Introduction

Towards Engaged Ontographies of Animist Developments in Amerindian South America

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In memory of Dimitri Karadimas's *poursuite*

> Nowadays we are prone to be less certain about the distinction between man and animal as well as finding ourselves with increasing frequency wondering whether things have souls, and what it means to call a thing a thing? We ask pointedly, What is an Animal? What is a Man? What is Life? … It is as if our humming is a conversation with the hummings of the world at large.
>
> —M. Taussig, *The Corn Wolf*

How do the different norms, various moments, and diverse contexts found among South Amerindian peoples affect the principles around which indigenous daily interactions with non-humans occur? How do these interactions intersect with the human ability to give them multiple meanings, and what could be learned from it in the particular cases of South America? Which kinds of elements of the South American environments are considered to have human-like qualities, and for what reasons? How much productivity is left for categories such as 'culture' and 'nature' (and its various versions) in understanding a set of features considered as cross-species shared?

This volume offers bottom-up approaches – in the sense of a symmetric openness to the inflection of the ethnographer's concepts with the concepts of the field that he or she is confronted to – to relationships between human and non-human subjects among South American Amerindian peoples, illustrating both their spatial variations and temporal transformations. Following the evidence of their

own fieldwork findings, the authors have compiled here work from ethnographic phenomena to theoretical frames, and their texts intend to stand in contrast to projects that are apparently mostly concerned with locating examples of more or less fixed typologies (Laugrand and Oosten 2007; Wardle and Schaffner 2017). Using different frameworks of interpretation and offering a series of mutually illuminating ethnographically focused studies, we would like this compilation to modestly contribute to a possible cross-fertilisation of current debates on non-humans in South America covering diverse groups (twelve in total, representing seven different language families), and contrasted – and usually opposed – geographical areas (those regions of the Chaco, the Andes and the Amazonia included in the territories of Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil and Venezuela – see Map 0.1 of indigenous groups studied in this book).

Bringing together researchers from various institutions working in their different manners and from different angles, and in diverse ethnographic areas, this compilation engages with debates over the practical, symbolic and transformative aspects of human versus non-human interactions in the lowlands and highlands of South America. Although it would be impossible here to situate this volume in the long tradition of relevant South American ethnography, previous similar efforts include Claude Lévi-Strauss's fundamental *Mythologiques* (and the so-called *petites mythologiques*), later followed by compilations like those of Gary Urton (1985), Lawrence E. Sullivan (1988), Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere (2006), Laugrand and Oosten (2007), and more recently Halbmayer (2012b) and Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva (2012).[1]

The chapters joined here highlight the ethnographic complexities that allow 'the apprehension of more differentiated semiotic regimes' (Stolze Lima 2000: 51) linked to the relationships between humans and non-humans (like the souls of the dead, Incas, members of previous humanities, clans' properties, place-based beings, ritual offerings, plants, animals and artefacts). Themes explored include the relationships between Amerindian groups and 'natural' resources, and peasants or rural proletarians trying to make a living in the context of an extractive and exploitative economy that involves sociopolitical elites, communities, outsiders, and community members with differing opinions. Authors consider topics such as the subjectivity and agency of non-human beings, humans taking on non-human subjectivities, production and reproduction, continuity and change, and the situated context of time and symbolic landscapes. These topics are illustrated through their rituals, dances, musical expressions,

narratives, material cultures, economic exchanges, and contemporary political vindications. They are addressed searching for 'ethnographic sites to conceptualise otherwise' (de la Cadena 2014) and for alternative forms of composing specific Amerindian worlds (Alberti et al. 2011). Seeking needed and practicable 'potential actions of other collectives' (Skafish 2016a: 79), this compilation aims to 'provide resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one-world story' (Escobar 2016: 22). Avoiding both naturalist reductionisms and semiologist idealisms, every chapter intends to leave 'a way out for the people' who are described (Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de

Map 0.1 Indigenous groups studied in this book. Map created by the author.

Castro 2014) producing 'non-existence points at the non-existence worlds' (Escobar 2016: 15).

A 'Bizarre Scandal' and an Ante-predicative Movement

Before describing and contextualising the contents of this book, I will offer a brief preliminary description of two key categories: 'non-human' and 'animism', both of which will be problematised and discussed in the following pages. The 'conceptual fuzziness' of the category of 'non-human' or 'other-than-human' has been justified considering its usefulness to 'recruit scores of new actants so as to render the theater of worldly interactions more complex' (Descola 2014a: 271–72). I intend to use this concept in a merely descriptive form and mainly as an alternative to 'nature', to 'supernatural beings' (which clearly mirrors the Western idea of nature) and also to 'spirits' (which evokes the spirit/body dualism of the modernist person concept) (Bird-David 1999: 71).[2]

It is important to highlight two aspects here. The first is that we are dealing with a 'contextual' non-human. It means that this category here 'has no overarching, common substantive (even if privative) definition' and therefore 'each non-human species is as different from all the others as it is from humans' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 226). The second aspect is that when these 'entities that are in constant interactions with us' (Descola 2014b: 281) are personified, they are given the capacities of conscious intentionality and social agency that define the position of the subject. In other words, non-humans are personified '*as*, *when*, and *because*' (Bird-David 1999: 78, emphasis in original) they are subjects and we socialise with them, rather than the other way around (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 467. See also Venkatesan et al. 2013). Here, thus, personification is a *consequence* (Keane 2013: 189).

> *culture is the subject's nature*; it is the form in which every subject experiences its own nature. Animism is not a projection of substantive human qualities … but rather expresses the logical equivalence of the reflexive relations that humans and animals each have for themselves … 'humanity' is the name for the general form taken by the subject. (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 245, emphasis in original)

The second concept that I wish to address is 'animism', 'the label traditionally applied to those ontological regimes in which … things and people assume the social form of persons' (Viveiros de

Castro 2015a: 149). Recently, the relations between humans and non-humans, both in South America and elsewhere, have been precisely considered through a redefined concept of 'animism' (Vilaça 1992; Århem 1996; Stolze Lima 1996, 1999; Howel 1996; Bird-David 1999; Stringer 1999; Morrison 2000; Pedersen 2001; Surrallés and García Hierro 2004; Descola 2005; Harvey 2005; Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva 2012; Stengers 2012). Ethnographic peoples' postulation of 'ontological continuities … where the analyst's "common sense"… posits ontological separations' (Holbraad 2009: 431) has led to analytical considerations of an '[a]nimism's enigma of subverting same into other' (Willerslev 2013: 43).

As is well known, animism is one of the oldest concepts in anthropology, representing the 'century-old problem [of] why people animate what we regard as inanimate objects' (Bird-David 1999: 70). In fact, ethnologists' efforts to understand this 'bizarre scandal' (Kohn 2009: 136. See also Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish 2017a: 9) could be traced at least to the very foundation of British social anthropology. Seminal work by Edward B. Tylor (1871) explained 'animism' in accordance with David Hume's thesis in *Natural History of Religion* (1757), taking the label from his 'contemporary spiritualists' (Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva 2012: 3) and the German 'proto-vitalist' Ernst Stahl (Halbmayer 2012b: 9). After more than a century (Dransart 2013: 6), this attribution of a social character to relations between humans and non-humans is traditionally understood as configuring a world in which the default form of interaction between beings is modelled on that that occurs between subjects (Costa and Fausto 2010: 94).[3]

Some of the most important current theories dealing with animism have been primarily promoted by Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2015a) and Descola (2006, 2011), who are 'the main figureheads and provocateurs' (Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 11) of the so-called 'ontological turn'[4] in anthropology. This introduction will address the ontological turn only as a means of presenting the most recent contemporary debates concerning how Amerindians construct relations with non-humans (and in particular those discussions that have renovated the study of animism among various forms of otherness objectifications). Neither this Introduction nor this volume as a whole is interested in weighing or critiquing any of the diverse and still evolving perspectives that the ontological turn harbours today (Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish 2017a: 19). In short, ontology is not used here as a strict method of investigation, but merely as an inspirational descriptive frame for recent studies

closely linked to contemporary indigenous South America to which this volume contributes new material.[5]

The category of 'ontology' has been used as 'a concrete expression of how a particular world is composed, of what kind of furniture it is made, according to the general layout specified by a mode of identification' (Descola 2014d: 437). An ontology is based on something more general or 'more elementary' (Descola 2014b: 239) than, for instance, a cosmology: it is based on 'systems of properties that humans ascribe to beings' (Descola 2006: 139). These properties are censed to deal with 'generative patterns of inferences and actions, modes of worlds' composition and use that follow analogous principles and that, for this reason, can spread out in very similar forms in very diverse historical contexts' (Descola 2014b: 112, and 236–37. See also Skafish 2016b: 395). In contrast, for instance, a cosmology would be defined as something more specific: 'the form of distribution in space of the components of an ontology and the kind of relations that conjoin them' (Descola 2014d: 437. See also Law and Lien 2012; Jensen 2017: 530). Therefore, it has been suggested that in the Andes, for instance, 'certain landscapes' components [a lake, a mountain, a river, a cave, a slope] play an essential role in people's conception of social membership, they are full-fledged components of a collective much wider than human community' (Descola 2014b: 324).[6]

In short, as Pedersen (2012) puts it, ontology becomes 'anthropologically meaningful … as "composition"'. Nevertheless, this composition takes different inflections. On the one hand, according to Descola, '[t]o compose a world is a form of perception, actualisation and detection (or non-detection) of our environment's qualities and of the relationships established at it' (Descola and Ingold 2014: 30). On the other hand, Tim Ingold has stressed the processual dimension of this notion of composition: 'a continuous process … a perpetual development … to compose the world is not to represent life as if it existed beforehand, but to make life come out as it grows' (ibid.: 37–38). In sum, while Descola considers the so-called composition of the worlds as a form of perception, actualisation and detection of certain qualities, Ingold thinks of it more as a construction, a development, a sort of instigation of life growth.

