am very grateful to Tim Ingold and Peter Marshall for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of the lecture and for their suggestions of stylistic amendments.

to experience any form of non-self by leaving out of the account the instituted world and everything it means for them, the only resources that they can avail themselves of are their body and their intentionality<sup>8</sup>. These twin assets, which I prefer to call physicality (in the sense of dispositions enabling a physical action) and interiority (in the sense of self-reflexive inwardness), are not Western constructs generated by the marriage of Greek philosophy with Christian theology and subsequently raised under the rigorous ferule of a long line of Cartesian tutors. According to developmental psychology, the awareness of this duality is probably innate and specific to the human species<sup>9</sup>, a point confirmed by ethnographic and historical accounts: for despite the known diversity of conceptions of the person, notions of physicality and interiority seem to be universally present, although with an infinite variety of modalities of connections and interactions between the two planes. A proof of this would be that there is no known case of a conception of the ordinary living human person that would be based on interiority alone – let's call it a mind without a body – or on physicality alone – a body without a mind –, or not at least, in the latter case, until the advent of materialist theories of consciousness of the late twentieth century. Rather than reducing the distinction between interiority and physicality to an ethnocentric prejudice, one should instead apprehend the specific forms this distinction was given in Europe by philosophical and theological theories as local variants of a more general system of elementary contrasts that can be studied comparatively.

The thought experiment derives from the initial intuition. If we agree that every human is aware of being a combination of interiority and physicality, then one can imagine how an entirely hypothetic subject, devoid of any previous information about the world, might use this equipment to chart his environment through a process of identification. By identification, I mean the elementary mechanism through which this subject will detect differences and similarities between himself and the objects in the world by inferring analogies and distinctions of appearance and behaviour between what he experiences as characteristic of his own self and the attributes he ascribes to the entities which surround him. And since the only tools he can rely upon are his interiority and his physicality, his patterning of the world will be based upon the selective attribution or denial of these attributes to other existing things. The range of identifications based on the interplay of interiority and physicality is thus quite limited: when confronted with an as yet unspecified *alter*, whether human or non-human, our hypothetical subject can surmise either that this object possesses elements of physicality and interiority analogous to his, and this I call totemism; or that this object's interiority and physicality are entirely distinct from his own, and this I call analogism; or that the object has a similar interiority and a different physicality, and this I call animism; or that the object is devoid of interiority but possesses a similar kind of physicality, and this I call naturalism. These formulae define four types of ontologies, that is of systems of distributions of properties among existing objects in the world, that in turn provide anchoring points for sociocosmic forms of aggregation and conceptions of self and non-self.

Let us now examine some properties of these four modes of identification. Animism as a continuity of souls and a discontinuity of bodies is quite common in South and North America, in Siberia and in some parts of South-East Asia where peoples endow plants, animals and other elements of their physical environment with a subjectivity and establish with these entities all sorts of personal relations, whether of friendship, exchange, seduction, or hostility. In these animic systems, humans and most non-humans are conceived as having

---

<sup>8</sup> E. Husserl, *Erste Philosophie* (1923-1924) II, *Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion* (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1959), pp. 61-64.

<sup>9</sup> P. Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York, Basic Books, 2004).

the same type of interiority, and it is because of this common subjectivity that animals and spirits are said to possess social characteristics: they live in villages, abide by kinship rules and ethical codes, engage in ritual activity and barter goods. However, the reference shared by most beings in the world is humanity as a general condition, not man as a species. In other words, humans and all the kinds of non-humans with which humans interact each have different physicalities, in that their identical internal essences are lodged in different types of bodies, often described locally as clothing that can be donned or discarded, the better to underline their autonomy from the interiorities which inhabit them. Non-humans see themselves as humans because they are said to believe that they share with the latter the same kind of soul, and yet they are unlike humans because their bodies are different. Now, as Viveiros de Castro pointed out in the case of Amazonia, these specific clothes often induce contrasted perspectives on the world, in that the physiological and perceptual constraints proper to a type of body impose to each class of being a specific position and point of view in the general ecology of relations<sup>10</sup>. Human and non-human persons have an integrally 'cultural' view of their life sphere because they share the same kind of interiority, but the world that all these entities apprehend and use is different, for each employs distinct bodily equipment.

These differences of bodies are morphological, and thus behavioural, rather than substantial. This is hardly surprising as animic ontologies probably borrow part of their operational schema from the model of the trophic chain. Everywhere in the animic archipelago, one finds the same idea that vitality, energy and fecundity constantly circulate between organisms thanks to the capture, the exchange and the consuming of flesh. This constant recycling of tissues and fluids, analogous to the nutritional interdependence in the synecological process, is a clear indication that all these beings who ingest one another cannot be distinguished by the substances they are made of. And this is why, in animic systems, dietary prescriptions and prohibitions are less designed to favour or to prevent the mixing of reputedly heterogeneous substances – as is typically the case in Chinese or Galenic medicine, for instance – than to favour or to prevent the transfer from the prescribed or the proscribed species of certain anatomical features or of certain traits of behaviour reputedly derived from these features. By contrast, the place that each species occupies in the trophic chain is precisely determined by its organic equipment, since this conditions both the milieu accessible to the species and, through the organs of locomotion and of acquisition of food, the type of resources that can be tapped in this milieu. The form of bodies thus amounts to a bundle of differentiated functions, it is the entire biological toolkit that allows a species to occupy a certain habitat and to lead there the type of distinctive lifestyle by which it is identified.

Although many species share the same or a similar interiority, each one of them thus possesses its own physicality under the guise of a particular ethogram that will determine its own *Umwelt*, in the sense of Jakob von Uexküll: that is, the salient features of its environment are those that are geared to its specific bodily tools as instruments of locomotion, of reproduction, of defence, of acquiring food<sup>11</sup>. This is why metamorphosis plays such an important role in animic systems. For metamorphosis is what allows interactions on a common ground between entities with entirely different bodies, when animals and plants reveal their interiority under a human form in order to communicate with humans – in dreams and visions generally, or when humans – usually shamans and ritual specialists – don animal clothing in order to visit animal communities. Thus, metamorphosis is not an unveiling of the humanity of animal persons, or a way to disguise the humanity of human persons; it is the

---

<sup>10</sup> E. Viveiros de Castro, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos', p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> J. von Uexküll, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen – Bedeutungslehre* (Hamburg, Rowohlt Verlag, 1956).

culminating stage of a relation where everyone, by modifying the position of observation to which he has been confined by his original physicality, strives to coincide with the point of view according to which he presumes that the other term of the relation apprehends himself: a human will not see an animal as he perceives it normally, but as the animal perceives itself, as a human; and a human is seen as he does not perceive himself ordinarily, but as he wishes to be perceived, as an animal. It is an anamorphosis, then, rather than a metamorphosis.

This exchange of perspectives immediately brings to mind what Viveiros de Castro calls 'perspectivism', a concept by which he refers to the positional quality of some Amerindian cosmologies; in such cosmologies: "humans, in normal conditions, see humans as humans, the animals as animals and the spirits (when they see them) as spirits; the (predatory) animals and the spirits see humans as animals (preys), while the (game) animals see humans as spirits or as (predatory) animals. By contrast, animals and spirits see themselves as humans"<sup>12</sup>. Is perspectivism the normal epistemic regime of animism or is it a particular case of it? I favour the latter option for a variety of reasons. In, so-to-say, 'standard' animism, humans say that non-humans see themselves as humans because, in spite of their different forms, they share a similar interiority. To this, perspectivism adds a clause: humans say that some non-humans do not see humans as humans, but as non-humans. It boils down to a simple matter of logical possibility: if humans see themselves with a human form and see non-humans with a non human form, then non-humans who see themselves with a human form should see humans with a non human form. However this inversion of the points of view which properly characterizes perspectivism is far from being a general feature of all animic systems (it is, for example, conspicuously absent among the Jivaroan Achuar who triggered my initial interest for animism). The most common situation in standard animic regime is one in which humans just say that non-humans see themselves as humans. But how do non-humans see humans if perspectivism is not operative? The answer that can be inferred from ethnographic accounts is that they see them as humans. This stems from the fact that animals (and the spirits who act as their representatives) generally adopt a human appearance when they want to establish a relationship with humans, an attitude that they certainly would not adopt if they thought that humans were predatory animals. For, if I treat a monkey, whom I think perceives himself as a human, according to the prescribed behaviour between brothers-in-law (as the Achuar do), then I have to expect from him that he will treat me in the same manner, that is in 'human code', not in 'jaguar code' or in 'anaconda code'. Otherwise they would be no point in pretending that he is a brother-in-law. True, a non-human could possibly see a human under a non human form and nevertheless surmise that this human sees himself as a human; but this would imply, by reflexive conversion, that the non-human is himself conscious of not being human in spite of the human form under which he perceives himself, a rather implausible hypothesis and one which is not warranted by ethnography.

A new question then arises: if the standard situation in an animic regime is that non-humans see humans as humans, how can they distinguish themselves from humans since they also perceive themselves as humans? The only answer supported by ethnography is that non-humans distinguish themselves from humans (and between themselves) by the behavioural habits determined by the biological equipment proper to each species, habits which subsist in their bodies even when they perceive them as human. For bodies that might be anatomically similar, nevertheless differ by the dispositions that are lodged within them (such as gregariousness or solitary habits, being diurnal or nocturnal, evasive or predatory...) as well as by the way they present themselves in motion to the gaze of others (through ornamentation, gestures, the types of weapons and tools used, the languages spoken...). In other words, the very criteria that an Amerindian would use to distinguish himself from members of a

---

<sup>12</sup> E. Viveiros de Castro, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos', p. 117 (my translation).

neighbouring tribe, are also used by animals (according to the Indians) to distinguish their species-specific human form (as they perceive it) from the human form of humans. As Viveiros de Castro himself states “perspectivism is an ethno-epistemological corollary of animism”<sup>13</sup>. By postulating the inverted symmetry of points of view, perspectivism ingeniously exploits the possibility opened by the difference of physicalities on which animism is predicated. But this is a development that many peoples of the animic archipelago have not attempted, perhaps because it introduces an additional level of complexity in a positional ontology where it is already extremely difficult to assign stable identities to the different kinds of beings with whom one interacts daily.

Let us turn now to the second mode of identification, where some beings in the world share sets of physical and moral attributes that seem to cut across the boundaries of species. I call it totemism, but in a very different sense from the one which has been attached to the term since Lévi-Strauss attempted to debunk the ‘totemic illusion’. For totemism is more than a universal classificatory device; it is also, and perhaps foremost, a very original ontology which is best exemplified in Aboriginal Australia. There, the main totem of a group of humans, most often an animal or a plant, and all the human and non-human beings that are affiliated to it, are said to share certain general attributes of physical conformation, substance, temperament and behaviour by virtue of a common origin emplaced in the land. This explains famous counter-intuitive statements which hardly fit within the Lévi-Straussian framework, such as the one reported by Spencer and Gillen who, when showing to an Aranda man of the kangaroo totem a photograph they had taken of him, received this response: ‘this one is exactly like me; as is a kangaroo’, leading them to comment ‘every man considers his totem (...) as the same thing as himself’<sup>14</sup>.

Now, as C. G. von Brandenstein showed in his thorough analysis of the meaning of Australian totem terms, these attributes that crosscut species boundaries are not derived from what is improperly called the eponym entity, since the word designating the totem in many cases is not the name of a species, i.e. a biological taxon, but rather the name of an abstract property which is present in this species as well as in all the beings subsumed under it in a totemic grouping<sup>15</sup>. For instance, the Nungar of South-West Australia had two totemic moieties, respectively called *maarnetj*, that can be translated as ‘the catcher’, and *waardar*, which means ‘the watcher’, these two terms also being used to designate the totems of these moieties, the White Cockatoo and the Crow<sup>16</sup>. Here, the names of the totemic classes are terms that denote properties that are also used to designate the totemic species, and not the reverse, that is names of zoological taxa from which would be inferred the typical attributes of the totemic classes. It is thus difficult to maintain, at least for Australia, the classificatory interpretation of totemism, since the basic difference is between aggregates of attributes that are common to humans and non-humans within classes designated by abstract terms, not between animal and vegetable species that would provide naturally, by their manifest discontinuities of morphology and behaviour, an analogical template that could be used so as to structure social discontinuities.

And these moral and physical attributes are usually defined with precision. In the case of the Nungar, for instance, humans belonging to the moiety of ‘the catcher’ are said to have a

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> W. B. Spencer et F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London, Macmillan & Co, 1899), p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> C. G. von Brandenstein, *Names and Substance of the Australian Subsection System* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> C. G. von Brandenstein, ‘Aboriginal Ecological Order in the South-West of Australia - Meanings and Examples’, *Oceania* XLVII (3) (1977), pp. 170-186.

light brown skin, round faces and limbs, curly hair and to be endowed with an impulsive and passionate temperament, while members of the moiety of 'the watcher' are said to have a dark and leaden skin, to be very hairy and of a stocky build, with small hands and feet, and to be vindictive, sullen and secretive. Such qualities are not directly inferred from the observation of the White Cockatoo or the Crow; they express, in the domain of moral and physical properties ascribed to humans, repertoires of more abstract, contrasted predicates that these two emblematic species are supposed to express and embody much more clearly than the secondary totem species that are subsumed under them. The two birds are thus prototypes of a kind, not primarily because they are morphologically salient, but because they are the best exemplars of their respective classes in that they allow inferences of properties derived from certain traits of their behaviour and appearance, however tenuous these may be.

As ontologies, animism and totemism evidence contrasting formal features. In animic systems, the continuity of relations between humans and nonhumans that is allowed by their common interiority overrides the discontinuity introduced by their physical difference. This explains the relational nature of animic cosmologies and the fact that the identities of human and non-human persons are defined by the positions they occupy in relation to one another. By contrast, Australian totemism is a symmetrical structure characterized by a twofold identity internal to each class of beings – ontological identity of the human and non-human components of the class by virtue of their sharing elements of interiority and physicality, and identity of the relations between them, whether of origin, affiliation, similarity or inherence to the class. Totemism thus places on an equal footing interdependent terms and relations, a motive for puzzlement among anthropologists, and the reason why they have interpreted the phenomenon by favouring either the identity of terms – in the case of Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl, for instance – or the homology of relations, as Boas or Lévi-Strauss did.

The third mode of identification, which I call analogism, is predicated on the idea that all the entities in the world are fragmented into a multiplicity of essences, forms and substances separated by minute intervals, often ordered along a graded scale, such as in the Great Chain of Being that served as the main cosmological model during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This disposition allows for a recombination of the initial contrasts into a dense network of analogies linking the intrinsic properties of each autonomous entity present in the world. What is most striking in such systems is the cleverness with which all the resemblances liable to provide a basis for inferences are actively sought out, especially as these apply to crucial domains of life, particularly the prevention and treatment of illness and misfortune. The obsession with analogies becomes a dominating feature, as in ancient China where, according to Granet, 'society, man, the world, are objects of a global knowledge constituted by the sole use of analogy'<sup>17</sup>. However, analogy is here only a consequence of the necessity to organize a world composed of a multiplicity of independent elements, such as the Chinese *wan wou*, the 10 000 essences. Analogy becomes possible and thinkable only if the terms that it conjoins are initially distinguished, if the power to detect similarities between things is applied to singularities that are, by this process, partially extracted from their original isolation. Analogism can be seen as an hermeneutic dream of completeness and totalisation which proceeds from a dissatisfaction: admitting that all the components of the world are separated by tiny discontinuities, it entertains the hope of weaving these weakly differentiated elements into a canvass of affinities and attractions which would have all the appearances of continuity. But the ordinary state of the world is indeed a multiplicity of reverberating differences, and resemblance is only the expected means to render this fragmented world intelligible and tolerable. This multiplication of the elementary pieces of the world echoing within each of its parts – including humans, divided into numerous components partially

---

<sup>17</sup> M. Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1968 (1934)), p. 297.

located outside of their bodies – is a distinctive feature of analogic ontologies and the best clue for identifying them. Apart from the paradigmatic case of China, this type of ontology is quite common in parts of Asia, in West Africa, or among the native communities of Mesoamerica and the Andes.

The last mode of identification, naturalism, corresponds to the prevalent ontology of Modernity. Naturalism is not only the idea that nature exists, that certain entities owe their existence and development to a principle that is extraneous both to chance and to the effects of human will. It does not qualify only the advent, conventionally situated in the seventeenth century, of a specific ontological domain, a place of order and necessity where nothing happens without a cause. Naturalism also implies a counterpart, a world of artifice and free-will the complexity of which has progressively emerged under the scrutiny of analysts, until it rendered necessary, in the course of the nineteenth century, the institution of special sciences which were given the task of stabilizing its boundaries and characteristics: that is, the diversity of expressions of the creativity of humans as producers of signs, norms and goods. Now, if one considers naturalism – the coexistence of a single unifying nature and a multiplicity of cultures – not as the all-embracing template that allows us to objectify any reality, but as one among other modes of identification, then its contrasting properties appear more clearly. For instance, naturalism inverts the ontological premises of animism since, instead of claiming an identity of soul and a difference of bodies, it is predicated upon a discontinuity of interiorities and a material continuity<sup>18</sup>. What, for us, distinguishes humans from non-humans is the mind, the soul, subjectivity, a moral conscience, language and so forth, in the same way as human groups are distinguished from one another by a collective internal disposition that used to be called *Volksgeist* but is more familiar to us now under its modern label of ‘culture’. On the other hand, we are all aware, especially since Darwin, that the physical dimension of humans locates them within a material continuum wherein they do not stand out as singularities. The ontological discrimination that excludes from personhood non-human organisms that are biologically very close to us is a clear sign of the privilege granted in our own mode of identification to criteria based on the expression of a purported interiority (language, self-consciousness or theory of mind) rather than those based on material continuity.

I want to make clear that these four modes of identification are not mutually exclusive. Each human may activate any of them according to circumstances, but one of them is always dominant at a specific time and place in that it gives to persons who acquired skills and knowledge within a same community of practice the main framework through which they perceive and interpret reality. It is this framework that I call an ontology. Now, each ontology also prefigures a specific type of collective more particularly appropriate to the gathering within a common destiny of the kinds of being that this ontology distinguishes. By collective, a concept I borrow from Latour, I mean a way of assembling humans and non-humans in a network of specific relations, by contrast with the traditional notion of society, which only applies, strictly speaking, to the subset of human subjects, thus detached from the fabrics of the relations that they maintain with their non-human environment<sup>19</sup>.

Taken in that sense, a collective corresponds only very partially to what we usually call a social system. If one takes seriously the various conceptions that peoples have forged of their institutions in the course of history, we have to admit that they seldom isolate the sphere of sociality as a separate regime of existence and norms concerning humans alone. One had to

---

<sup>18</sup> A point which Viveiros de Castro was the first to make, ‘Os pronomes cosmológicos’, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> B. Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes. Essai d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris, La Découverte, 1991).

wait for the maturity of naturalism, in the nineteenth century, for a specialized body of disciplines to emerge which would define sociality as its main object of study and attempt as a consequence to detect and objectify this field of practice everywhere, without paying much attention to local conceptions, as if the content and frontiers of this domain were invariably identical to those that we decreed. Now, far from being a founding prerequisite from which everything else is derived, sociality proceeds rather from the process of collecting and assembling into a common whole that each mode of identification predetermines. Thus, the property of being social is not what explains, but what must be explained. If one admits this, if one accepts that the major part of humankind has not, until very recently, made stark distinctions between what is natural and what is social, nor considered that the treatment of humans and the treatment of non-humans belong to entirely different spheres, then one must apprehend the different modes of sociocosmic organisation as a question of patterns of distribution of beings into collectives: who or what is assembled with whom or what, in what way, and for what purpose?

I can only offer a very brief sketch of this patterning and I shall begin with animism. In such systems, all the classes of beings endowed with an interiority similar to that of humans reputedly live in collectives that possess the same kind of structure and properties: they all have chiefs, shamans, rituals, dwellings, techniques, artefacts, they assemble and quarrel, provide for their subsistence and marry according to rules. But these collectives, that are all integrally social and cultural, are also distinguished from one another by the fact that their members have different morphologies and behaviour. Each collective is equivalent to a sort of tribe-species that establishes with other tribes-species relations of sociability of the same type as those that are held legitimate within the given human collective which ascribes its internal organisation, its system of values and its mode of life to the collectives of non-humans with which it interacts. The so-called natural and supernatural domains are thus peopled by collectives with which human collectives maintain relations according to norms that are deemed common to all. For although humans and non-humans may exchange perspectives, they also and above all exchange signs, that is indications that they understand each other in their practical interactions. And these signs can only be interpreted by all parties concerned if they are predicated on common institutions that legitimate them and give them a meaning, thus warranting that the misunderstandings in interspecific communication will be reduced to a minimum. This is why all the isomorphous collectives of humans and non-humans take as their model a specific human collective.

Although the concept of species provides the template for animic collectives, it is a species which hardly corresponds to the definition of modern systematics. True, in both cases, it amounts to a collection of individuals that conform to a type. However, the natural sciences do not take into account the point of view of the members of a species in the characterisation of its attributes and taxonomic boundaries, except perhaps in the basic form of mutual identification that a community of reproduction implies. In the naturalist regime, then, the human species is the only one that has the capacity to objectify itself thanks to the reflexive privilege granted by its interiority, while the members of all the other species remain ignorant of the fact that they belong to an abstract set which has been isolated by the external point of view of the systematician according to his own classificatory criteria. By contrast, the members of an animic species are reputedly conscious that they form a collective of their own, with distinctive attributes of form and behaviour. And this collective self-awareness is reinforced by the notion that the members of other collectives apprehend them with a point of view different from their own, a point of view which they must appropriate in order to experience themselves as fully distinct. In the naturalist classification, species A is distinguished from species B because species C says so in virtue of its human rational capacity, while in animic identification, I experience myself as a member of species A, not

only because I differ from members of species B by certain manifest physical features, but also because the very existence of species B allows me to know I am different since its members hold of me a different point of view from the one I hold of myself. The perspective of the putative classifier must then be absorbed by the classified in order for the latter to see himself as entirely specific.

I will not expatiate on the sociological formula of naturalism, since it is the one that is most familiar to us and that we deem, mistakenly, to be universal: humans are distributed within collectives differentiated by their languages, beliefs and institutions – what we call cultures – which exclude everything that exists independently from them, namely nature and artefacts. The paradigm of collectives is here human society, *by contrast* to an anomic nature. Humans associate freely, they elaborate rules and conventions that they can choose to infringe, they transform their environment and share tasks in the procurement of their subsistence, they create signs and values that they exchange; in sum, they do everything that non-human animals do not do. And it is against the background of this fundamental difference that the distinctive properties attributed to human collectives stand out; as Hobbes says with his robust concision: ‘no covenant with beasts’. It is true that social evolutionism has introduced graduations into this original separation from the world of non-humans, graduations that subsist today as prejudices: certain ‘cultures’ are said to be closer to nature (it has now become a positive trait) because they hardly modify their environment and make do without a heavy institutional apparatus. But no one, even among the most stubborn racists, would be prepared to say that these societies borrow their institutions from animals.

While animism and naturalism take human society as general models of collectives, they do it very differently. Animism is extremely liberal in its attribution of sociality to non-humans, while naturalism reserves the privilege of it to everything that is not deemed natural. In the case of animism, a Radcliffe-Brownian anthropologist would say that nature is conceived by analogy with culture since the majority of beings in the world reputedly live in a cultural regime, and it is mainly through physical attributes – the morphology of bodies and the behaviours associated with them – that collectives are distinguished from one another. In naturalism, by contrast, common philosophical wisdom has it that culture is conceived as what is differentiated from nature; it is qualified by default. Although both conceptions may appear anthropocentric, only naturalism is really so, since non-humans are tautologically defined by their lack of humanity. It is exclusively in humans and their attributes that the paradigm of moral dignity denied to other beings is held to reside. No such thing can be said of animism, since non-humans share the same condition as humans, the latter claiming as their only privilege the ascription to non-humans of institutions that are similar to their own so as to establish with them relations based on shared norms of behaviour. Animism is thus better defined as anthropogenic, in that it contents itself with deriving from humans only what is necessary in order for non-humans to be treated like humans.

The question of totemic collectives is more complex. Traditionally, totemism has been conceptualised as a form of social organisation in which humans are distributed in interlocking groups that borrow their distinctive characteristics from the realm of natural kinds, either because these groups are supposed to share certain attributes with a set of non-humans, or because they take as models for patterning their internal differences the contrasts between eponymous species. Now, this broadly sociocentric definition has the disadvantage of introducing an analytical dichotomy between social categories and natural categories that appears to be absent from the ontological premises of those paradigmatic totemists that Australian Aboriginal people are. It is more appropriate in that case to say that humans and non-humans are distributed *jointly* in collectives (totemic classes) which are isomorphous and complementary, by contrast with animism wherein humans and non-humans are distributed *separately* in collectives (tribes-species) which are also isomorphous, but which remain

autonomous in relation to each other. To return to the example of the Nungar, in the moiety of 'the getter' iconically represented by the White Cockatoo, one does find cockatoos, as well as the human half of the Nungar tribe, but one finds also eagles, pelicans, snakes, mosquitoes, whales, in short an apparently ill-assorted aggregate of species that cannot be matched with any of the groupings of organisms that the environment spontaneously offers to observation. By contrast, an animic collective such as the Achuar tribe of the Upper Amazon is exclusively composed of achuar-persons, while among their non-human neighbours, one finds only peccary-persons in the peccary tribe, tapir-persons in the tapir tribe, toucan-persons in the toucan tribe. If the structure and properties of animic collectives thus derive from those ascribed to human collectives, the structure of totemic collectives is defined by the differentials between bundles of physical and moral attributes that are denoted by non-human emblems (the species illustrating the totems), while the properties ascribed to the members of these collectives do not proceed directly from humans or from non-humans, but rather from a prototypical class of predicates, embodied in Australia in the Beings of Dreamtime, which pre-exist their actualisation in specific beings. Although animic collectives differ from one another because of the monospecific recruitment of their members, they are homogeneous as regards their principles of organization: for the Makuna of Colombia, the tapir tribe has the same type of leader, shaman and ritual system as has the peccary tribe, the toucan tribe and, of course, the Makuna tribe<sup>20</sup>. This is not so with totemic collectives, which are also all different as regards the composition of their members, but which are furthermore hybrid in their contents and heterogeneous in their principles of composition.