I will come back to this contrast later. For now, let us note that in both cases, ontology would open the field to explore the 'more fundamental intuitions [,] … basic inferences' (Descola 2014b: 239–40) or, put more simply, some kind of 'reality' (Kohn 2015). It envisages a 'science of beings and of relationships yet to come' (Descola 2014b: 245) that could 'highlight the elemental components of the

syntax of worlds and the rules of their combination' (ibid.: 265). In an ontologically inflected anthropology, animism has been redefined as an ontology concerned much more with 'being' than with *how* we come to know it, or if being is knowable at all (i.e. via epistemology). This has been recurrently used by many scholars as an argument for a critique of a 'Western European mononaturalist-multiculturalist ideology' based on a (particular) nature–culture binary (Latour 2009). They assert that 'the space between nature and society is itself social' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 481; 2015a: 232). In consequence, in order to truly understand the environment, we need to ignore or overcome the dualism that opposes nature to society. We must deny the existence of one unifying nature '[distilled] into its material properties alone, uncontaminated by symbolic meanings or social relations' (Hornborg 2006: 21; see also Hornborg 2013). We need to abandon the intellectualist perspective (Bird-David 1999: 83) that stabilises universality 'too fast' and accepts plurality 'too lightly' (Latour 2014b: 302). Finally, we might also need to recognise that '"what exists" is always in between the subject–object divide that is central to the modern ontology and [that] … "what exists" is always the ongoing effect of practices or performances' (Blaser 2009: 11).[7] With this proposal and the consideration that 'objectivity and subjectivity, as well as morality and politics, are indissolubly entangled' (ibid.: 14), Blaser responds to a persistent 'factual' critique. This assessment of the ontological turn is concerned with an 'absence of objectivity' (Karadimas 2012: 28–29) and issues that produce questions such as the following: '[O]n what grounds can we make such a claim that it is the world and not our construal of it that differs?' (Keane 2013: 187. See also Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 10–23).

Thus, the distinction between some things of the world that would fall within the jurisdiction of human intentionality, and others that would obey to the universal laws of the material (Descola 2011: 34), would neither be universal nor demonstrable. It would merely be a conventional form 'of carving ontological domains in the texture of things' (Descola 2014c: 271). In fact, we would be facing an 'infernal' or 'nasty' dichotomy (Course 2010: 253; Viveiros de Castro 2015a), a contingent dualism that is 'historically situated and just one of many other possible and indeed empirically existing modes of understanding relations' (Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva 2012: 1. See also Kapfhammer 2012: 152).

The following section will summarise two main well-known approaches that have emerged from both anti-dualist approaches and South American ethnography: Descola's new animism and Viveiros

de Castro's perspectivism. It will highlight the continuities rather than the differences between them, as that has been stressed before (Karadimas 2012).

From Cosmochemistry to Bomb

Descola's fourfold typology of ontologies and six modes of identification – called cosmochemistry by Scott (2014) – follow his interest in actions and processes of knowledge that have already been accomplished.[8] According to him, what should be analysed is the institutional manifestation of these changing relationships between human and non-human entities (Descola 2011: 13, 76):

> the solidification, the actualisation, the objectification of those schemes in institutions … the stabilisation of worlds' compositions in devices whose power and duration persist beyond any individual existence.[9]

According to some scholars, this interest would overshadow the fact that 'these ontologies–worlds are not pregiven entities but rather the product of historically situated practices' (Blaser 2009: 11). Closer to Tim Ingold's proposal (see below), Blaser adds that 'the borders that delineate them [these ontologies–worlds] have to be traced constantly for they are in a constant state of becoming, not least through their ongoing interactions' (ibid.: 16. See also Medrano and Tola 2016).[10]

It is worth noticing, nevertheless, that this recognition could be implied in Descola's consideration of its typology as 'a kind of experimental machine' (Descola 2014b: 224; see also Kohn 2009: 143). Similar to Holbraad's 'analytical artifices' (2012: 255) and to Pedersen's 'open-ended and creative technology of ethnographic description' (2014: 5), this 'heuristic device' of Descola would allow us to identify how the inference of animism is being favoured or inhibited (Kohn 2009: 144). It would allow us, consequently, to recognise the frequent possibility of finding different degrees of prominence of modes of identification within the same society.

These 'degrees' take us to the issue of 'ontological hybridity' (Descola 2014d: 442. See also Scott 2014). Probably one of the most elegantly simple forms to deal with this problem has been proposed by Marshal Sahlins, who has rebaptised Descola's ontological grid or quartet (Skafish 2016a: 73) as composed of 'communal', 'segmentary' and 'hierarchical' forms of animism.[11] In the same vein as Descola takes Viveiros de Castro's 'perspectivism' as a particular elaboration

of an animist ontology, Sahlins includes the former's animism within 'one overall human ontology' (Kelly 2014: 358). This 'animic ground' would be a form of anthropomorphism writ large (Karadimas 2012). As its 'closest systematization' (Descola 2014e: 295), this amplified animism would include naturalism (Sahlins 2014: 282) as one expression, though to a lower degree, of the same 'animic subjectivity'. Thus, although the degree of personhood is recognised as more present in animism – inasmuch as it implies the attribution of (human-like) subjectivity, agency and emotion – it would not be completely absent in naturalism. In any case, it becomes clear that animism cannot be isolated from its contexts, circumstances or relative positions in any given ontology or system of knowledge: the 'degree of subjectivity attributed to objects' are 'open to negotiation and debate … [and] perceived by … different categories of people in very different ways' (Santos-Granero 2009: 10). This position in which animism is neither fully present nor fully absent in any given group, in fact advocates that, at least apparently, the most common case could be that of hybridity or complex combinations (Dransart 2013: 7; Sahlins 2014: 282; Descola 2014c: 277; Bartolomé 2015; Wardle and Schaffer 2017: 29).

Among others, Lucas Bessire (2014: 19) has expressed his scepticism towards the supposition that Amerindian multinaturalism is external to modernity's predominant naturalism. This reservation is mainly directed towards what Michael Scott has described as

> [T]he chief distinction between … Cartesian dualists [who] see things … as discrete entities, [and] relational non-dualists [who] see things as relations, both internally and externally, [and for whom] … there are no pure unmixed things or essences, only the web of relations which inhere in things and in which things inhere (Scott 2013: 867).

In consequence, the field is opened to subtler and more particular hierarchies between modes of identifications.[12] Descola himself has recently recognised that a 'hierarchical encompassment' would not be completely satisfying if the articulation of the ontologies were to be 'accidental' instead of 'built as potentialities into the very structure of the initial set of contrasts' (Descola 2014d: 441). Still, in another work, he has used the concept of 'permeability' (*perméabilité*) between different modes of identification (Scott 2014), but always pointing out its limitation to two final options: either an absorption or a radical change (Descola 2014b: 303–4).[13]

Besides the consideration of perspectivism as a type or as an extension of animism (Kohn 2009: 139; Karadimas 2012: 25–26; Halbmayer 2012b: 7, 12), some scholars have taken seriously the former's

potential to provoke a crisis (Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish 2017a: 1), to constitute a 'bomb' destroying a 'whole implicit philosophy' (Latour 2009: 2) of the interpretations ethnographers make of their material. In a recent interview, Viveiros de Castro stated: 'On the basis of perspectivism, it was easy to imagine a counteranthropology that could redescribe Western or modern anthropology … a political object, a very handy political weapon against … the "colonization of thought"' (Skafish 2016b: 410).

Furthermore, they justify this bomb as an 'end of the "Internal Great Divide" between culture and nature, and therefore of the fundamental characteristic that differentiates (and supposedly makes superior) the moderns in relation to the "others"' (Blaser 2009: 17). Always in the case of Amerindian societies, thanks to its 'collapse' of the 'modern constitution' (ibid.: 11), the multinaturalist approach would allow us to accept the existence of multiple ontologies or worlds, and to focus 'on what kinds of worlds are there and how they come into being' (ibid.: 18).

The elaborations of perspectivism on the physical discontinuity between the beings of the cosmos – the counterpart of the meta-physical continuity implied in animism – have lead it to define the body as 'the great arena' (Seeger, DaMatta and Viveiros de Castro 1979: 14), the 'assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a habitus' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 257).