This is particularly the case in Australia where there exists a great variety of totemic groupings and where humans can belong simultaneously to several of them. Here again, the contrast is notable with animic collectives which are on the contrary predicated on a species-specific physicality, since the affiliation to each 'society' is based on the fact that all its members share the same physical appearance, the same habitat, the same diet and the same mode of reproduction. It is in animism, not in totemism, that the biological species provides a model for the composition of collectives. And this is so because animic collectives, like biological species, are never integrated into a functional whole at a higher level: above the achuar tribe-species, the toucan tribe-species, the peccary tribe-species, there is nothing in common, except this abstract predicate that anthropologists who try to make sense of these arrangements call 'culture'. No such thing with totemism, where the integrative whole formed by the juxtaposition of the different totemic classes cannot be represented on the basis of the groupings that the natural world proposes: the only available model would be the species, since the genus is a taxonomic fiction, but the species is precisely not liable to be decomposed in contrastive segments that would be analogous to totemic classes. While animism and naturalism take human society as the paradigm of collectives, totemism thus mixes in hybrid sets humans and non-humans that use one another in order to produce social linkage, generic identity and attachment to places. But it does so by fragmenting the constitutive units so that the properties of each of them become complementary and their assemblage dependant upon the differentials that they present. Such a system is not driven by a Lévi-Straussian classificatory logic nor by a Durkheimian sociocentric logic, but by a principle that may be called cosmogenic. As animism is anthropogenic because it borrows from humans what is necessary for non-humans to be treated like humans, so totemism is cosmogenic in that it derives from sets of cosmic attributes – that is, which cannot be referred to a particular species – everything that is needed for some humans and non-humans to be included within a single collective.

---

<sup>20</sup> K. Århem, 'The Cosmic Food Web: human-nature relatedness in the Northwest Amazon', in Ph. Descola and G. Pálsson (eds.), *Nature and Society*, pp. 185-204.

The forms of collective allowed by the analogic mode of identification are not so specific: in this kind of ontology, the components of the world are so fragmented into a plurality of elements and determinations that their association can take many different guises. In spite of this diversity, however, humans and non-humans always appear as constitutive elements of a wider collective, coextensive with the world: cosmos and society become truly indistinguishable, whatever the types of internal segmentation that such a totality requires in order to remain efficient. For the analogic collective is always divided into interdependent constitutive units which are structured according to a logic of segmentary nesting: lineages, moieties, castes, descent groups prevail here and expand the connections of humans with other beings from the infraworld to the heavens. Although the exterior of the collective is not entirely ignored, it remains an 'out-world' where disorder reigns, a periphery that may be feared, despised, or predestined to join the central core as a new segment that will fit in the slot that has been allocated to it long before: such was the fate of the Amazonian savages bordering the Tawantinsuyu, who, without ever having been subjected to the Lords of Cuzco, belonged to the Anti division of the Inca quadripartition.

Analogic collectives are not necessarily empires or States; some of them are weak in numbers and ignore political stratification and disparities of wealth. They all have in common, however, that their parts are ordered hierarchically, if only at a symbolic level. The hierarchical distribution is often redoubled within each segment, delimitating subsets which are in the same unequal relation one to the other as the encompassing units. The classical illustration is the Hindu caste system where the general schema of encompassment is repeated within each of the successive levels of subordination: in the sub-castes composing the castes, in the clans composing the sub-castes, in the lineal groups composing the clans. The same structure is found in the organisation into endogamous sections, or *kalpul*, of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal of Chiapas, a sort of segment that can hardly be called a moiety, in that certain communities have three or five of them, but that has all the characteristics of it. The *kalpul* are social and cosmic segments mixing humans and non-humans, as well as corporate units exerting a control on land tenure and on the individuals incorporated under their jurisdiction. When there are only two sections, the most frequent case, their demarcation follows the gradient of the territory at the level of the village, so that the dominant moiety on the ritual, symbolic and demographic planes is located in the upper part, associated with the mountains and the autochthonous divinities that have their abode there, while the lower moiety is linked to the lowlands, to the abundance of crops, and to the world of demons and Whites. The demographic and ceremonial preponderance of the upper moiety is but an expression of a more general pattern of segmentation of the cosmos in pairs of complementary elements, one said to be 'elder', the other 'younger': each 'elder' mountain is thus flanked by a 'younger' mountain, each 'elder' cavern by a 'younger' one, and so on, from fountains to the statues of saints in the village church.

To sum up, the analogic collective is unique, divided into hierarchised segments and in almost exclusive relation with itself, by contrast with the egalitarian and monospecific collectives of animism, and the egalitarian and heterogeneous collectives of totemism that are all bound to enter into relation with each other. It is thus self-sufficient, in that it contains within itself all the relations and determinations that are necessary to its existence and adequate functioning, by contrast with the totemic collective, which is indeed autonomous at the level of its ontological identity, but which requires other collectives of the same kind in order to become functional. For, in an analogic collective, the hierarchy of the elementary segments is contrastive: it is defined exclusively by reciprocal positions. And this is why the segments do not constitute independent collectives as the totemic classes do, since the latter draw from within themselves, from specific sites and prototypical precursors, the physical and moral foundations of their distinctiveness. The moiety of the East only exists because it

complements the moiety of the West, while the totemic group of the Kangaroo, even if it may need the totemic group of the Goanna in many situations, draws from the sole circumstances of its emergence the legitimacy of its absolute singularity.

The segments of an analogic collective are thus thoroughly heteronomical in that they only acquire a meaning and a function by reference to the autonomous whole that they jointly form. It is true that animic collectives also admit a degree of heteronomy, but of an entirely different kind since the external specification obtains through a series of identifications to individual and intersubjective alterities of various origins, not through an overdetermination of the elements by the structure which binds them. The enemy whose alterity I absorb by capturing his head or consuming his body proceeds indeed from a different collective; however his capacity to singularise me is not linked to traits that would be specific to his own collective, but simply to his position of exteriority regarding myself. The members of the tribe-species A differentiate themselves from the members of the tribe-species B, C or D because they perceive themselves as distinctive entities through the perspective that these other tribe-species activate upon them in the course of certain codified interactions. This is why, in the case of animism, there is no predetermination as to the type of collective liable to serve this function of external specification: it may be, according to context, individuals proceeding from one or various tribe-species of animals, from one or various tribe-species of spirits, from one or various tribe-species of humans, or from a combination of all of these. As for the properly physical incorporation of an external point of view, it becomes an occasional luxury, reserved to a few animic collectives only, as is actual cannibalism the easiest means for achieving that end. In an analogic collective, by contrast, the members of segment A differentiate themselves collectively from members of segment B in that A and B are elements of the hierarchical structure which encompasses them all; in philosophical language, one would say that their positions and relations are the product of an expressive causality. The dependence of the analogic segments on the collective that defines them is thus constitutive of their mode of being; with elements that are intrinsically internal to the collective, they must strive to produce an illusion of exteriority.

In a famous presidential address to The Royal Anthropological Institute, Radcliffe-Brown remarked that ‘we do not observe a “culture”, since that word denotes, not any concrete reality, but an abstraction’<sup>21</sup>. Quite true. But the same can be said of most anthropological concepts. We do not observe a ‘social structure’ either, or a kinship system, or the mysterious entelechy that Durkheimians call a *représentation collective*. We only observe what we take as instantiations of what we believe are structured patterns of behaviour and recurrent patterns of thought. Understanding the nature and distribution of these patterns has been our concern for almost a century and a half, whatever our differences as to the level of reality on which they should be found. If, as I surmise, the ambition of anthropology is to contribute with its own methods to the task of elucidating the manner in which humans engage with their surroundings, how they identify and select some properties of the world for their use, and how they transform it by establishing, with elements of it and among themselves, constant or occasional relations of a remarkable but not infinite diversity, then, to pursue such an endeavour, we need to draw up the chart of these relations, to elicit their modes of compatibility and incompatibility, and to examine how they are actualised in ways of being that are immediately distinctive. I found that this task is much easier if one looks at differences rather than resemblances. Not the obvious differences between what we call cultures, the bread and butter of social constructionism, nor the unique mega-difference

---

<sup>21</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, ‘On social structure’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 70 (1940), pp. 1-12, republished in *Structure and Function*, p. 190.

between humans and non-humans that is used to authenticate all other differences. The differences that count are those that accrue from the network of discontinuities of form, matter, behaviour or function that are offered to our grasp by the movement of the world. Discontinuities that are sometimes straightforward, sometimes barely outlined; discontinuities that we can recognize or ignore, emphasize or minimize, actualize or leave as potentialities; discontinuities which form the framework on which are hooked our relations with what Merleau-Ponty aptly called 'the associate bodies'<sup>22</sup>. I found, in short, that there was no need to presuppose some original fault lines in this network of discontinuities, in particular one that would separate the realm of nature from the abode of speaking creatures; I found that, however useful this constitutional division may have been in triggering the accomplishments of Modernity, it has now outlived its moral and epistemological efficiency, thus making way for what I believe will be a new exciting period of intellectual and political turmoil.

---

<sup>22</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* (Paris, Gallimard, 1964), p. 13.

Уважаемые читатели! Обращаем Ваше внимание на необходимость строгого выполнения правил использования электронных информационных ресурсов. Напоминаем Вам, что использование данных ресурсов разрешено только для научных и образовательных целей, их использование для коммерческих целей строго запрещено.

Dear readers! We would like to pay your attention on the necessity to follow the rules of electronic resources usage. These texts are for educational and scientific purposes only and not for commercial usage.

**‘The Genres of Gender.  
Local Models and Global Paradigms in the Comparison of Amazonia and Melanesia’**

**Philippe DESCOLA**

**in T. Gregor & D. Tuzin (eds.) *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia : An Exploration of the Comparative Method*, pp. 91-114, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.**

Seen from Amazonia, Melanesia stands out as a sort of anthropological wonderland teeming with a bewildering diversity of social institutions which the specialists of the South American Lowlands sometimes view with discreet envy. Shamanism, head-hunting, secret men’s cults, cannibalism, ritualized feuding, dualist organizations, splendid feather paraphernalia or sophisticated adaptations to tropical ecosystems, all these ethnographic features that the students of Amazonia would spontaneously consider as forming the characteristic landscape of their cultural area are also present in Melanesia; to which must be added an array of practices, cultural idiosyncrasies and social systems which are either totally absent or barely sketched in Amazonia. As a result, Amazonianists tend to look towards Melanesia as a kind of experimental laboratory, or evolutionary template, that presents the full range of combinations between a set of structural potentialities of which Amazonia, for reasons that are yet to be properly understood, offers only a very partial realization. Melanesian cultures may thus be seen as an ethnographic thought experiment whereby the logical conditions for a possible structural transformation of Amazonian social systems may be identified.

My repeated use of the word ‘structural’ is indication enough that cross-cultural comparison cannot be for me of the Murdockian type, i.e. it cannot be reduced to correlating a set of reified phenomena or surface properties in order to establish universal connections between predefined typological features. In other words, comparison is worthy to attempt only if it deals with differences rather than similarities, differences that stem from the operation of deep underlying schemata, that become analytically meaningful when considered as transformations of one another. A first step in the procedure is thus to isolate domains of contrast as starting points for the production of hypotheses that offer a guiding thread both for the comprehension of the internal diversity of a cultural area and for the intelligibility of the principles that may account for the systematic variations between two historically unrelated cultural areas. By inviting the contributors

to this volume to focus their comparative approach on the topic of gender, the editors have judiciously pinpointed such a domain of contrast.

Perhaps the first symptom of a major difference between Amazonia and Melanesia in the construction of sex differences is the unequal coverage given to this theme in the ethnographic literature on both regions. A recent review of the major questions treated by Amazonianists in the domain of gender (Bellier 1993) shows a remarkable paucity of studies when compared with the overabundance of publications devoted to the same topic by Melanesianists (see Herdt & Poole 1982 or Strathern 1988, for instance). Less than half a dozen monographs and probably no more than two dozens articles can be said to deal exclusively with the question of the cultural interpretation or politics of sexual dichotomy in Amazonia, although, of course, there are passing references to gender contrasts in most publications, especially those dealing with kinship. There are reasons to believe that this disparity reflects the situation that anthropologists of both sexes have found during their fieldwork, rather than personal prejudices. After all, the ideological and ritual elaboration of sexual differences is so pervasive a theme in Melanesia that it was extensively discussed in the earlier publications (see Read 1952, for instance), long before gender became a fashionable anthropological topic and a political issue. By contrast, the first major study devoted to the relation between the sexes in Amazonia -- Yolanda and Robert Murphy's classical monograph on the Mundurucú -- was published in the seventies (1974).

Invoking the difference in the cultural backgrounds of anthropologists working in these two areas as a possible source of epistemological bias is not very convincing either. It is true that the ethnography of New Guinea is an Anglo-American stronghold, while the study of Amazonia has been influenced by French and Brazilian structuralism. That relations between men and women are indeed predicated on contrasted sets of values in the Anglo-Saxon world and in Latin countries cannot be meant to imply that Amazonianists would tend to take gender distinctions as unproblematic, while Melanesianists would be acutely aware of them. The writings of French anthropologists doing fieldwork in New Guinea are as replete with bodily humors, female pollution, spatial segregation and ritual inequality between the sexes as those of their Anglo-Saxon colleagues. Conversely, most American and British anthropologists working in Amazonia -- some of them little influenced by structuralism, to say the least -- have devoted little attention to these themes, as can be lazily ascertained by perusing through the indexes of their monographs.

It thus seems that there is a major difference 'out there', in the relative weight given to the cultural construction of sexual contrasts by Melanesian and Amazonian cultures. A difference that perhaps appears greater than it really is, due to a focusing of the ethnographic interest on certain areas of New Guinea where gender distinctions are taken to be the core device of social reproduction. Recent studies, such as Lepowsky's monograph on Vanatinai Island, offer a picture completely at odds with the standard New Guinea model, but very evocative of gender relations in some parts of Amazonia : the people of Vanatinai form an egalitarian society, where women

regularly hunt and formerly participated to warfare, where they can lead long-distance maritime trading expeditions, where their body is not considered polluting and their sexuality dangerous for the men (Lepowsky, 1993). Conversely, the ideology of marked gender hierarchy and segregation displayed by the Mundurucú of Brazil is more reminiscent of the standard pattern of the New Guinea Highlands than it is of many Amazonian societies who strive to maintain a strict parity between the sexes, such as the Matsigenka (Renard-Casevitz 1985) or the Amuesha (Santos Granero 1994).

Comparing gender relations, then, always reverts to the vexing question of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty, of whether the domination of men over women is real or symbolic, of whether formal equality is undermined by covert hierarchy or the reverse. In view of the internal disparities within Amazonia and Melanesia in this respect, it seems reasonable to consider the construction of sexual differences less as a universal tool for comparison, than as a label subsuming a domain of broad contrasts between cultural areas, a domain which is itself revealing of strong differences in the ways societies in these areas perceive and ordain the building blocks of individual and collective identities. This is how I will treat gender in this chapter, as a way of elucidating why it has remained a relatively minor topic for anthropologists working in Amazonia. Starting with an analysis of the role played by the sexual dichotomy in the cosmology and social organization of a particular society, the Jivaroan Achuar of the Upper Amazon, I will show that their gender categories are encompassed by a wider set of relationships. I will then argue that this is also the case for many other Amazonian societies, and that this sharp contrast with Melanesia may help us to identify and assess relevant strategies for comparison.

#### ENCOMPASSING GENDER : THE ACHUAR

The Jivaroan Achuar (or Achuales as they are known in Peru) inhabit the upper area drained by the Rio Morona and the Rio Pastaza, on either sides of the line of the Protocol of Rio de Janeiro which separates the Amazonian territories of Ecuador from those of Peru. In Ecuador, the Achuar number a little more than two thousand persons, distributed within a territory of approximately 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> extending on both sides of the Rio Pastaza. As among many other native groups of the Ecuadorian, Peruvian and Bolivian montaña (the Andean foothills), the traditional settlement pattern is markedly dispersed in time of peace. Each household consists of a single, and generally polygynous, nuclear family and functions as a politically independent unit of production and consumption. Households are either totally isolated or in clusters of two or three; the distance which separates them may vary from an hour to a day's trip by foot or by canoe. The anomie which might result from such an extreme residential atomism, as from the lack of any internal segmentation, is counterbalanced by the existence of discrete supra-local units which I have called

"endogamous nexus" (Descola 1981, 1982 and Taylor 1983). A nexus is a collection of twelve to twenty scattered domestic units that intermarry regularly according to the classical Dravidian pattern, where the replication, at each generation, of a relation of prescriptive alliance replaces the lineal continuity usually insured by a principle of descent (Dumont 1975). As social distance increases with geographical distance, marrying 'close' -- both genealogically and spatially -- is highly valued. Such a system promotes the territorial stability of cognatic kindreds which tend to identify themselves through a common reference to the name of a main river forming the backbone of the area inside which they regularly relocate their houses -- every six to twelve years, usually.

Although the endogamous areas have no explicit borders, they are usually separated by extensive no man's lands; these have a tactical function as relations between neighboring nexus oscillate between covert mistrust and open hostility. When a conflict between nexus reaches alarming proportions, most households scattered within an endogamous area will form a temporarily nucleated faction settled in a fortified house under the strategic command of a 'great-man'(juunt). This process actualizes the latent tendency towards a cognatic solidarity within a neighborhood : the nexus does not coalesce as a corporate group, but rather as an occasional coalition more or less coextensive with the limits of a great-man's kindred. Since feuds are fairly frequent, settlements thus regularly vary in size from a minimum of half a dozen individuals, in time of peace, to more than seventy in the largest 'war houses'. In spite of the 'normal' (and desired) state of dispersion, then, most Achuar will spend part of their lives in conditions of collective residence that are comparable to those of traditional native villages or long-houses in some other parts of Amazonia.

Among the Achuar, as among many other non segmentary Amazonian societies, the Dravidian kinship model entails a characteristic sociological feature which J. Kaplan Overing was the first to state explicitly by reference to the Piaroa: kindred endogamy, although structured by a symmetrical relation of alliance, is locally perceived and expressed as the product of an ideal consanguinity, this paradoxical result being obtained by a deliberate blurring of affinal links (1975). Affinity appears endowed with a political function, both ambiguous and strategic, since it conditions the marriage exchange necessary for the local group to reproduce itself, but establishes a broad distinction, heavy with potential conflicts, between two categories of co-residents (Rivière 1969). It thus becomes imperative to expel this relation loaded with threatening alterity towards the periphery. In accordance with this general pattern, the external relations of the Achuar nexus are graded along a scale of social distance expressed by a variation of the modalities of the affinal link, which becomes more and more schematic and abstract as one moves away from the focal point where it structures the actual marriage alliance. Distant kin are called affines and treated as such when they live in a neighboring nexus; Achuar enemies from other local groups are considered generically as metaphorical affines (they are often called nua suru, or 'wife givers'), an allusion to

the common practice of abducting women during vendettas; finally, the Achuar themselves are treated as ideal affines in the tsantsa festivals held by other Jivaroan tribes, where their shrunken heads serve as a medium to impart a new identity to a perfectly consanguine child to be born in the kindred of the head-hunters (for more details, see Taylor 1993a, Descola 1996b).

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has shown that such systems of graded alterity are common to many Amazonian societies, where the apparent symmetry between consanguinity and affinity, typical of Dravidian kinship, is actually broken by a hierarchical encompassment -- in Dumont's specific sense (1977) -- and animated by a diametrical structure : while affinity is encompassed by consanguinity at the level of the endogamous local group, it encompasses consanguinity in the relations between local groups, and becomes subordinated to a kind of meta-affinity in the (generally hostile) relations with the more distant tribes (Viveiros de Castro 1993, 1995; Fausto and Viveiros de Castro 1993). This meta-affinity expresses itself in different forms of predation (cannibalism, hunting for human trophies) on enemies that are conceptualized as generic affines the violent incorporation of whom is deemed necessary for the symbolic reproduction of the self.

#### Female kin and male affines

By what means does affinity become encompassed by consanguinity within the endogamous nexus? Basically by a manipulation of the gender dichotomy. In a thorough analysis of the Achuar vocative terminology and system of attitudes, Anne Christine Taylor has shown that affinity is shifted into the sphere of masculine kin ties, whereas consanguinity is concentrated on the feminine side (Taylor 1983). To briefly sum up her argument: within the nexus, affinal relations between men are always marked by affinal terminology and attitude, while cross-sex affinal relations are selectively consanguinealized in the vocative terminology both by men and women, especially at the same generation level, but with a wider range of kin categories on the side of women than on the side of men; on the other hand, cross-generation affinal relations between women are always consanguinealized terminologically, while women affines of the same generation address each other as such but behave towards each other as classificatory sisters. In other words, « women act on certain relations as operators or transformers, whereby affinity is constantly absorbed and transmuted into postulated consanguinity » (Taylor 1983: 335). A similar pattern has been described for another Jivaroan group, the Shiwiari of the Corrientes (Seymour-Smith 1991). This manipulation of the kinship system would seem to indicate that the Achuar associate women with the realm of consanguinity, while they place the obligations and hazards of affinity in the men's camp. Such an interpretation is supported by certain features of the technical and symbolic division of labor.

#### Gender roles

As in many other Amazonian societies, Achuar women are mainly 'transformers' of raw products within the domestic sphere (horticulture, food preparation, pottery, weaving, raising children and pets, etc.), while men are essentially predators in the outside world (hunting, fishing, clearing

gardens, warfare, etc.). The dichotomy is not so neat, however, as women also engage in certain activities which would be thought unfit for their condition in other parts of the world. Hunting is one of them. Hunting dogs are owned by women who are responsible for leading them in pack to the hunt, following their husbands. This is by no means an exceptional occurrence and a woman, especially in a monogamous household, may go off hunting with her husband several times a week. Due to the lack of privacy in polygynous households, hunting also affords the only opportunity for sexual intercourse between spouses in a secluded spot, so that husbands take great care to maintain a fair rotation between their wives when they set off hunting, so as not to appear to be favoring one of them. The qualities of the dogs and the ability to control them are considered essential assets in hunting and are seen as the products of the technical and symbolic skills of the women who raise them; especially important in this respect is the women's knowledge of a wide range of magical songs, or anent, specifically designed to foster the pugnacity and hunting abilities of their dogs, which they sing mentally while they are chasing the game. Women may also occasionally hunt on their own, particularly armadillos, rodents or opossums, provided they use traps or blunt instruments which do not pierce or make blood flow. Young women may also participate in war parties as food-carriers, both in intratribal feuding raids and in long-distance expeditions against neighboring Jivaroan tribes. Although apparently subordinate, this function is taken very seriously indeed by those to whom it has been entrusted, and in this capacity, as in the exclusively feminine war rituals known as ujaj (Descola 1996b), women appear to share the martial exaltation of their menfolk.

Like hunting, most Achuar labor processes are dependent upon a tight gender complementarity (Descola 1994a), although women fare much better than men if they are obliged to fend for themselves. When the head of a household is away for some time -- in a trading or war expedition, for instance -- women manage to compensate for the lack of game by poison-fishing and collecting insects, crustacean and palm grubs. Provided their brothers or kinsmen help them to build a house and clear a garden, widows or divorced women even manage perfectly well to live without a man. The reverse situation is harsher for men: a widower who has no daughter or sister to take care of his gardening and cooking will usually have no other alternative but to commit suicide. In other words, the sexual division of labor is not based on a native discriminatory theory which would rank productive activities on a scale of prestige according to whether they are performed by men or women. A good hunter certainly acquires prestige, but so does a woman who is an expert gardener; and their skills are complementary and interdependent both within the domestic economy and within most of the labor processes. This complementarity manifests itself as much in a sort of rivalry between men and women in their respective spheres of practice as in the need to combine skills in certain cross-gender tasks such as gardening or hunting. The husband of a reputed gardener will emulate her by providing great amounts of game and he will make a point of clearing very large swiddens to allow her to demonstrate ostentatiously her gardening abilities. Conversely,

the wife of a great hunter will strive to provide him and his male guests with a great variety of foodstuffs and huge quantities of tasty manioc-beer. One of the strongest bases for a happy marriage rests on this kind of emulation between spouses, grounded in a healthy respect for the competence and hard work of one's partner.