The importance of the 'body' in perspectivism is such that it, for instance, defines nature as 'being the form of the other as body' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 273). Also, it creates a point of divergence from Descola's animism. As Viveiros de Castro said to Peter Skafish: 'Philippe had stopped at the realization that Indians think that every-thing in the universe has a soul – that's animism. But as to where the differences between things with souls come from, he had no answer to that question. My answer … [is] that the difference comes from the body' (Skafish 2016b: 406). In fact, in the case of Descola, 'bodies are necessary paradoxes: they are both excessively effective barriers and eminently malleable means of intersubjective relations' (Scott 2014).

The theoretical consequences of considering the body as the 'site and instrument of ontological differentiation and referential disjunction' (Viveiros de Castro 2004b: 4) are clear in the definition itself of perspectivism as a set of ideas and practices that 'imagines a universe peopled by different types of subjective agencies, human as well as non-human, each endowed with the same generic type of soul, … which determine that all subjects see things in the same way' (ibid.).

As Karadimas has rightly noticed, '[t]here seem to be no stable identities in the world view of the "perspectivist subject", as identity depends on the subject and that subject's point of view' (Karadimas 2012: 27). He was in fact only echoing one of the fundamental postulates of Perspectivism: '[This] representational or phenomenological unity … is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity. One culture, multiple natures – one epistemology, multiple ontologies' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 474).

Viveiros de Castro himself stresses this issue: 'Same representations, different objects; same meaning, different reference. This is perspectivism … A perspective is not a representation because representations are a property of the mind or spirit, whereas the point of view is located in the body' (2015a: 256). Taking Amazonian mythologies as an example, he makes explicit that '[b]lood is to humans as manioc beer to jaguars, in exactly the same way as a sister to me is a wife to my brother-in-law' (ibid.: 254). What the study of 'Amerindian souls' as indexical categories or 'cosmological deictics' would need is then 'a theory of the sign or a perspectival pragmatics' (ibid.: 244):

> The human bodily form and human culture … are deictics, pronominal markers … They are reflexive or apperceptive schematisms … by which all subjects apprehend themselves, and not literal and constitutive human predicates projected metaphorically … onto non-humans. Such deictic 'attributes' are immanent in the viewpoint, and move with it. (ibid.: 245)

In perspectivism, then, 'body and soul, just like nature and culture, do not correspond to substantives, self-subsistent entities or ontological provinces, but rather to pronouns or phenomenological perspectives' (ibid.: 268). It might not be useless to insist that, in concordance, here the categories of nature and culture 'refer to exchangeable perspectives and relational-positional contexts; in brief, points of view' (ibid.: 197).

It might also be worth noticing that perspectivism not only stresses (as animism) a certain porosity between the ontological status given to humans and non-humans (Césard, Deturche and Erikson 2003). Instead of the mere collecting of data about indigenous peoples for Western theoretical elaboration, perspectivism would also privilege the exploration of 'indigenous anthropologies' (Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva 2012: 13; Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish 2017: 7–14). Furthermore, it would stress an equivalence between academic and indigenous epistemologies, as has long been demanded by some anthropologists (Narotzky 2010). Therefore, perspectivism could be

considered as a 'potentially generatively comparative' (Kohn 2015) Amerindian theory[14] of the subject (Tola, Medrano and Cardin 2013: 29). Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that it would be so not in the sense of

> a systematic, exhaustive native model without internal contradiction that applies deductively to the facts, but ... [only as] a set of interconnected assumptions, which inform and are informed by social practice, and which present a reasonable degree of internal coherence and interpretative flexibility. (Fausto 2012: 189)

In sum, perspectivism as a modality of Amerindian cosmology 'not only offers resources for thinking about alter-modernities but is itself just such a site of alter-modernity' (Scott 2013: 867. See also Salmon 2017: 55; Candea 2017: 85).[15]

At this point, it is important to remember that both Descola's new animism and Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism not only reject the dualism between nature and culture, but also rely on another fundamental dual distinction: that between interiority and physicality (Keane 2013: 187; Tola 2015; Skafish 2016a: 66,76). The epistemic opposition between interiority and physicality (*physicalité*) is key for the arguments of the ontological turn. It is a sort of 'hypothetical invariant' (*invariant hypothétique*) (Descola 2014b: 124) with the ambition to 'exploit universal mental constrains' (Salmon and Charbonnier 2014: 568). Interiority (sometimes called 'spirit' or 'soul') involves an intentionality, a subjectivity, a 'reflexive form', and a certain awareness that one is animated by an immaterial inner flow (but not necessarily by an immaterial inner substance). Physicality (sometimes called 'body') has been described as 'affectual dispositions', a system of physiological, perceptual, sensory-motor and intensive affects, as the awareness that one is embedded in systematic material constraints, but not necessarily an extended material organism or a substance (Halbmayer 2012b: 13; Kohn 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 260, 273). While interiority integrates, physicality differentiates (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 475; Descola 2011: 94). Additionally, they are useful to contrast perspectivism and animism. If the definition of interiority mentioned above has been deemed the 'principle tenet of animism', the concept of physicality would be 'the minimum condition' for perspectivism (Costa and Fausto 2010: 94).[16] While in animism what matters is metaphysical continuity, what is at stake in perspectivism is the physical discontinuity between the beings of the cosmos (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 260). '[I]f salmon look to salmon as humans to humans – and this is

'animism' – salmon do not look human to humans and neither do humans to salmon – and this is 'perspectivism' (ibid.: 247).

It is also important to notice that, if according to animism all creatures possess a kind of interiority, in the case of perspectivism they are all human in so far as they share a human culture (Course 2010: 250) or subjectivity (Sztutman 2008: 6). In short, metaphysical continuity seems to be present in Descola's animism in a more restricted form than in Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism.

In the case of Descola (2014d: 440), he has recently recognised his 'esthetic addiction to symmetry' and the 'irony' of taking as a universal or a pan-human cognitive propensity (Kohn 2009: 138) the awareness of a Husserlian distinction between material processes and mental states (Descola [2005] 2006: 138; Skafish 2016a: 90).[17] In the case of Viveiros de Castro, the following lines might illustrate what happens in perspectivism:

> The 'human mode' can be imagined, then, as the fundamental frequency of this animic field we can call meta-human … every entity situated in a subject position perceives itself *sub specie humanitatis* – living species and other natural kinds (including our own species) can be imagined to inhabit this field's domain of visibility. (Viveiros de Castro 2007: 161)

To what extent does the equivalence between interiority and human qualities permeate or charge Descola's animism and Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism? Is the above-mentioned definition of interiority actually humanising all actants (Kelly 2014: 358)? According to some authors, in perspectivism 'the sharing of spirit by animals and plants comes down to a sharing of humanity' (Turner 2009: 17). Furthermore, Turner (ibid.: 37) states that, at least in Amazonian animism, the possession of a subjectivity 'does not in and of itself indicate that an animal or plant therefore identifies itself as human'. He has also found either untenable or contradictory 'the mutual dissociation and irrelevance of external bodily (natural, affective) form and internal spiritual (cultural, cognitive) content' (ibid.: 25–26). Moreover, Turner disputes perspectivism's conception of the body – 'this complex entity, comprised of the physiological body as mediated by the social body' (ibid.: 29) – as an external 'envelope' (ibid.: 31). In sum, 'granting … to non-humans of an interiority identical to' humans (Rival 2012a: 70) seems to strongly contradict 'the ethnographic evidence … consistent with a non-anthropocentric version of animism' (Dransart 2013: 20). According to other authors (Descola 2014b: 296), it would simply be enough to consider animism as

'anthropogenic'. Instead of anthropomorphism (deemed as a cognitive tendency to assign human personhood to other-than-humans), all that is needed to treat non-humans as humans would be derived from the interactions among the latter (Scott 2014).

The frequently advanced hypothesis that indigenous peoples call upon social relationships to shape their entanglements with the environment[18] faces the issue of agency (and intentionality) in the 'natural' world. The next section will deal with this and other issues related to the relationship between agency and animism – about which there is still not really a complete synthesis. This will lead us to what could be called eco-phenomenological perspectives on animism.

From Agency to Pan-semiotics?

Recent debates about the 'ontological turn' have evolved – sometimes violently (Jensen 2017: 535) – into various inquiries.[19] Here I will just point out one which appears as a more or less direct product of the above-mentioned anti-dualist proposals. I am referring to a group of questions that focus on the nature of the relationships between non-human beings and particular forms of perceiving the environment.