The parallelism between hunting and gardening is all the more notable as the Achuar conceive of the latter as a hazardous and even dangerous activity, despite the effectiveness and sophistication of their horticultural techniques. A myth known to everyone recounts that, after giving the cultivated plants to an Achuar family, Nunkui, the protective spirit of gardens, cursed the humans for their ill treatment of her daughter, with the result that the plants diminished to a minute size and are now under threat of disappearing completely if the women do not take good care of them. Sweet manioc, the most ubiquitous of all cultivated plants and the main staple food, is also supposed to suck through its leaves the blood of those who approach it, particularly the women and their children who are most exposed to its contact. Special anent songs must be addressed to the manioc plants by the women who take care of them in order to protect themselves from this vampirical propensity and deflect the aggression towards possible intruders in the garden. The whole process of garden cultivation could thus be defined as ensuring the presence of beings who might suddenly disappear, while trying not to be killed by them before they are eaten. Although the nature of their uncertainty is symmetrically inverted around two poles (desired presence of game versus feared absence of plants, and humans as agents of killing versus humans as preys to the vampirism of plants), both hunting and gardening are thought of as risky endeavors the outcome of which is unpredictable. There is thus no ground here for a possible justification of the superiority of male hunting over female gardening which would be based on an exaltation of the dangers and unpredictability of the former in contrast with the mundane and easy-going nature of the latter.

#### Vegetal children and affinal game animals

However, and in spite of the effective cooperation between man and women that they entail, hunting and gardening are strongly gendered in one respect. The Achuar do not conceive these labor processes as mere technical operations intended to satisfy their material needs; rather they see them as series of repeated intercourse with various entities -- plants, animals and guardian spirits -- that must be charmed, constrained or moved to pity by appropriate symbolic techniques. Most cultivated plants as well as game animals are considered as 'persons' (aents), endowed with reflexivity, intentionality and a social life and moral code of their own; they possess a 'soul' (wakan), which makes them receptive to the messages addressed to them by humans through the medium of anent magical songs. They are also protected by a host of tutelary beings: Nunkui, the female spirit who created the cultivated plants and takes care of them down to the present; the 'mothers of game' (kuntiniu nukuri), a race of spirits who own and protect the animals of the forest; and the amana, the prototype of each hunted species, described as a perfect and larger than life embodiment of his conspecifics. The 'mothers of game' are fearsome creatures and may exert

revenge on behalf of the animals upon excessive or disrespectful hunters, mainly through snakebites. According to the Achuar, success in hunting and in gardening thus depends largely on the quality of the relation one manages to establish with these various entities through a series of symbolic preconditions: magical songs, dream omens, food prohibitions, charms, sexual abstinence, etc. Now, each sphere of practice is governed by a specific set of preconditions that is clearly assigned to one of the sexes according to its purported predisposition for a particular regime of sociability.

The garden spirit Nunkui is thought of as the mother of all cultivated plants and the bond that a woman wishes to establish with her is basically a relation of identification : the plants she grows are her children and her relationship with them is a double of the maternal relationship Nunkui entertains with her vegetal offspring. This appears clearly in the rhetoric of the gardening magical songs, where the singer always refers to the plants as her children and constantly identifies herself with Nunkui <sup>1</sup>. Hunting, on the other hand, implies a triangular relationship between the hunter, a series of go-betweens (the various ‘mothers of game’ and the amana prototypes) and the individual hunted animals wherein the go-betweens are conceived as cross-generational affines (fathers-in-law), while the game is called and treated as a brother-in-law. The complex relationship of competition, negotiation and complicity which the hunter entertains with these non human affines closely resembles that which prevails in his dealings with his human in-laws : these are both privileged political allies within the nexus and potential enemies if they have kept allegiances in neighboring nexus. While the gardening model of sociability is built around two identical relationships of consanguinity with the same object (Nunkui as the mother of cultivated plants and the woman gardener as their, so to speak, ‘foster’ mother), the hunting model is structured around two relationships of affinity with two separate objects (the hunter and the go-betweens, the hunter and the game animals), themselves related by blood. The Achuar sexual division of labor is thus based on the idea that each sex reaches its full potential in the sphere befitting its symbolic area of manipulation and in the kinship regime preferentially assigned to its range of social competence. Each gender deals with humans and non humans alike according to its particular abilities : women convert affinity into consanguinity within the nexus and treat their plants as children, men are in charge of affinal relations and treat the beings of the forest as in-laws.

#### The politics of sex

My emphasis on the symbolic autonomy and actual complementarity of the sexes should not obscure the effective, and often brutal, political domination of men over women in Achuar society. Men are the ‘owners’ (nurintin) of women : fathers and brothers control the fate of their unmarried daughters and sisters, although they have to relinquish part of their authority in favor of their in-laws after marriage. A married woman is thus subjected to various and often conflictive rights of ownership distributed amongst her kinsmen and cross-generational affines. This may turn out to be an asset for her in the not uncommon eventuality of her being persistently ill-treated by a brutal

husband. Men are said to be naturally 'prone to anger' (kajen), so that beating their wives, sometimes very severely with machete blows on the head, is considered an unfortunate but normal outcome of this propensity when they become displeased with them or when they suspect unfaithfulness.

However, because she still belongs partly to her kinsmen, a mistreated woman may appeal to their active support, except in cases of proven adultery where she may be killed by her husband - - along with her lover, if they are caught in flagrante -- without her brothers interfering. The very long period of uxorilocal residence to which a young man is submitted allows his in-laws to assess his character and behavior, eventually to remonstrate with him for improper treatment of his wife, and thus to prepare themselves for future intervention if he shows inclination towards marital violence. Polygyny, particularly the very common sororal polygyny, also allows the co-wives to form a united front against a violent husband who may be brought to heel eventually by concerted shows of bad temper, or even a strike in the kitchen.

In spite of the political domination exerted by men, women have ample room of maneuver to participate in public life. One reason for this is that the men do not form a community as such, which would have vested interests to defend collectively such as, for instance, their joint control over women (in sharp contrast with many Melanesian cultures, needless to say). The extreme anarchy of Achuar social life prevents the consolidation of an effective leadership over long periods of time, and thus impedes the formation of corporate sodalities. The authority that a great-man exercises over the men of his faction is restricted to tactical decisions in times of open hostilities and based on the recognition of his personal qualities; it does not extend to the women of the warriors who share his fate. The model for this ascendancy and for its public expression is in fact derived from the domestic authority which a man wields upon his sons and sons-in-law. The wife of a great-man, for instance, will command far more respect from the faction of her husband than a young son-in-law does, and she may intervene effectively to orient the course of a vendetta or even to convince her husband and his followers of their moral obligation to avenge a wrong. In sum, there are no collective mechanisms of mediation through which the men as a whole could decide the fate of women as a whole, as each woman falls under the authority of a restricted set of men with competing interests.

In terms of status, women have open access to most social activities except the exercise of violence in warfare, though we have seen that they can participate in raids and that their contribution to the success of arms is enacted in the ujaj ritual that they perform each night for the whole duration of a war expedition. We have seen also that they take part in hunting, and I can vouch that they are far from timid when they chase a quarry with their pack of hounds. Women commonly engage in barter, both between themselves -- trading puppies, cultivars, mineral dies for pottery, salt, etc. --, and with the men, with whom they exchange woven ornaments for small metal tools. They may also become shamans, although the most powerful among them are usually

widows; contrarily to what obtains among their male counterparts, full dedication to their shamanistic career appears to be incompatible with a normal married life. Finally, women can seek an arutam vision, the most important self-fulfilling experience in the life-course of any Achuar individual. This mighty quest requires absolute seclusion for several days, severe fasting, and drinking a powerful hallucinogenic decoction made of Brugmansia bark, combined with repeated absorptions of tobacco-water. Encounter with an arutam vision helps one to shape or reorganize his or her destiny according to the nature of the revelation obtained; it greatly enhances a man's forcefulness, self-confidence and bravery, and increases a woman's longevity, strength of character and mastery of feminine skills (see Descola 1993, 1996b and Taylor 1993a, 1993b). An arutam quest is not always successful, however, and a mature woman who has met arutam several times will be granted far more respect than a younger man who has been unable to do so. In sum, nothing supposedly specific in the nature of women is invoked to bar them from doing most of what the men do, except killing humans.

#### The encompassment of gender

Achuar society is indeed gender inflected, but so are classless societies everywhere else, particularly cognatic societies which, for lack of explicit segmentary divisions, tend to use the sexual dichotomy as a basic classificatory device. However, one does not find among the Achuar the obsession with gender separation that is such a striking feature of Melanesia. It is true that the ideology of segregation and hierarchy forcefully enacted in the Melanesian rituals of manhood is often contradicted in practice by a remarkably egalitarian and mutually caring relationship between men and women in the domestic sphere, sometimes coupled with ambivalent feelings on the part of the men towards the harshness and brutality displayed in rituals<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the contrast in the treatment of gender difference is still striking : Achuar women are never banned from male domains because their body would be polluting, nor are they deemed unworthy of sharing the cosmological and mythical lore that is a common patrimony to each and everyone. Achuar men are not obstinately attempting to reproduce themselves and the social order through the ritualized transmission of male substances, nor do they try to exist as an almost separate community, bound by the shared secret of their initiation. The only rite de passage that could be likened to an initiation, the arutam vision quest, is entirely individual and left open to anyone, man or woman, who is willing to try it.

Furthermore, sexual dichotomy seems to be subordinated to, and instrumentalized by, more encompassing social patterns and relationships. One is the opposition between kin and affine which, as we have seen, structures every level of relatedness from Ego to the outer rim of the tribal social space. Gender contrasts are subsumed under this elementary opposition in such a way that women are first and foremost defined as signifiers and operators of consanguineal links, while men are perceived as signifiers and operators of affinal links. Subjecting gender categories to wider social oppositions goes far beyond the internal constraints of the kinship system, as sex roles

acquire their full justification and meaning in relation to the type of behavior proceeding from the preferential assignment of each sex to a specific kinship category. In that sense, warfare or hunting are male affairs, not because men would be stronger or braver than women, but because these activities are conceived as expressions of relationships with metaphorical affines, and fall therefore under the jurisdiction of those whose business it is to deal with affinity. Conversely, gardening or child-rearing are female prerogatives, not so much because women would be naturally predisposed to produce and manage life, but because these tasks befit their aptitude at dealing with consanguinity.

This encompassment of gender difference by kinship relations is neatly expressed in a small myth recounting the origin of women : while they were bathing in a river, a man changed his sai (sister's husband and male cross-cousin for a male Ego) into a woman in order to satisfy a sexual drive, thus creating the first couple. In mythic discourse, gender relations are thus conceived as originating in a relation of affinity between men, a generative feature by no means restricted to the Achuar : in some Melanesian and Amazonian contexts, as M. Strathern convincingly argues (this volume), same-sex relations may create the pre-conditions for cross-sex relations.

It should be obvious by now that my emphasizing the dominance of the kin/affine dichotomy over the cross-sex one does not equate with the proposition that 'gender' is an epiphenomenon of 'kinship'. In much the same way as gender does not refer primarily to reified sexual attributes but is constituted as a function of social positions (Strathern 1988), consanguinity and affinity cannot be reduced, in the Amazonian context, to mere labels subsuming kin terms and marriage categories. As I tried to make clear, consanguinity and affinity are far-reaching and versatile intellectual templates that may be used to structure every conceivable form of mediation within the sphere of Achuar social life.

This is particularly evident in the daily commerce between humans and non humans. Since most plants and animals are viewed as persons to be coerced, seduced or protected, the frontiers of Achuar society extend far beyond the sphere of humankind and almost coincide with the outer limits of the cosmos. As in any other society, this cosmos is gendered; assigning a sex to non humans, however, is not something which appears relevant to most Achuar. Most kinds of spirits, plants and animals are said to be like humans : they are composed of two sexes and lead a conventional family life, some bordering on the incestuous, such as the dog or the howler monkey. Certain cultivated plants are female, such as the achiote, the genipa, the sweet potato, the squash and the wayus (an Ilex), while others are thought to be male -- tobacco, the banana tree, and the two species of fish poison, masu (Clibadium sp.) and timiü (Lonchocarpus sp.); often based on superficial analogies between certain parts of the plant and human sexual organs, these metonymical identifications are not taken very seriously by the Achuar. Two spirits are definitely gendered : Nunkui, the provider and protector of cultivated plants, is a female and a sort of embodiment of maternal care, while Shakaïm, a much lower personage than Nunkui, is said by

some to be husband of the latter and by others to be her brother; Shakaïm is the curator of the jungle which he cultivates like a gigantic garden, and he sometimes appears in men's dreams to reveal the best locations for opening new swiddens in the forest. But the genders attributed to Nunkui and Shakaïm are not altogether surprising in view of their respective dominions over two domains of practice, the garden and the forest, that are preferentially, if not exclusively, associated with each of the sexes.

The occurrence of gender categories among plants, animals and spirits is less an indication of a fully gendered cosmos, then, than a product of the technical and symbolic differential engagement of men and women with certain portions of their environment, an engagement which is itself conceived as a result of the predisposition assigned to each sex for successfully managing either a consanguineal or an affinal relationship with humans and non humans alike. In that sense, being a woman or being a man appears as an overdetermination -- in the classical Freudian sense -- of a set of relations not primarily concerned with sexual dichotomy, rather than being a substantive attribute of personal identities mainly defined by anatomical and physiological peculiarities. Particularly striking in this respect, especially when compared with Melanesia, is the utter lack of concern shown by the Achuar as to the origin of bodily humors, their working mechanisms and their possible compatibilities and incompatibilities : there are no specific prohibitions linked to menstruation, the post-partum taboo on sexual intercourse is rather short (until the mother's womb 'dries up') and everyone confesses ignorance as to what type of physiological substance may be transmitted by either of the genitors to their offspring. Gender categories among the Achuar thus specify and label classes of individuals whose characteristics stem not from the elementary components of their organic nature so much as from the range of social interactions which their initial physical idiosyncrasies open to them.

#### COMPARING RELATIONSHIPS : AMAZONIA

The subsumption of gender under a more encompassing set of relationships is not peculiar to the Achuar or to the Jivaroan groups. Instead of emphasizing sexual dichotomy, as in Melanesia, many Amazonian societies seem to downplay gender contrasts and subordinate them to more abstract generic oppositions. It is true that, in some regions of Amazonia, male initiations and some festivals involve the playing of a set of musical instruments women are strictly forbidden to see, as in the secret men's cults of New Guinea. Such rituals are often linked to a myth which recounts how, after an original period of matriarchy when women were the sole owners of the sacred instruments, men managed to appropriate these symbols of power, thereby establishing male supremacy and the foundations of a proper social order. There are two main foci for this ritual and mythological pattern which appears to push to the forefront of public life a strongly gendered conception of social relations. One is found in Western Amazonia -- the famous Yurupary complex of the Eastern Tukanoans (S. Hugh-Jones 1979, this volume; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996) and of some

of their Arawak neighbors, such as the Curripaco (Journet 1995) or the Wakuénai (Hill and Wright 1988; Hill, this volume), and the *ñá* festival of the Yagua (Chaumeil and Chaumeil 1977). The other is in Central Brazil : the Upper Xingú (see Gregor 1985 for the Mehinaku) and the Mundurucú of the Upper Tapajós (Murphy 1958; Murphy and Murphy 1974).

Amazonian secret male cults have attracted a lot of attention from anthropologists, in part because of their elaborate ceremonialism, complex symbolism and ostentatious paraphernalia, but probably also because of their uniqueness in an area where little concern is shown otherwise for the ritual celebration of gender differences. The occurrence of these cults is indeed quite restricted when compared with their frequency in New Guinea. In 'Amazonia' (an ethnographic construct including also Central Brazil, the Guianas and the Orinoco basin), there are presently between 400 and 500 distinct native groups, depending on the criteria of ethnic definition; of these, probably less than 3% practice one of form or other of secret male cults. I admit that the cultural importance of a phenomenon cannot be measured in statistical terms, but these may be helpful to qualify analogies and comparisons.

In this small set of societies, the ritualization of gender dichotomy seems to be the enactment of a non-dialectic dualist principle : either because a fully-fledged system of patrilineal moieties (as among the Mundurucú) or a set of crypto-moieties (as among the Yagua) tends to dissociate each pair of spouses along their respective lines of descent, or because the linguistic exogamy of patrilineal sibs produces a partitioning of each local group into autochthonous males and alien females (as among the Tukanoans). A feature common to these Northwestern and Central Brazilian societies with secret men's cults is thus a strong emphasis on unilineal descent, in sharp contrast to the typical cognatism which predominates elsewhere in Amazonia<sup>3</sup>. It is not impossible that the transcription of the kin/ affine dichotomy in exogamous descent groups, i.e. the reification of a dualist principle of social organization, may have fostered a parallel institutionalization of the gender dichotomy in myth and ritual. As for the Mehinaku, who are cognatic and follow the general pattern of Dravidian kinship, they also show strong evidence of an ideology of parallel succession : parents expect their same-sex children to embody their qualities and recapitulate their social careers as former selves (Gregor 1977 : 270). All these societies with secret male cults, whether they are unilineal or not, thus appear to share a marked emphasis on the same-sex transmission of material or immaterial attributes, in sharp contrast with the relative lack of interest shown elsewhere in Amazonia (except among the Gê groups) for the inter-generational transfer of objects and prerogatives.

Finally, in Northwest Amazonia at least, initiation cults, as celebrations of intra-clan same-sex relations of consanguinity, entertain a close relation of complementarity with inter-community feasts involving the ceremonial exchange of gendered food and artifacts between wife givers and wife takers (Hugh-Jones, this volume, for the Tukanoans; Journet 1995 : 283-292, and Hill, this volume, for the Arawak). Although gender is obviously an important dimension of such ritual

combinations, ceremonial exchange nevertheless tends to blur the massive singularity of intra-clan male cults by inserting them in a wider framework where the familiar dialectics of consanguinity/affinity and center/ periphery play a major role. If, as Hill writes of the Wakuénai, « women are affinal Others who gradually become integrated into the cults of clanhood of their husbands » (this volume, p ?), then there is reason to believe that these cults are dealing as much with the encompassment of (female) peripheral affinity by (male) central consanguinity as with the stressing of gender distinctions.

Elsewhere in Amazonia, the construction of individual and collective identities does not result in one half of the society persistently attempting to distinguish itself from the other half through the ritual enactment, and mythical assertion, of its generic difference, if not always of its intrinsic superiority. I do not imply that sexual differences are meaningless in these processes of identity-building, which would be absurd, but rather that they are combined with, or encapsulated within, a great variety of other principles of social categorization which render gender distinction less conspicuous than in Melanesia. I cannot substantiate this claim with a detailed comparison, but a small ethnographic sample may help to sketch the type of encompassment I have in mind.

It may be apposite to start with societies who show evidence of internal segmentation, whether institutionalized in social units (moieties, age-grades, marriage sections, etc.) or in the spatial disposition of their villages (public center versus domestic periphery), or in a combination of both, societies who thus present some likeness of features with those practicing secret male cults. The Gê and Panoan groups are the most obvious candidates for such a comparison. Among the Xikrin Kayapo, for instance, gender categories are embedded in age categories in such a way that social classification does not differentiate them : the complex system of age-grades is the focus for social action and the basis for a definition of personal identities in terms of a community of age set activities rather than internal sexual differences (Fisher, this volume). Furthermore, in the series of parallel rituals establishing these age grade identities, the social attributes conferred on persons of the same age are not distinguished according to their sex, but globally derived by metonymy from the characteristics of different cosmic domains (and of their non human denizens); individual identities are thus paired with cosmological discontinuities at the level of the whole age group, not according to a central gender dichotomy (Giannini 1991). As for the Krahó, also a Northern Gê group, they stress another discontinuity, the opposition between the living and the dead, which encompasses secondary oppositions such as between kin and affines or between Krahó and non Krahó living persons : to be a Krahó (woman or man) is primarily not to be what a dead Krahó (woman or man) is (Carneiro da Cunha 1978: 142-146). Identity and alterity are defined as contrasted positions within the Krahó universe; not in reference to social, spatial or sexual attributes, but as a function of eschatology.

The Panoan groups are also notable for the institutional complexity of their social organization as well as for their elaborate rituals of initiation. Among the Cashinahua, gender is



By contrast, the Araweté lay emphasis in their social ontology on two other dyads -- living/ dead and humanity/ divinity -- since any individual in this Tupian society of Eastern Brazil must die, be eaten by cannibal gods and be transformed as a result into one of them in order to reach fully his or her destiny (Viveiros de Castro 1992); again, this eschatological tension may be expressed by a standard homology:

kin : affines :: congeners : enemies :: living : dead :: human : divine :: women : men.

The subandean Arawak of the central Peruvian montaña (Ashaninka, Matsiguenga, Nomatsiguenga, etc.) have established a different dividing line between sameness and otherness; one that is both ontological and isometric in the sense that it separates the radically negative world of the Andes, full of predatory peoples and evil spirits, and the wholly positive world of the Arawak themselves, their higher gods and their game animals, who all share an identical essence (Weiss 1975, Renard-Casevitz 1985 and 1991; see Brown and Fernández 1991, for the transcription of this cosmology into contemporary regional politics). In this particular ethnographic context, affinity seems to play a very subordinate role, as if its actual encompassment by consanguinity at the level of the local group had resulted in its complete obliteration at the level of the relations with the outside world. The Andean peoples and the Arawak are totally extraneous to one another and their only relationship is one of pure predation of the former upon the latter. In this case the homology would run as follows:

Highland : Lowland :: despotism : social equality :: bewitching : game : : evil : higher gods  
 peoples peoples (in kinship and animals animals spirits  
 gender)

I am quite aware that structural formulae of this kind are merely a convenient way to sum up homologies and differences in the patterning of socio-cosmological relations. As such, however, they clearly point out to a specific relationship which may be as central to the understanding of Amazonian sociability as are gender distinctions to the construction of Melanesian identities : the relation of humans with non humans, and particularly with animals. If the anthropology of Amazonia has shown little concern on the whole for the problem of sex and gender, it has devoted a great deal of intellectual energy to the question of the symbolic treatment of natural kinds; the exact reverse could be said of the anthropology of Melanesia <sup>4</sup>. My brief description of the Achuar's relationship with their environment could be extended indeed to a large part of the South American Lowlands (Descola 1992, 1996a). Many Amazonian cosmologies do not establish marked ontological distinctions between humans, on the one hand, and most species of plants and animals, on the other, since they all share a common set of human-like attributes. As a result, the multiple entities inhabiting the world are linked in a vast continuum animated by an identical regime of social and ethical rules. Their internal contrasts are defined not by any essentialist

assumption as to their nature, but according to their mutual relations as specified by the requirements of their metabolism, and particularly of their diet (see, for instance Århem 1990, 1996, Brown 1986, Chaumeil 1989, Chaumeil and Chaumeil 1992, van der Hammen 1992, Jara 1991, Rojas 1994, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976, Viveiros de Castro 1992).

Amazonian cultures are cosmocentric rather than sociocentric. They grant less centrality to the ritual and political reproduction of the human social order -- including the domination of men over women -- than to the continuous efficiency of their relations with the multiple actors of the universe. Much the same can be said of many other native American cultures, especially in Central and North America. What Ann Fienup-Riordan writes of the Alaska Eskimos -- « Just as gender may provide the ‘master code’ for Melanesia (Biersack 1984: 134), the relationship between humans and animals may provide a comparable master code in some parts of the Arctic » (1990: 9) -- may in fact hold true elsewhere in the American continent, where the essential contrast is between human and non human rather than between human (males) and human (females).

#### COMPARING COMPARISONS : AMAZONIA AND MELANESIA

Although somewhat provocative, the preceding remark was not meant to imply that a culture-specific master code should be replaced by another one, more appropriate to the local context. What I would like to suggest, rather, is that there are different types of comparison according to the nature and to the scale of the objects compared. Many years ago, the Leiden school devised a research strategy which it labeled the ‘Field of ethnological study’ (Ethnologisch studieveld). Intended as a way out of the particularism of village monographs and developed in the wake of the first intensive field-studies in Dutch Indonesia and the Malay Archipelago, it stressed that certain cultural areas were to be considered as ethnographic totalities within which each different society or community could be treated as a structural variation within an overall pattern. This is the type of comparison that most anthropologists now practice, implicitly or explicitly, and the one most likely to provide regional master codes such as ‘gender’ for new Guinea, ‘lineage theory’ for Western Africa, ‘hierarchy’ for India or ‘cosmocentrism’ for Amazonia. That all societies conceptualize filiation, even in a minimal form, does not mean that an ideology of descent is meaningful everywhere. This is self-evident for the specialists of Melanesia and Amazonia, who started their theoretical aggiornamento thirty years ago by rejecting the application of African models of segmentary organization to their respective fields of study (Barnes 1962, for New Guinea; Seeger, Da Matta and Viveiros de Castro 1979, for Amazonia). But the same could be said of gender. Sex distinctions are universal tools for the building of social categories, but this does not imply that societies everywhere give them the same weight in the definition of their social philosophy and elaborate them to the same degree (Héritier 1996). Because of the intellectual conservatism entailed by the reproduction of knowledge within each regional field of study, and also because each of these areas does really appear to exhibit a distinctive style, each one of us tends to see his or her

ethnographic province as focusing on a core of specific social and cultural features which constitute, as it were, spontaneous patterns of intelligibility; these, however, should not be taken as anthropological universals, but as mere tools for the interpretation of geographically circumscribed groups of cultures.