One possible answer to those questions acknowledges that if everyday life is the key foundation upon which the conceptualisation of non-human beings is built, then they should be viewed as agents in interaction with humans in concrete situations (Descola 2011: 100). In consequence, animism should be restricted to specific positions or contexts (Kapfhammer 2012: 162).[20] Also, the variation of these 'circumstances' (Descola 2014c: 277) would produce an oscillation of the ontological status and capacity of reaction of human and non-human entities. As Alf Hornborg wrote some years before,

> what distinguishes us from the animists … [may be our] incapacity to exercise such 'relatedness' within the discursive and technical constraints of the professional subcultures [that] organize the most significant share of our social agency. (Hornborg 2006: 24)

Various scholars follow this consideration of Amerindian cosmologies as inextricably linked to (or even produced by) their practices and everyday engagement with the environment. This could be illustrated by the use of the concept of 'worlding' to denote the particular daily assemblages that constitute the perceived environment (Descola 2014c: 272. See also Descola 2011).[21] Another example could be found in Tim Ingold,[22] who has characterised animism as a

form of being (rather than a set of beliefs) and has also proposed to substitute the former with 'animist process' (*processus animique*), and ontology with ontogeny (*ontogénie*). Both substitutions are a consequence of Ingold's emphasis on the unavoidable temporality of constant human becoming:

> It is an historical process. Focusing on the study of processes, I was interested in distinguishing ontogenies (meaning the different paths of development) rather than ontologies … I am trying to stop thinking in terms of animism … and instead in terms of animist (or non-animist) processes in development … I do not consider humans as human beings … but as human becomings … because we never cease building ourselves and contributing to build others in the same way [that] others build us. It is an uninterrupted process. (Descola and Ingold 2014: 37)[23]

Paul Kockelman summarises this tendency, pointing out that in fact 'ontologies are concomitant with ontogenies; that is, the latter describe how the former develop – either in history (as the conditions and consequences of their coming-to-be) or in practice (as the processes, practices and relations through which their being is constituted)' (Kockelman 2016: 61).

The problems of agency and intentionality in the natural world and of the 'symbol-induced passivity' (Descola 2014a: 269) of non-humans, have led some to consider the concept of agency dubious, inaccurate or even useless (Long and Moore 2013: 6). Holbraad (2009: 433) illustrates this point with a somehow sharp assertion: 'Whatever the "things" of animism might be, they are certainly not material objects (nor, by the same token, are they "imbued" with "non-material properties")'. It might be worth citing Ingold's argument on this issue at length:

> [E]ngaging directly with the materials themselves … [w]e discover [they] … are active. Only by putting them inside closed-up objects are they reduced to dead or inert matter. It is this attempted enclosure that has given rise to the so-called 'problem of agency' … How is it, we wonder, that humans can act? If we were mere lumps of matter, we could do nothing. So we think that some extra ingredient needs to be added to liven up our lumpen bodies. And if … objects can 'act back', then this ingredient must be attributed to them as well. We give the name 'agency' to this ingredient … But if we follow active materials … then we do not have to invoke an extraneous 'agency' to liven them up again. (Ingold 2011: 16–17)

It has been conventional to describe animism as a system of belief that imputes life to inert objects. But … such imputation is more typical of

people in Western societies who dream of finding life on other planets than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has generally been applied.[24] These peoples are united … in a way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth. In this animic ontology, beings … issue forth through a world-in-formation. (ibid.: 63)

Preceding Bruno Latour's insistence in that 'animation is the essential phenomenon' (2014a: 7), here Ingold is substituting a cognitive understanding of agency with a phenomenological account of the world as immanent and emergent. His dismissal of the concept of agency – still disguised in, for example, some authors' notions such as 'co-activity' (Pitrou 2016) – follows the idea that animism raises more questions about ourselves than about the so called 'animists' (Hornborg 2006: 22. See also Holbraad 2004). As Hornborg (ibid.: 25–26), Ingold draws from Jakob von Uexküll's account of *Umwelt*, a term that denotes a system in which the world is constituted within an animal's circuit of perception and action. For this German-speaking ethologist, meaning is bestowed by the organism on its environment, located in the immediate coupling of perception and action (Ingold 2011: 64). This form of approaching meaning makes Ingold (ibid.: 77) not only view von Uexküll as a 'pioneer of bio-semiotics', but also allows him to fight the usual idea that meaning is related to the correspondence between an external world and its interior representation (Ingold 2013: 107).

A similar concern to that of Ingold has recently been expressed in the perspectives of Eduardo Kohn. Although more explicitly grounded in ethnography, his recent elaborations not only pay similar attention to the ideas developed by von Uexküll during the 1940s, but similarly contest the boundary between humans and their environment. For instance, whether or not Ingold's work maintains humans–environment relations at the centre of his concerns, he is no less interested than Kohn in what the latter called an 'anthropology of life',[25] and, more recently, an 'anthropology beyond the human' (or the post-human). In a short commentary on Bird-David's well-known article, Ingold describes a 'system of perception and action constituted by the co-presence' of humans and non-humans:

Responsiveness, in this view, amounts to a kind of sensory participation, a coupling of the movement of one's attention to the movement of aspects of the world. If there is intelligence at work here, it does not lie inside the head of the human actor, let alone inside the fabric of the tree. Rather, it is immanent in the total system of perception and action constituted by the co-presence of the human and the tree within a wider environment. (Bird-David 1999: 82)

This 'intelligence at work' could be paralleled with Kohn's understanding of knowing: 'Humans are not the only knowers, and knowing (i.e. intention and representation) exists in the world as an other than human, embodied phenomenon that has tangible effects' (Kohn 2007: 17).

If significance is not exclusive to humans, and all living beings have semiotic dimensions, then we need to consider all organisms as selves and biotic life as a (non-symbolic and highly embodied) sign process (Long and Moore 2013: 16–19): '*As long as they act, agents have meaning*' (Latour 2014a: 12, emphasis in the original). How could we consider the forms in which non-humans represent themselves to humans? Based on the works of Terrence Deacon (2011) and Charles S. Pierce, Kohn considers the ecological relations of the Ecuadorian Runa as essentially constituted by two orders of things. In the first place, by the ways in which human and non-human beings perceive and represent their environment. Secondly, the Runa's forest would also be constituted by the interactions of phenomenal worlds that are specific to their respective perceptual and bodily dispositions, motivations and intentions (Kohn 2007: 5, 2014a).[26]

It has been suggested that 'a real investigation of how non-human forms *actually* deal with iconic and indexical signs' (Descola 2014a: 272, emphasis in original) would have at least two closely related consequences. First, the assertion that semiosis is intrinsic to life (Kohn 2007: 6) would rescue the question of being 'from its eclipse by concerns with epistemology' (Alberti et al. 2011: 900), concerns that sometimes persist under labels as extravagant as '*weak* ontology' (Keane 2013: 186–88. See also Viveiros de Castro 2015b; Escobar 2016: 22; Lebner 2017: 224).[27] In second place, and more importantly, this claim would ultimately collapse the distinction between epistemology and ontology (Costa and Fausto 2010: 98; Halbmayer 2012b: 18). In terms of his critique of the notion of language in primatology, David Cockburn has similarly stated:

> The point is, further, that in speaking of 'our' language we … will no longer be speaking of the language of a particular group of human beings. 'Our' vocabulary … will no longer be simply that of a human community; the standards embodied in it … will no longer be specifically human ones; or, better, those to whom we must answer in our use of that language is not restricted to other human beings. (Cockburn 2013: 178)

Nevertheless, it is important to recall that overcoming the conceptions embedded in a naturalist ideology does not appear to be a

simple task (Descola and Ingold 2014). For instance, even if nature is no longer 'monolithic' – and culture is no longer the variable (Kohn 2009: 142) – the stability of the former might still persist. How should we then consider 'the Nature of Nature'? How could we overcome a merely negative account such as 'all sorts of not-necessarily human dynamics and entities' (Kohn 2014c)?

The perspectives of 'Kohn's pansemiotic approach' (Descola 2014a: 272) are not only in dialogue with Ingold's, but also (among other Americanists) with Descola's recent elaborations on 'collectives'. With this concept (along with that of 'associations') the latter defines 'hybrid multispecies groupings wherein humans strive, through complex rituals, to disentangle themselves from the mass of beings with whom they share an origin and an identity, and to carve out some functional mechanisms for their specifically human life concerns' (Descola 2014e: 296–97).

In general, these approaches that are borne from the study of indigenous South America could also be considered as following a tradition that dates back at least to Marcel Mauss's (1938) classic work on personhood. Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism, Kohn's 'sylvan thinking' and Descola's animistic 'collectives', for instance, not only raise doubts about the universality of the category of 'nature'. All of them, in fact, aim to re-establish the very object of the study of anthropology, by taking 'culture' and 'social' away from what we used to call 'human societies' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 16, 43. See also Salmon and Charbonnier 2014: 567; Salmon 2017: 55).[28]

The following subsection includes some definitions and critiques of the 'ontological turn' from another perspective, a political one. It summarises a broad range of critical approaches of ontology: both external (where cosmologies are seen as primarily resulting from practical engagements with the environment) and internal (where the concern is with the plurality, coexistence or hybridisation of ontologies and with the potential anthropomorphism vitiating the usefulness of the concept). Nevertheless, it does so only to the extent that the present state of temporary, unstable and emerging positions and paradigms of the current intellectual landscape of anthropological research on animism allows for it.

Is the 'Ontological Wolf' Afraid of Turbulences?

Taking into account its current relevance in mainstream anthropology, the concept of ontology has also been viewed as a sort of

'epidemic' (Halbmayer 2012b: 11) 'buzzword' giving a 'sense of déjà vu' (Pedersen 2014).[29] Popularised at least since the publication of *Thinking Through Things* (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007), this so-called turn is seen today as not 'particularly new anymore, let alone that it will last forever' (Pedersen 2014). Authors working on different ethnographic regions around the world have, if not directly criticised this approach, at least recognised that 'we don't know what it [the 'ontological turn'] means yet' (Kelly 2014: 264) or even that 'what's good about the turn isn't new, and what's new isn't good' (Jensen 2017: 535).