Another type of comparison is the one that the editors of this volume have invited us to attempt. It proceeds from the previous stage and is thus rather difficult to implement, as context-related analytical tools are seldom interchangeable : my Amazonian monkey-wrench will do as much damage to Melanesian screws as the reverse <sup>5</sup>. A way out of this compatibility dilemma is to treat two cultural areas that present superficial similarities as speculative spring-boards for assessing the logical conditions that would allow a reduction of their underlying disparities. Such a process implies considering these disparities as systematic variations of a set of basic patterns that can be shown to operate in different ways in both areas.

There are reasons to believe that the contrasted ideologies of gender relations found in Amazonia and Melanesia result from a deeper difference in the conceptualization and modes of implementation of exchange. In his lectures on Melanesian kinship, Lévi-Strauss remarked that, in this part of the world, marriage alliance seems to be separated from the kin-affine distinction in such a way as to constitute almost « a separate order » (Lévi-Strauss 1984: 206). Instead of being used to circumscribe the sphere and partners of exchange (as in Amazonia), the kin-affine distinction appears rather as an outcome of marriage alliance, since it is the faculty to enter or not into an exchange with cross-cousins which results in their being assimilated either to affines or to siblings. Now this sociological precedence of the domain of exchange is directly linked to another striking difference between Amazonia and Melanesia, the possibility or not to substitute persons for objects. Writing on the Baruya, Godelier has shown that this society of the Highlands combines two distinct principles of exchange : one is based on a strict equivalence as to the nature and the quantity of the entities exchanged -- the model of which is the sister-exchange within the Baruya tribe --, while the other principle allows a disparity in the nature and the quantity of the items exchanged -- the acquisition of wives against goods among intertribal trading partners (Godelier 1982). Although these principles coexist among the Baruya, Godelier argues, they are usually dissociated in Melanesia : either the only substitutes for humans are other humans (in marriage exchange and in warfare, where a death must be repaid by another death), or humans are systematically substituted by non humans, in which case women and homicides are compensated for by material wealth (ibid.: 253-290). It is quite possible, as Lederman argues (this volume), that Godelier's framework of analysis is context-dependent and tinged by the Baruya's own view of what a proper (i.e. symmetrical) system of exchange should be. I still find this distinction useful, however, in that it calls attention to the fact that the principle of substituting objects for persons is conspicuously absent in Amazonia : bridewealth is replaced by the bride-service to which young

men are subjected during the widely distributed period of uxori-local residence and a violent death can never be repaid except by another violent death<sup>6</sup>.

Now, it seems reasonable to assume that what may account for the greater institutional complexity of Melanesia is the multiplicity of options opened up by the various combinations between what we may call 'homosubstitution' and 'heterosubstitution'. Competitive systems of exchange (such as the tee or the moka), for instance, or the 'big-man' complex, which are unknown in Amazonia, could not exist without the principle of heterosubstitution<sup>7</sup>. In fact, the whole range of intermediary institutions which can be found between 'big-men societies' and 'great-men societies', or between fully ascribed and fully achieved political status, may well stem, as Lemonnier convincingly argues, from the variations in the modes of compensation for, and exchange of humans and non humans in war and in peace (1990). But why is heterosubstitution absent in Amazonia, then? For what reasons cannot animals and artifacts stand for human persons or for parts of their body? Conversely, why is it that material wealth is deemed in Melanesia to be an adequate embodiment and a convenient carrier of social relations? I suspect that part of the answer lies in different ontological premises as to what constitutes a person, the process by which it is constructed and the links through which it becomes objectified.

A first clue to the nature of that difference is given by the notorious contrast between the two areas regarding the treatment and domestication of animals (see Morton 1984). In spite of the fact that the so-called 'Ipomoean revolution' -- the increase in pig production following the introduction of the sweet potato in New-Guinea (Watson 1977) -- was triggered by a plant domesticated in Amazonia several thousand years before, and although several species of Amazonian mammals are likely candidates for a successful domestication, the Amerindians never tried to emulate the Melanesians and transform the wild pigs they hunt into domestic pigs. I have argued elsewhere that this lack of concern for domestication in the South American Lowlands proceeds from the conceptualization of game animals as the independent and collective subject of a contractual relation with humans, thus preventing the kind of metonymical transfer which enables an animal to express the qualities and ambitions of those who possess it (1994b). Amazonian Indians do possess animals, but these are the young of the hunted species, kept as pets in the houses and never eaten; they are treated as orphaned or abducted children, not as expendable live-stock. While game animals are affinal others, endowed with human-like attributes and institutions, pets are consanguinealized when they are brought into the domestic sphere : in neither guise can animals be objectified as extensions of one's persons, for they are persons in their own right. They are not seen as being created by human labor -- as are pigs, or yams, in certain Melanesian contexts -- and thus can never be fully owned or converted into exchange values. It is not that, failing pigs as currency, the Amazonian Indians had no wealth to exchange for humans -- like anyone else, they don't lack trading goods -- but rather that they could not conceive animals as being subordinated to humans and thus as providing convenient substitutes for them.

There are good phenomenological reasons for conceiving a cosmos where humans and non humans live on a parity. On the whole, native Amazonia is characterized by low population densities, small and scattered settlements and a great diversity of animal species; as a result, Amazonian Indians feel immersed in a vast ecological network where humans are extremely sparse. Their landscape is not one of densely populated villages, large enclosed mound-fields, herds of pigs and deep valleys crisscrossed by markers of land rights, as in the prototypical Highlands of New Guinea, but one of timid encroachers in an ebullient sea of multiple life forms. Their social life and individual growth do not imply producing and accumulating objects and substances that stand for relationships with other humans, but rather accumulating knowledge and expertise about relationships with non humans and humans alike.

Another type of accumulation is not so benign, however, and plays a central role in the constitution of selfhood in many parts of Amazonia : the repeated assimilation of alien bodies and identities. It is an ontological accumulation and one that negates exchange, although it pushes the principle of heterosubstitution to its utmost limits : it is because the flesh and soul of my enemy are analogous to my own that I am able to incorporate them and make the most of it, in spite of the temporary inconvenience that may result from my preying upon another self (see Conklin, this volume). Exocannibalism, hunting for human trophies, abducting women and children, and all other forms of Amazonian predation thus imply that absorbing otherness is necessary for constituting or perpetuating the self, an absorption not conceived as a replacement for a loss but as the addition of another alter ego which will make me different. Ritual anthropophagy is the most obvious or literal expression of this obsessive desire to define oneself by assimilating alien identities, a drive which may take more peaceful expressions, such as in the ethno-taxonomy of the Panoans, who use the word nawa both as a generic pejorative term for strangers and as an affix for constructing autonoms (Erikson 1996 : pp. 77-82), or in the process of ethnogenesis of the various Lowland Quechua communities who continuously absorb individuals from neighboring ethnic groups (Whitten 1976, Scazzocchio 1979). Amazonian cannibalism is thus a quite abstract metonymical operation rather than a mere incorporation of substances : it is that which I assimilate which predicates what I am <sup>8</sup>.

All this offers a definite contrast to the emphasis that Melanesian cultures lay on bodily substances as a medium for the construction of individual and collective identities along gender lines. Using bodily humors linked to sexuality and the reproductive process (semen, menstrual blood, milk, vaginal fluids) as literal markers of personal status is not very common in Amazonia, where people are mostly indifferent to the fear of pollution by physiological substances. Conversely, these substances constitute adequate social emblems in Melanesia because of their convertibility in the physiology of exchange, such as salt becoming a substitute of semen among the Baruya, the pandanus nut becoming either milk or sperm among the Sambiah, or pig and game meat becoming a substitute for the flesh and blood of a dead person when they are offered as

compensation to his maternal relatives among the Etoro or Melpa (Bonnemère 1990). In Amazonia, there may be cases of homology between body parts or physiological substances, on the one hand, and artifacts or natural kinds, on the other, but these homologies are seldom made explicitly, as in Melanesia, and they must be uncovered through a sophisticated interpretation of symbolic discourse (see Hugh-Jones, this volume, and Bidou 1996). These metaphorical equivalences are usually found in societies who have secret men's cults analogous to those of Melanesia -- where, for instance, the sacred flutes are seen as embodiments of ancestors' bones (see Chaumeil 1993 for the Yagua or S. Hugh-Jones 1979 for the Northwest Amazon); but these homologies seldom lead to actual processes of heterosubstitution in the construction or disposal of the person. Nevertheless, these societies do exhibit a peculiar relation to artifacts as substitutes: contrarily to what prevails elsewhere in Amazonia, their sacred musical instruments are both embodied substitutes (metaphorically, of bodily substance or of certain spirits, and metonymically, of male power) and non exchangeable against similar objects or other items. They have thus many features of Oceanian 'inalienable possessions' (Weiner 1992) and may constitute an intermediary figure between homosubstitution and heterosubstitution : they, alone, stand for something else and they, alone, cannot enter the network of reciprocity.

What would be the necessary conditions for switching to heterosubstitution, then? I know of only two native societies in the South American Lowlands who have crossed that step : the Guajiros of the Atlantic coast of Colombia and Venezuela, and the Araucanians of Central Chile<sup>9</sup>. Both have bridewealth and make payments to compensate for homicides; both were famed for their bellicosity and resisted to the Spaniards for several centuries; both associate personal and corporate prestige to the accumulation, display and ceremonial exchange of material wealth, mainly pieces of jewelry and heads of cattle; for both these societies are also exceptional in that they have domestic animals. The Araucanians and the Guajiros acquired cattle and horses by raiding Spanish settlements and adopted a pastoral economy during the colonial period, thereby establishing an entirely novel way of objectifying animals, no longer as persons and collective subjects of a social relationship, but rather as mere signifiers of social status and detachable objects of generalized exchange. These two cases point again to the crucial role of the relationship with non humans, be they artifacts or natural kinds, in explaining the predominance of homosubstitution or heterosubstitution. However, the paradoxical result of the conversion of the Guajiros and colonial Araucanians to pastoralism is that their social organization and values are not closer to those of Melanesian societies than they are to those of the rest of the South American Lowlands; in fact, they are more reminiscent of Nilotic peoples, such as the Nuer or the Dinka, with whom they share the typical 'cattle complex' of large-scale herders. This may be a sign that there are wider differences than meet the eye between South America and Melanesia or, more simply perhaps, that once the speed of history has accelerated after the colonial encounter, the rates of divergence between societies become incommensurable.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In her thoughtful comment of my paper during the conference, Marilyn Strathern suggested that blood-sucking by manioc plants might be equated with suckling, thus implying a nurturing transmission of substance from the women to their vegetal offspring. However, Achuar women do not regard the vampirism of manioc as a legitimate feeding process; they view it, rather, as a very harmful propensity that must be deflected by magical songs and specific rituals. Furthermore, women are less exposed to blood-sucking than their small (human) children whose main diet is precisely composed of mashed manioc tubers. Gardening thus implies both a deadly competition between different kinds of children and an element of reciprocal predation between humans and non humans that parallels hunting.

<sup>2</sup> A point made by Tuzin (1982) for the Arapesh and emphasized, in a comparative framework, by Gregor and Tuzin (this volume).

<sup>3</sup> In the sample of the kinship systems of 48 Lowland societies prepared by Hornborg, only twenty have indubitable exogamous unilineal descent groups or moieties (1988: 223), and these have a disproportionate importance in the sample as three quarters of them are either Gê (11) -- i.e. not Amazonian, ecologically speaking -- or Tukanoan (4), the two strongholds of unilineality in the Tropical Lowlands and the areas which have attracted most attention from anthropologists in the past thirty years.

<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside the treatment of pigs and the large body of literature on cultural ecology, natural species are mostly taken into account as the metonymical components of ritual activities concerned with gender distinctions (see Bonnemère 1992 or Juillerat 1986, for instance). But there are notable exceptions, of course, such as Ralph Bulmer (1967, 1974) or Steven Feld (1982).

<sup>5</sup> This is, at least, the impression I have when I cast a look at a youthful attempt at comparing Amazonian and Melanesian shamanism (Descola and Lory 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Hugh-Jones mentions (this volume) the possible exception of the Kalapalo where 'bridewealth payments' reputedly mark a woman's first marriage. It is doubtful, however, that the gifts that are given to newly married women and men can be considered as bridewealth, as these are immediately passed on to the elder in-laws of both spouses (Basso 1995: 16). The moral imperative of generosity and sharing is extremely strong among the Kalapalo and seems incompatible with the idea of a payment being made for the acquisition of a person (ibid.).

<sup>7</sup> The Kalapalo 'big-men' to which Hugh-Jones calls attention (this volume) are somewhat peculiar in that their status is partly ascribed and partly achieved. In order to become the ceremonial representatives of their village in inter-community feasts, they must belong initially to a class of hereditary titular chiefs. Apart from this initial condition, their ascension requires personal charisma, generosity and physical strength, as well as the perfect mastery of an elaborate formal language used in the rhetoric of political discourse and in ceremonial dialogues. They must also possess a shamanic competence so as to be able to launch accusations of witchcraft against other chiefs competing for the leadership of the village (Menget 1993). The capacity to channel wealth in the ceremonial exchanges between villages is thus one dimension only of a status which merges aspects of political positions seemingly differentiated in Melanesia between 'big-men', 'great-men' and chiefs.

<sup>8</sup> See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's illuminating discussion of the Tupian 'cannibal cogito' (1992: 252-258).

<sup>9</sup> See Picon 1983 and Perrin 1983 for the Guajiros. The 'Araucanians' I am referring to are the people who defined themselves as 'Reche' during the colonial period (16-18th century) before their submission by the Spaniards and their subsequent ethnogenesis as 'Mapuche' (Boccaro 1996); however, the contemporary Mapuche have retained the practice of bridewealth (see Faron 1969).

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- 
- Århem, K. (1990). "Ecosofía Makuna", in F. Correa (ed.), La selva humanizada. Ecología alternativa en el Trópico húmedo colombiano, pp. 105-122. Bogota: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología.
- Århem, K. (1996). "The Cosmic Food Web: human-nature relatedness in the Northwest Amazon", in P. Descola & G. Pálsson (eds), Nature and Society: anthropological perspectives, London: Routledge.
- Barnes, J. A. (1962). "African models in the New Guinea Highlands". Man 62: 5-9.
- Basso, E. (1995). The Last Cannibals. A South American Oral History. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bellier, I. (1993). "Réflexions sur la question du genre dans les sociétés amazoniennes". L'Homme 126-128: 517-526.
- Bidou, P. (1996). "Trois mythes de l'origine du manioc (Nord-Ouest de l'Amazonie)". L'Homme 140: 63-79.
- Biersack, A. (1984). "Paiela "women-men": The reflexive foundations of gender ideology". American Ethnologist 11 (1): 118-138.
- Boccard, G. (1996) Des Reche aux Mapuche (16°-18° siècles). Ethnogenèse et identité dans le Chili central. Thèse de doctorat en ethnologie, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.
- Bonnemère, P. (1992). Le casoar, le pandanus rouge et l'anguille. Différence des sexes, substances et parenté chez les Ankave-Anga (Nouvelle-Guinée). Thèse de doctorat en ethnologie, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.
- Bonnemère, P. (1990). "Considérations relatives aux représentations des substances corporelles en Nouvelle-Guinée". L'Homme 114 (2): 101-120.
- Brown, M. F. (1986). Tsewa's Gift: Magic and Meaning in an Amazonian Society. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Brown, M., F. & E. Fernández. (1991). The War of Shadows. The struggle for utopia in the Peruvian Amazon. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bulmer, R. (1967). "Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird? A Problem of Zoological Taxonomy among the Karam of the New Guinea Highlands". Man 2: 5-25.
- Bulmer, R. (1974). "Memoirs of a small game hunter: on the track of unknown animal categories in New Guinea". Journal d'Agriculture Tropicale et de Botanique Appliquée 21: 79-99.
- Carneiro da Cunha, M. (1978). Os Mortos e os Outros. Uma análise do sistema funerário e da noção de pessoa entre os índios Krahó. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec.
- Chaumeil, B. and J.-P. Chaumeil. (1992). "L'oncle et le neveu. La parenté du vivant chez les Yagua (Amazonie péruvienne)". Journal de la Société des Américanistes LXXVIII(2): 25-37.
- Chaumeil, J., & Chaumeil, J. P. (1977). "El rol de los instrumentos de música sagrados en la producción alimenticia de los Yagua del Nor-Este peruano". Amazonía peruana I (2): 101-120.
- Chaumeil, J.-P. (1989). "Du végétal à l'humain". Annales de la Fondation Fyssen 4: 15-24.
- Chaumeil, J.-P. (1993). "Des Esprits aux ancêtres. Procédés linguistiques, conception du langage et de la société chez les Yagua de l'Amazonie péruvienne". L'Homme 126-128: 409-428.
- Descola, P. (1981). "From scattered to nucleated settlements: a process of socioeconomic change among the Achuar", in N. Whitten (ed.), Cultural Transformation and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador, pp. 614-646. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Descola, P. (1982). "Territorial adjustments among the Achuar of Ecuador". Social Science Information 21 (2): 299-318.
- Descola, P. (1992). "Societies of nature and the nature of society", in A. Kuper (ed.), Conceptualizing Society, pp. 107-126. London and New York: Routledge.
- Descola, P. (1993). "Les affinités sélectives. Alliance, guerre et prédation dans l'ensemble jivaro". L'Homme 126-128: 171-190.
- Descola, P. (1994a). In the Society of Nature: a native ecology in Amazonia (Nora Scott, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Descola, P. (1994b). "Pourquoi les Indiens d'Amazonie n'ont-ils pas domestiqué le pécarí? Généalogie des objets et anthropologie de l'objectivation", in B. Latour & P. Lemonnier (eds.), De

- 
- la préhistoire aux missiles balistiques. L'intelligence sociale des techniques, pp. 329-344. Paris: La Découverte.
- Descola, P. (1996a). "Constructing natures: Symbolic ecology and social practice", in P. Descola & G. Palsson (eds.), Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives, London: Routledge.
- Descola, P. (1996b). The Spears of Twilight. Life and Death in the Amazon Jungle. (Janet Lloyd, trans.). London: Harper Collins.
- Descola, P., & J.-L. Lory. (1982). "Les guerriers de l'invisible. Sociologie comparative de l'agression chamanique en Amazonie (Achuar) et en Nouvelle-Guinée (Baruya)". L'Ethnographie 87-88.
- Deshayes, P., & Keifenheim, B. (1994). Penser l'Autre chez les Indiens Huni Kuin de l'Amazonie. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Dumont, L. (1975). Dravidien et Kariera: l'alliance de mariage en Inde du Sud et en Australie. Paris: Mouton.
- Dumont, L. (1977). From Mandeville to Marx. The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Erikson, P. (1996). La griffe des aïeux. Marquage du corps et démarquages ethniques chez les Matis d'Amazonie. Paris: Peters.
- Faron, L., C. (1969). Los Mapuche. Su estructura social. Mexico: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano.
- Fausto, C., & E. Viveiros de Castro. (1993). "La puissance et l'acte. La parenté dans les basses terres de l'Amérique du Sud". L'Homme 126-128: 141-170.
- Feld, S. (1982). Sound and Sentiment. Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fienup-Riordan, A. (1990). "Eskimo Iconography and Symbolism: an Introduction". Etudes/ Inuit/ Studies 14 (1-2) (Chasse, sexes et symbolisme/ Hunting, Sexes and Symbolism, special issue edited by A. Fienup-Riordan): 7-12.
- Giannini Vidal, I. (1991) A Ave Resgatada : "A Impossibilidade da Leveza do Ser". Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Godelier, M. (1982). La production des Grands Hommes. Pouvoir et domination masculine chez les Baruya de Nouvelle-Guinée. Paris: Fayard.
- Gregor, T. (1977). Mehinaku. The Drama of Daily Life in a Brazilian Indian Village. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gregor, T. (1985). Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Héritier, F. (1996). Masculin / Féminin. La pensée de la différence. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob.
- Herdt, G., & F. J. Poole (1982). "'Sexual antagonism': the intellectual history of a concept in New-Guinea anthropology". Social Analysis (Adelaïde) 12: 3-28.
- Hill, J. D., & R. M. Wright (1988). "Time, Narrative and Ritual: Historical Interpretations from an Amazonian Society", in J. D. Hill (ed.), Rethinking History and Myth. Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past, pp. 78-105. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Hornborg, A. (1988). Dualism and Hierarchy in Lowland South America. Trajectories of Indigenous Social Organization. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Hugh-Jones, S. (1979). The Palm and the Pleiades. Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jara, F. (1991). El camino del Kumú: ecología y ritual entre los Akuriyó de Surinam. Utrecht: ISOR.
- Journet, N. (1995). La paix des jardins. Structures sociales des Indiens curripaco du haut Rio Negro (Colombie). Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie.
- Juillerat, B. (1986). Les Enfants du sang. Société, reproduction et imaginaire en Nouvelle-Guinée. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Kensinger, K. M. (1995). How Real People Ought to Live : The Cashinahua of Eastern Peru. Prospect Heights (Illinois): Waveland Press.

- 
- Lemonnier, P. (1990). Guerres et festins. Paix, échanges et compétition dans les Highlands de Nouvelle-Guinée. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Lepowsky, M. (1993). Fruit of the Motherland. Gender in an Egalitarian Society. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1984). Paroles données. Paris: Plon.
- Menget, P. (1993). "Les Frontières de la chefferie. Remarques sur le système politique du haut Xingu (Brésil)". L'Homme 126-129: 59-76.
- Morton, J. (1984). "The domestication of the savage pig : the role of peccaries in tropical South and Central America and their relevance for the understanding of pig domestication in Melanesia". Canberra Anthropology 7 (1-2): 20-70.
- Murphy, R., F. (1958). Mundurucú Religion. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Murphy, Y., & R. F. Murphy. (1974). Women of the Forest. New York & London: Columbia University Press.
- Overing Kaplan, J. (1975). The Piaroa, a people of the Orinoco Basin: a study in kinship and marriage. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Perrin, M. (1983). Le chemin des Indiens morts. Mythes et symboles guajiro. Paris: Payot.
- Picon, F. (1983). Pasteurs du Nouveau Monde. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Read, K. (1952). "Nama-cult of the Central Highlands". Oceania 23.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G. (1976). Amazonian Cosmos. The Sexual and religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G. (1996). Yuruparí. Studies of an Amazonian Foundation Myth. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions.
- Renard-Casevitz, F.-M. (1985). "Guerre, violence et identité à partir des sociétés du piémont amazonien des Andes centrales". Cahiers Orstom (série Science Humaines) 21 (1): 81-98.
- Renard-Casevitz, F.-M. (1991). Le banquet masqué. Une mythologie de l'étranger chez les Indiens Matsigenka. Paris: Lierre & Coudrier.
- Rivière, P. (1969). Marriage among the Trio: a principle of social organisation. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rivière, P. (1984). Individual and Society in Guiana. A comparative Study of Amerindian Social Organization. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rojas Zolezzi, E. (1994). Los Ashaninka, un pueblo tras el bosque. Contribución a la etnología de los Campa de la Selva Central Peruana. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.
- Santos Granero, F. (1994). El poder del amor. Poder, conocimiento y moralidad entre los Amuesha de la selva central del Perú. Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Scazzocchio, F. B. (1979) Ethnicity and boundary maintenance among the Peruvian Forest Quechua. Ph. D. thesis, University of Cambridge.
- Seeger, A., Da Matta, R., & Viveiros de Castro, E., B. (1979). "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras". Boletim do Museu nacional (Rio de Janeiro) 32: 2-19.
- Seymour-Smith, C. (1991). "Women have no affines and men no kin: the politics of the Jivaroan gender relation". Man (N.S.) 6: 629-649.
- Strathern, M. (1988). The Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Taylor, A. C. (1983). "The marriage alliance and its structural variations in Jivaroan societies". Social Science Information 22 (3): 331-353.
- Taylor, A. C. (1993a). "Les bons ennemis et les mauvais parents. Le traitement de l'alliance dans les rituels de chasse aux têtes des Shuar (Jivaro) de l'Equateur", in E. Copet-Rougier & F. Héritier-Augé (eds.), Les complexités de l'alliance: IV. Economie, politiques et fondements symboliques, pp. 73-105. Paris: Editions des Archives contemporaines.
- Taylor, A. C. (1993b). "Remembering to Forget. Jivaroan Ideas of Identity and Mortality". Man (N.S.) 28 (4): 653-678.

- 
- Tuzin, D. (1982). "Ritual Violence among the Ilahita Arapesh : The Dynamics of Moral and Religious Uncertainty", in G. Herdt (ed.), Rituals of Manhood. Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea, pp. 321-355. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- van der Hammen, M. C. (1992). El manejo del mundo. Naturaleza y sociedad entre los Yukuna de la Amazonia colombiana. Bogotá: TROPENBOS.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. (1992). From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society (Catherine V. Howard, trans.). Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. (1993). "Alguns Aspectos da Afinidade no Dravidiano Amazônico", in M. Carneiro da Cunha & E. Viveiros de Castro (eds.), Amazônia : etnologia e historia indígena, pp. 149-210. São Paulo: NHI-Universidade de São Paulo.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. (Ed.). (1995). Antropologia do Parentesco. Estudos Ameríndios. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da UFRJ.
- Watson, J. B. (1977). "Pigs, fodder, and the Jones effect in postipomoean New Guinea". Ethnology 16 (1): 57-70.
- Weiner, A. B. (1992). Inalienable Possessions : The paradox of keeping-while-giving. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weiss, G. (1975). Campa Cosmology. The world of a forest tribe in South America. New York: American Museum of Natural History.
- Whitten, N., E. (1976). Sacha Runa. Ethnicity and Adaptation of Ecuadorian Jungle Quichua. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.