Among the scholars who have developed a critique of certain aspects of it (Halbmayer 2012b; Pazos 2006, 2007), some focus on, for instance, its flaws regarding the ontological hybridations or ontodiversity, the possible internal differences within ontologies, or the ponderability of ontological classifications (Ingold 2000; Willerslev 2007; Piette 2012; Kohn 2013; Scott 2013; Descola 2014c: 298; Neurath 2015: 59–60). Others ask whether anthropologists are taking indigenous animism too seriously (Willerslev 2013: 49) or too literally (Keane 2013: 189. See also Killick 2015: 4). Is this seriousness in fact failing to recognise the ability of indigenous people to distance themselves from their official rhetoric? A reply to this question has asserted that what distinguishes the ontological turn is not an assumption of seriousness but a proposal of 'deliberate and reflexive' misunderstandings in ethnography, a proposal to 'pass through what we study … as when an artist elicits a new form from the affordances her material allows her to set free' (Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014).[30]

> [T]o take seriously does not mean to believe … to be in awe of what people tell you, to take them literally when they do not mean … to take it as a profound dogma of sacred lore or anything of the sort. It means to learn to be able to speak well to the people you study … to speak about them to them in ways they do not find offensive or ridiculous. (Viveiros de Castro 2015b)

Other authors focus on a 'level of abstraction [in the ontological turn] that rarely deals with ethnographic material' (Fischer 2014: 348). In fact, some of them have compared it with a 'dogma' (Ramos 2012: 489) and an 'orthodoxy' (Course 2010: 249). The image of a 'doctrinaire' (Franklin 2017: 229) 'fundamentalism' (Oyuela-Caycedo 2014) that advocates a sort of 'conversion' (Scott 2013: 861), or that requires, in a moderated version, a sort of problematic 'faith' (Killick 2015) among its 'devotees' (Ramos 2017) has also been frequent: '[in

the] discussion of the typology of animism and the variation of a society's perspectives of the body, the soul and non-humans … we thus end up with this fundamentalist view of what an ideal ethnic group thinks, through the filters of the anthropologists' (Oyuela-Caycedo 2014: 53–54).[31]

Still other authors raise doubts about the indifference of the ontological turn to indigenous political concerns, adversities, and its 'disquieting potential to add to indigenous political difficulties and intellectual fragility' (Ramos 2012: 483–84). Following previous critiques of the representation of Western modern thought as an integral, homogeneous system of abstract type-concepts (Douglas 1989; Turner 2009: 16), Lucas Bessire and David Bond have suggested that the ontological turn involves an 'easy dismissal of modernity'. They also have questioned the conditions under which ontologies are 'made amenable to ethnographic analysis' (Bessire and Bond 2014a: 443. See also Heywood 2012: 146 and Gordillo 2014: 185–90). In his detailed review of Martin Holbraad's study on Cuban divination, Evan Killick has pointed out as well

> a particular trend in some current anthropological work in which the complex ideas, practices and social processes of everyday life are overlooked in the intellectual pursuit of radical alterity … this proposed methodological emphasis on alterity … [has] the danger both of over-interpreting, or perhaps over-intellectualising, alternative views and practices while also eclipsing a fuller and wider sense of the power of anthropological study itself … the philosophical ideas become an end in themselves, not linked to raising further ethnographic questions or elucidating other social and cultural phenomenon but rather held up as precious jewels to be admired in isolation. (Killick 2014)

Bessire denounces a 'mystifying ethnographic project' based on the 'active omission of the conditions and relationships' that allow anthropological knowledge (Bessire 2014: 39). Furthermore, he advocates paying more attention to 'the palpable social presence of anthropological knowledge and the unequal forces that it conjures and exerts against human life' (ibid.: 26).[32] Addressing his own fieldwork among the Ayoreo, Bessire states that the search for

> an encounter with pure difference or an ontological alterity that exists external to the particular relationships between Ayoreo and outsiders … the always-frustrated desires of ethnographers to gain access to a secret domain of true primitive difference is the key to understanding how the figure of that difference is reproduced and sustained by the same apparatus that consumes it and targets actual Ayoreo lives for extermination in the present. (Bessire 2014: 45. Cf. Killick 2015; Bartolomé 2015; Todd 2016)

The current restrictions of the 'often reactionary and romantic' (Kockelman 2016: 154) search for a 'primitive ontology' would actually domesticate alterity, making ontology 'available for governance' (Bessire 2014: 228. See also Skafish 2016a: 76). The ontological turn would also replicate 'the metanarrative that liberalism tells about itself and thus reanimates the colonial space of death for many people like the Ayoreo' (Bessire 2014: 192). This author echoes here those concerns about the reduction of the anthropological gaze to a 'citational' reproduction (Todd 2016: 13) and 'the class perspective of urban cosmopolitans making [a] career out of objectifying the rural and the local' (Bird-David 1999: 81), usually secluded in 'impoverished and formerly colonized' communities (Alberti et al. 2011: 907).

Furthermore, such liberal narrative may bear 'little relation to people's lives and deny their ability to interact with others' (Killick 2014), highlighting 'the dissonance between modernist and nonmodernist ontologies in localized case studies' (Alberti et al. 2011: 899). Bessire's severe critique also explicitly targets animism:

> Instead of animism, I found apocalypticism. Instead of jaguars who are humans, I found Indians who were animalized. Instead of wisely multinaturalist primitives crossing human/nonhuman divides at will, I found increasingly sharp and non-negotiable divides between nature and culture, primitive and human, past and future. (Bessire 2014: 15)

Bessire and Bond suggest that the restriction of 'Indigenous ontological legitimacy' to the terms of an 'orthodox dialectic of Otherness' might ethnographically erase those individuals who do not correspond to the mythology in which this dialectic is exclusively grounded (Bessire and Bond 2014a: 444. Cf. Killick 2015; Cepek 2016; Heywood 2017a: 227). They also urge us to inspect the 'hardening matrices' that select what must be safeguarded and what could be left, to explore the actually existing politics of nature and culture. We must pay attention to 'the more consequential makings' (Bessire and Bond 2014c) of an urgent present whose challenge lies precisely in 'devising ways to indefinitely sustain the possible' and in 'contributing to actualize some possibilities and not others' (Blaser 2014): the non-modern, the isolated field site, the 'colonizing binaries of structuralism' (Bessire and Bond 2014a: 442–49). What could be the relevance, they ask, of embracing an anachronistic hideaway towards these outdated topics (Scott 2013: 861; Bessire and Bond 2014b; Killick 2015)?

Among the answers to these questionings, the main two exponents of the ontological turn have both underlined the political dimension

of their theoretical proposals. Descola (2014b: 348) asserts that ontology in fact amplifies the anthropological study of politics when it comes to indigenous movements that see non-humans as political subjects in their own 'collective' (*collectif*)

> to do away with those Eurocentric categories [class, race, gender] and with the colonial project of sucking into our own cosmology peoples who, having lost their lands, their dignity, and their work-force, face the added ignominy of having to translate their ways of life into our own way of life and of being grateful to us for providing them the tools to do so. (Descola 2014d: 436)

Viveiros de Castro makes a similar argument:

> [O]ntological questions are political questions insofar as they come into existence only in the context of friction and divergence between concepts, practices and experiences within or without culturally individuated collectives … given the absolute absence of any exterior and superior arbiter. (Viveiros de Castro 2015b)

Certainly, the strength of a replica like this only holds if one considers that, for instance, Descola's distinction between interiority and physicality is neither one of those tools for which indigenous peoples should be 'grateful' nor operates an evolutionary 'absorption' disguised as translation (Haber 2009; Ramos 2012: 490 and Ramos 2017; Candea 2014; Tola 2015; Kohn 2015; Lebner 2017: 224). Is this the 'final act of colonization' (Kohn 2015)? To what extent could Descola's objectives be considered as a 'radically foreign conceptual dualism' (Skafish 2016a: 78) instead of the projection of a 'dialogic vacuum' (Bartolomé 2015) of 'disembodied representatives of an amorphous Indigeneity' (Todd 2016: 7)?

Tim Ingold has criticised what he considers the deep asymmetry of Descola's comparative project. On the one hand, it takes the peoples of the world as examples of the diverse modes of thinking. But on the other hand, it places the anthropologist as an emancipated observer, free to move around as he wishes in the domain of human diversity.

> [T]he observer has no place, he is nowhere, he does not recognise any ontology as his own … he affirms that he is an ontological pluralist. One might say that he observes the world from a sort of ontological paradise from which we are all excluded, we who are imprisoned by our respective philosophies of being … from his position of transcendental observer, he could thus affirm that there are different manners of composing a unique world. But this transcendental posture is in fact one of the bases of what he calls naturalist ontology … whatever he might say, he adopts

as a neutral position a certain ontology: naturalism. (Descola and Ingold 2014: 54)[33]

In equally appealing terms, Severin Fowles has similarly argued that:

> the problem with going further and adopting ontological pluralization … is that this move ends up being so ironically, tragically, and embarrassingly modern … our modernist ontology is inseparable from what we might call the exceptional position of nonposition. Whatever the world is, there must always be some position of nonposition outside it for the Western liberal subject to occupy, as reason stands apart from emotion, mind from body, referee from players, scientist from experiments, anthropologist from natives. In this sense, there is nothing more profoundly modern than the effort to step outside modernity. And this is precisely what the advocates of the ontological turn claim to have accomplished twice over: first by standing in the position of nonposition vis-à-vis other people's worlds, and second by standing in the position of nonposition vis-à-vis the plurality of worlds itself. (Alberti et al. 2011: 907. See also Wright 2016)

In other words, 'how do we account for ontological encounters when any account presupposes an ontological grounding?' (Blaser 2009: 18). Is not an anthropologist such as Descola actually a 'masked moderniser who, under cover of pluralism, in fact restores anthropological science's guiding function and therefore reinforces the Western in its intellectual imperialism'[34] (Descola 2014b: 116)?[35]

The answers to these critiques are until now not many, and rather perform a sort of retreat. Pedersen, for instance, has argued that these scholars – who have been called 'default sceptics' (Pedersen 2014) and *ultras* (Descola 2014b)[36] – could also 'be criticized for a certain lack of reflexivity about their own theoretical grounds' (Pedersen 2014). He has also argued that the ontological turn might only take itself seriously to a limited degree and hence might not amount to a 'big theory' (ibid.). Additionally, this avoidance of the claim of a 'meta-ontology' echoes Holbraad's position on alterity as pertaining

> to the relationship between analysis and its objects (namely, anthropological concepts and the ethnographic … materials brought to bear on them) and not per se to how some bits of the world(s) relate (or not) to others, which I take to be a metaphysical issue best left to philosophers. (Alberti et al. 2011: 908)[37]

Besides pointing out a tendency to reify the nature–culture binary, and to treat it as 'on the same footing as ethnographic evidence' (Turner 2009: 7), some authors have described at least two consequences of the recurrent ontological turn's bemoaning of the dualism between

nature and culture. One of them is a 'misrepresentation and mistranslation' (ibid.: 16) of Amerindian societies. Lowland South American ethnography shows that here culture 'neither excludes nor suppresses natural contents or qualities'. On the contrary, it 'rather retains and reproduces them through the employment of more abstract and generalized meta-forms' (ibid.: 22). Culture, in fact, would be understood as 'an incremental transformation of these natural elements', a sort of 'super-nature' (ibid.: 34). Based on a distinction between perspectivism and multinaturalism (a sort of metaphysical outcome of the former), Eduardo Kohn maintains that arguments as those illustrated here by Turner and Bessire would actually 'misunderstand the project' (Kohn 2015. See also Candea 2017: 100; Holbraad 2017: 142). According to Kohn, at least in the case of multinaturalism, it

> is not a description of how the world is, or how one kind of person thinks, but a call for a form of thinking, available to anyone, that is able to see possible ways of becoming otherwise … It certainly grows out of certain styles of thinking that ethnography reveals, but it also grows out of the recursive nature of comparative ethnographic thinking itself, in which one's form of thinking is constantly being changed by one's object of thought. (Kohn 2015: 320. See also Alberti 2016 and Heywood 2017b)

Prefiguring the methodological version of the ontological turn that I will discuss in the next section, Salmond has also tried to clarify the problem, stating that alterity here points to 'relational contrasts produced in acts of comparing one set of purported commonalities with another … Their "native thought" and "indigenous ontologies" are thus (for analytic purposes) artifacts of their own' (Salmond, in Boellstorff 2016: 402. See also Alberti 2016).

A second consequence of the ontological turn's 'radicalizing unfamiliarity [or] alterity' (Alberti et al. 2011: 906) is its requirement of the most 'euro-centric' (Todd 2016: 9) and 'modern binary of all: the radical incommensurability of modern and non-modern worlds' (Bessire and Bond 2014a: 442).[38] Advocating incommensurable differences as an analytical point of departure might lend itself to potentially dangerous political constructions of Otherness that could actually be misused against marginalised groups (Rival 2012b: 138; Carstensen 2014: 26; Vigh and Sausdal 2014; Wright 2016: 10; Todd 2016: 10; Ramos 2017). According to Evan Killick 'the ontological position is now imposing a new stricture … in placing too much emphasis on … difference the ontological approach arguably overemphasizes those aspects of these cultures and societies that are the most radically different' (Killick 2015).

Besides the issue of the problematic broadening of the scope of applicability of the ontological approach, Bessire affirms that it also 'standardizes multiplicity and fetishizes alterity' (Bessire and Bond 2014a: 449. See also Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 21; Todd 2016: 17). Ramos (2012: 483) echoes this concern, suggesting that 'to attribute so much uniformity to native thinking … is to flatten down (if not deny) their inventiveness and aesthetic sophistication, and to ignore their specific historical trajectories'.[39]

Among the arguments of the various authors described until here, two poles can be detected – a radicalisation and a questioning – and a sort of moderate position: a methodological one. On the one hand, some scholars have made remarkable efforts of generalisation of the perspectivist phenomenology. This amplification either heads towards a semiotics – in a phenomenology on the context-specific generation of the life process – (Kohn 2007, 2013), or the unpacking of the logical propositions that organise the relationship between beings (Holbraad 2009; Praet 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 219).

On the other hand, some authors denounce an unfortunate substitution of an urgently needed 'ethnography of the actual' in favour of a soteriological 'sociology of the possible' (Bessire and Bond 2014b: 449). Descola himself, for example, considers that exploring other possible metaphysical combinations, and other conceivable cohabitations of humans and non-humans (Kohn 2014b: 275; Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014) becomes even more urgent in a planetary crisis he deems as a 'byproduct of naturalism' (Kohn 2009: 147). Almost simultaneously, Viveiros de Castro has resorted to the same argument:

> I am talking of the feeling that there is now one big, global, major problem that confronts 'all of us', nay, that conjures and at the same time utterly problematises this entity I am calling 'all of us' … the ecological catastrophe and its dialectical connection to the economic crisis … I am convinced that in the somber decades to come, the end of the world 'as we know it' is a distinct possibility. And when this time comes … we will have a lot to learn from people whose world has already ended a long time ago – think of … the Amerindians who, nonetheless, have managed to abide, and learned to live in a world [that] is no longer their world 'as they knew it'. We [will all] soon be Amerindians. Let's see what they can teach us in matters apocalyptic … Anthropology would be thus in a position to furnish the new metaphysics of the 'Anthropocene'. (Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 16. See also Brum 2014)

A similar allegation – in a more concise but also seemingly paradoxical form – could also be found in Kohn's suggestion that

indigenous 'environmentalism' would be better understood, paradoxically, if we accepted that 'there's no nature [as a monolithic object opposed to a variable culture] to protect' (Kohn 2009: 147). In the next subsection, I wil describe in more detail what I have called the moderate or methodological position.

From Cartography to Engaged Recursivity

The issues related to hybridity that were summarised above problematised the idea of a cosmochemistry transformed in a sober but rigid cartography – or 'fantastic geography' (Skafish 2016a: 88) – of different ontologies (Salmon and Charbonnier 2014: 568; Candea 2014). 'To what extent do we need to territorialize modes of knowing' (Rival 2012b: 129), and to commit to a notion of general ontology (specifiable through particular scientific concepts), which excludes the exploration of multiple natures that have different forms (Jensen 2017: 536)? Skafish (2016b: 397) reminds us that 'thinking is much more than a matter of classification. The whole point is to shift the focus of anthropology from classification to speculation' (See also Carstensen 2014: 27). The caution implied in the previous question and affirmation takes us to a somehow more productive aspect of the ontological turn: its methodological reconceptualisation, the production of 'genuinely alter concepts' (Kohn 2015) or 'the active transformation of anthropological concepts' (Rival 2012b: 129). This could be a form of evading the exercise of mere intellectual games and consolidating a useful tool for advancing comparative understandings of indigenous South American collectives and practices (Devore 2017: 122).

Hornborg has asked how we could 'reintroduce morality into our dealings with our non-human environment' (2006: 25), with a nature that we have for centuries deprived of ethics (Callicot 1989; Berkes 2005; Harvey 2005; Kapfhammer 2012; Long and Moore 2013: 17; Latour 2014a: 13; Kohn 2015, 2017; Rees 2016)? Is the Other's suffering and devastation (Escobar 2016: 23) produced by the Anthropocene's geological agency of humans the high price we must pay for the pursuit of human 'freedom' (Chakrabarty 2009: 210)? Is 'this wonder-friendly ontology … with the potential to revolutionize anthropological practice and even save the planet from ecological apocalypse' (Scott 2013: 860) indeed hampering much needed situated analyses of afflictions, dominations and struggles? If so, those proposals in which 'indigenous people [are deemed] as an environmental

antidote to the behavior of the West' (Killick 2015) would constitute nothing but a 'problematic form of speculative futurism' (Bessire and Bond 2014c). A 'revisionary futurism, in which some vertically ranked world- and life-making projects count more than others' (Bessire 2014: 228) does 'a disservice to the past, present and future complexity and diversity of Amerindian ways of living' (Killick 2015. See also Kapfhammer 2012: 149–52). Facing these issues, the works compiled in this book, as will be detailed below, aim to provide with (ontographic) descriptions of those dimensions of South American worlds that have usually been ignored (Schavelzon 2016; Todd 2016: 15) or 'actively produced as non-existent' (Escobar 2016: 15).[40]

Among those we have called above the 'moderates', some scholars have acknowledged that there is a diversity of animisms, each one with its local authority – which also foretells its own local exclusions – status, history and structure (Bird-David 1999: 79). Such a recognition is crucial for that group of works of 'relational ontology' that 'hardly accounts for the peculiar ways in which each of them [animist phenomena] may be analytically challenging' (Holbraad 2009: 436). It should be acknowledged that 'these worlds and the borders that delineate them have to be traced constantly, for they are in a constant state of becoming not least through their ongoing interactions' (Blaser 2009: 16). Killick has also advocated for 'a slightly more realistic, and yet still hopeful view of the future in which indigenous people are … [not] fixed in a particular worldview as the ontological approach sometimes appears to suggest' (Killick 2015).

Despite their differences, as radicals, and sceptics, moderates follow the claim that reality is constructed through the practices of human and non-human beings. They also seem to agree about the necessity of including in the description of animistic ontologies' sociality,[41] at least those non-human beings with whom human society, life and interactions are considered inextricably bound up. As any critical approaches of ontology, they could probably agree that there is still much to be known about, first, how indigenous groups detect and use particular properties of their environments and, second, how they change this environment 'by weaving with it and between themselves' diverse kinds of relations (Descola 2014c: 273). Despite these points in common, the moderates tend to restrict the ontological turn to a reasonable and productive methodology (such as, for instance, Holbraad's 'ontography'). More importantly, this restriction might be one of the reasons why these authors have not been so directly affected by the strong critics of the philosophical or metaphysical premises reviewed above (Salmon and Charbonnier 2014: 567;

Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 17–21; Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish 2017a: 7; Jensen 2017: 530–31). Pedersen, for instance, considers the ontological turn as 'a strictly methodological proposal':

> Far from prescribing the horizon of anthropological inquiry in the name of an ultimate reality or essence that may ground it … OT [the ontological turn] is the methodological injunction to keep this horizon perpetually open, including the question of what an object of ethnographic investigation might be and, therefore, how existing genres, concepts and theories have to be modulated the better to articulate it … [T]he ontological turn is not concerned with the 'really real' nature of the world … [but] is a methodological project that poses ontological questions in order to solve epistemological problems … epistemology in anthropology has to be about ontology too. (Pedersen 2017: 229–30)

Stressing the ontological turn's 'commitment to recalibrate the level at which analysis takes place' (Course 2010: 248), Martin Holbraad has characterised it as a radicalisation of three anthropological basic requirements: reflexivity, conceptualisation and (empirical, methodological and theoretical) experimentation (Alberti et al. 2011). Holbraad insists on the need to reject any previous compromise concerning what type of phenomena could constitute an ethnographic discipline and how the anthropological concepts should be transformed in order to observe them. Instead of transformation, Kohn thinks in terms of 'deformation': 'anthropology's method of inquiry places our field in a position to deform it by being itself deformed by the different forms of thought it encounters' (Kohn 2015). Holbraad's radicalisation of reflexivity indeed gives conceptualisation a central place in the ontological turn, which aims to transform critical reflexivity into conceptual creativity (Holbraad 2014: 128–37). Consequently, he describes his ontographic approach as a 'break out of the circle of our conceptual repertoire' (Holbraad 2009: 433) using 'the extraordinary data to reconceptualize ordinary assumptions in extraordinary ways' (Holbraad 2009: 435). According to him, a 'copious effort' (Holbraad 2009: 434) or an 'extra care' (ibid.: 436) is needed 'to explore the enormous conceptual wealth of the Western intellectual tradition in order to find concepts that may … be appropriate to the analysis of animism'. In other words: '[T]he task of conceptualization that any given set of animist phenomena may necessitate may certainly involve engaging with Western ontological revisions, but is most likely to require analytical labour that goes further than that, and often in different directions' (ibid.). A few years later, the same author added that 'the turn to ontology in anthropology is not about offering some suitably improved and

ontically fortified replacement for culture. Rather, it is about offering a better way to address just one of the questions [that] "culture" was always supposed to absorb – namely, the analytical problem of how to make sense of things that seem to lack one' (Alberti et al. 2011: 902.[42] See also González-Abrisketa and Carro-Ripalda 2016: 119; Holbraad 2017; Kohn 2017; Laidlaw 2017; Lebner 2017: 225; Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 11).

A similar conviction lies behind the following statement: 'Anthropology's role, then, is not that of explaining the world of the other, but rather of multiplying our world' (Viveiros de Castro 2015b). In fact, there are multiple concordances between Holbraad's concept and the proposals of Viveiros de Castro – who has also written about what he calls 'speculative ontography' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 75) and declared that the most interesting thing in perspectivism is not that it illustrates an ethnographic phenomenon but that it illustrates a methodological imperative for anthropological thinking: to be able to exert radical reconceptualisations (ibid.). It echoes, for example, his notion of 'controlled equivocation', which has been profusely used by various ontologically inflected anthropologists (Blaser 2009; de la Cadena 2015; Vilaça 2016). The reflexivity implied in ontography also resonates in Strathern's well-known proposal: 'It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas', which some of her colleagues have amplified and updated to the point of saying, 'It matters what worlds world worlds' (Haraway 2016: 35).[43]

As already mentioned, the aim to rethink the object of anthropological studies by shifting from what we called 'human societies' to what we can provisionally name 'hybrid collectives' represents one of the main challenges (Ramos 2012: 485. See also Howe 2015) to scholars interested in the study of human/non-human interagentivity. 'The point of living in the epoch of the Anthropocene is that all agents share the same shape-changing destiny, a destiny that cannot be followed, documented, told [or] represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity or objectivity' (Latour 2014a: 15). Kohn's proposal, for instance, is considered to lead 'away', 'underneath', 'elsewhere', and definitely 'without' (Latour 2014b: 305) what has been applied so far. Lucas Bessire puts it in terms of surplus:

> If there is any opening to a so-called alter-modernity to be located among those struggling to survive on the margins of low-land South America, it may well lie in the ways that Indigenous senses of being in the world always already exceed the terms of the radical imaginaries they ostensibly sustain. (Bessire 2014: 445. See also Povinelli 2016; Todd 2016; Goldstein 2016; Taguchi 2017)

In front of this challenge and between these paths, this volume is rather interested in underlining the prominence of ethnographic field studies for further theoretical development. We are willing to acknowledge that much detailed research is necessary to understand the multiplicity of conceptual and practical relationships that humans establish with their environment: '[I]t tends to be ethnography, the actual words, actions and ideas of other people, that generates alternative versions that are much more complex and novel than anything "we" can dream up' (Killick 2014).

Indeed, the present Introduction does not try to fix a particular methodological statement, just as it does not intend to sharply demarcate the position or theoretical lines of contrast among the arguments summarised above or to discuss in detail the adequacy of any of them. It rather aims to help to situate some issues at stake which are still growing in this rather bewildering intellectual landscape. It wants to facilitate, in the South American context, the use of anthropological imagination and the forging of new concepts and approaches that could help to release anthropology from the 'centrality and paradigmatic clout' of certain 'conventional tools' (Descola 2014c: 278–79). Recent calls have been made to re-establish ethnography as 'the prime heuristic in anthropology' and to return it to the foreground of its current conceptual developments in order to face 'the loss of the discipline's distinctive theoretical nerve'. We want to test this engagement with ethnography through the potency of detailed field studies that are not beholden to the most recent theoretical developments. We aim to overcome the latter and to advance towards new approaches derived from the former's 'translational inadequations and equivocations' (HAU n.d.).

The following three sections present ethnographic studies of South American indigenous worlds that aim to avoid 'idealized and nostalgic fantasies' (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2011) and prophetic futurisms, and intend to pay attention to the coercion or punitive actions (Povinelli 2001; Scott 2014; Bessire 2014: 228; Carstensen 2014; Killick 2015; Lebner 2017: 225) related to their current political situations (Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014). They intend to grasp the turbulences of unequal ontologies striving 'to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other … [in a context of] continuous enactment, stabilization, and protection of different and asymmetrically entangled ontologies or worlds (Blaser 2009: 11. See also Mol 1999: 75; Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 17; Blaser and de la Cadena 2017: 190).

This collection is divided into parts, each of which attempts to intensify the reflexivity, conceptualisation and experimentation of their ethnographic explorations of the diverse relationships between human and non-human beings in South America. The grouping of the chapters into parts does not privilege the materials from which the authors have reflected. For instance, the slight predominance of ritual songs and music as a point of departure in these chapters – an acknowledgement of the extensibility of the 'sonorism' proposed in South American lowlands (Brabec 2012; Lewy 2015) – is not taken as a main criterion. What is outlined here instead is the main Amerindian features the authors have chosen to examine from their fieldwork experiences.

Finally, while most of the authors provide descriptions focusing on only one group, two chapters in this book (those of Brabec de Mori and Sax) involve different groups. Marieka Sax, for instance, stresses a rather unusual (at least, for the area concerned)[44] synchronic comparison between the socialities regarding place-based beings in two distant Andean regions.

Part I. Securing Body and Wealth

The first part deals with local variations of sociality that certain relationships can afford. The works compiled here deal with what might be thought of as 'canonical' non-human beings, those that most ethnographic accounts on South America are usually prepared to deem as part of the 'traditional' cosmology under consideration. On the one hand, this part explores humans' need to permanently struggle in order to keep their condition as such (debated by Ventura I Oller, Ferrié and, in Part II, Otaegui). This requirement is examined through the study of indigenous categories of beings, the composition of personhood, attributes of humanness, and the therapeutic treatment of illness where the balance between human and non-human beings is based on the administration of a porous body. On the other hand, these chapters also show the partial reliance of securing crucial sources of wealth (for example, cattle fertility) upon obtaining resources from non-indigenous worlds. They analyse how these resources are distributed, circulated and displayed in order to exhibit humans' wealth, and to allow them to enter into a relationship of reciprocity with place-based beings (see Dransart, Sax and Ferrié). Additionally, another important topic emerging from this part is the relationship with place-based beings embedded in diverse

Andean regional traditions, in both rural and urban contexts (see Sax and, in Part III, Vindal Ødegaard).

Two chapters deal with the highlands and the other two with the lowlands. Penelope Dransart writes about the Aymara people of Isluga (Chile), Marieka Sax compares Quechua-speaking peoples from the southern and northern Peruvian Andes, Montserrat Ventura i Oller considers the case of the Tsachila, who dwell in the western lowlands of the Andes of Ecuador, and Francis Ferrié addresses the community of Apolo in the Bolivian piedmont.

Penelope Dransart studies a ritual performed by Aymara-speaking herders in the highland steppes of northern Chile, in which cattle become a locus of wealth and are morally appreciated and praised.[45] Dransart shows that securing the cattle's fertility depends as much on ensuring the creative and transformative capacities of their human owners as it does on obtaining resources from non-indigenous worlds (Ortiz Rescaniere 1999; Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 475). These resources are distributed, circulated and displayed in order to exhibit the owner's wealth (Dransart 2002 and this volume; Rivera Andía 2003, 2014) and to allow them access into a relationship of reciprocity with local place-based beings (described also by Sax, Ferrié and Ødegaard in this volume). Dransart draws on the concept of 'inspiration' to illuminate these ritual relationships between humans and cattle that are intended to transform the behaviour of the latter.[46] Finally, let us note that showing how ritual efficacy depends on a two-way relation between humans and non-humans, this chapter complements Otaegui's discussion of non-humans as operators of intra-human relations (through ritual practices).

The chapter by Marieka Sax develops a comparative framework in two different Andean regions, exploring the relationship with place-based beings[47] embedded in two different Quechua shamanic traditions. In southern Peru, place-based beings are intimately implicated in the fortunes of individuals and households. Andean people provide them with ritual offerings, and can expect agricultural fertility, prosperity and well-being in turn. Accordingly, place-based beings are named, individualised, assigned particular characteristics and preferences, and even arranged in a political hierarchy (Salas 2012). In contrast, in the northern Peruvian Andes, although place-based beings are also embodied in particular high-altitude lakes and mountains, they are not given ritual offerings, and only shamans can communicate with them in order to direct their power (Douglas and Joralemon 1993; Polia 1996). Additionally, they neither seem to have a 'contract' with human beings nor are they expected to care

for the fate of humans. Contrasting the distinguishability of these different subject positions, this study of 'the kinds of things that are amenable to subjectivation' (Santos-Granero 2009: 13) suggests a link between the lack of moral responsibility of northern place-based beings' actions and a sort of disaffection towards their experientially real effects on people. Finally, thanks to her use of Amazonian data to triangulate her intra-Andean comparison, Sax is able to frame northern Andean sorcery as in between south-western Amazonian predation and southern Andean offerings (at least in what concerns to shamanism).

The chapter of Montserrat Ventura i Oller – in fact, the only author here explicitly dealing with debates on animism and the ontological turn – reminds us how Melanesian and Amazonian anthropologies' recognition of indigenous theories over the last two decades has revealed itself as a highly fertile ground for exploring notions of the individual, cosmological and ontological classification systems, and also the possible divisions (or rapprochements) between nature and culture. Ventura examines specific categories of being, components of the person, attributes that imply 'humanity', and forms of afflic-tion of the Tsachila. Her comparative revision of the conceptualisa-tions of human beings, and of the particular conditions under which the attribution of human qualities to non-humans is effected, makes her suggest that the Tsachila ethnographic information is compatible with those that prompted the so-called 'ontological turn'. According to Ventura i Oller, Tsachila ontology contains 'a logic of the con-tinuum' that is common to societies classified as animist and in which humans need to permanently strive to identify themselves as such, and not lose their condition. Therefore, if the condition of being human is shared with other beings, the differences between humans and non-humans is one of degree: instead of an equal distribution of human features among living beings in the universe (and in contrast to the Ayoreo – who, like the Tsachila inhabit an area that is neither Andes nor Amazonia – studied by Otaegui in this volume), there is a rather complex scale of intensities. In consequence, despite Tsachila's human–non-human continuity, this collective would constantly need to seek mechanisms (mainly activated through ritual and body marks) to signal certain discontinuities.

In the final chapter of Part I, departing from an ethnographic account of a therapeutic treatment for a specific but broadly distrib-uted illness called *susto* (fear) in the Apolo Bolivian foothills, Francis Ferrié reflects on the porosity of the human body, the danger of certain non-human entities and their specific eating habits. The author

considers the healer's diagnosis, which comprises a highly detailed knowledge of the parts of the body through which the pathogen enters or an immaterial part of the sick person leaves; and the usual temporal and geographical sites within which predatory entities dwell. Ferrié shows how the therapeutic treatment intends to recover a lost immaterial part of the human being (called *ánimu*), usually in return for ritual offerings (called *mesas*). These *mesas* are composed of culinary elements that satisfy the hunger of the attacking non-humans (cf. Rösing 2013). The author suggests that the shamanic re-establishment of the balance between human and non-humans beings that he found in Apolo is based on the use of substances that open and seal the channels of communication between them, ultimately configuring a game of exorcism and endorcism.

Finally, let us note that what distinguishes these studies from those in the next two parts is their emphasis on the striving of humans to preserve themselves in their encounters with specific components of the environment (cattle, mountains, other fearful entities or some detachable components of the person). In the next part, this confrontation is substituted by another frequent modality of human–non-human relationship: conviviality.

Part II. Cohabitation and Sharing

In this part, Bernd Brabec de Mori investigates the Central Panoan (Kakataibo and Shipibo-Konibo) of Ucayali (Peruvian Amazonia); Guillermo Salas Carreño discusses about the Quechua people of Cuzco (Peru); Alfonso Otaegui deals with the Ayoreo of the Northern Chaco (Paraguay), which is one of the two case studies in the book that is neither Amazonian nor Andean; and Minna Opas writes about the Yine (also known as Piro), an Arawak-speaking people of the south-eastern Peruvian Amazonia (in the Madre de Dios region).

This part addresses the centrality of continuous cohabitation, food circulation, and sharing in the creation and maintenance of existing relationships with non-human beings (see Otaegui, Salas and Opas). Its authors explore ethnographic case studies of what has been called an 'ontological incubator' (*couveuse ontologique*) (Descola 2014b: 326). They deal with verbal arts addressed to non-human beings, rituals associated with death (see Otaegui, Brabec and Salas, along with Yvinec in Part III), and ontological realities performed by shamanism that allow humans to exert certain transformations in their world (see Brabec, along with Hill in Part III).

Bernd Brabec de Mori explores, in the first chapter of this part, the image of the Andes among the Central Panoan of Ucayali (Peruvian eastern lowlands) through what is probably its most widespread cultural hero (shared by cosmologies of the highlands and the western Amazonian rainforest): the 'Incas'. The author considers the ontological level on which these non-human beings are located – an 'Inca timescape' removed from everyday experience – as paradigmatic of the different realities that are performed by shamanic narratives and songs. In line with Hill's proposals (this volume), Brabec shows how these verbal arts referring to the Inca among the Shipibo-Konibo allow them to bring about changes in their environment.

Guillermo Salas Carreño's chapter explores the forms by which Quechua-speaking indigenous groups in the Peruvian southern highlands around Cuzco relate to the dead. Considering Quechua sociality as constructed through implicit notions of continuous cohabitation and food circulation and sharing (Bird-David 1999: 73; Sax 2012), Salas shows how both of these components shape the relationship with the dead and other non-human beings. Illustrating these relationships through concrete rituals and narratives, he proposes a reassessment of notions of ancestry and descent in current Andean studies using kinship analogies. In contrast to Brabec, who discussed a relationship shaped as 'filiation' in an Amazonian context where consanguine kinship ties are frequently seen as more or less peripheral, Salas discusses the subsuming of descent to commensal ties in an Andean context where descent is usually considered as a key social and cosmological axis. Furthermore, taken together, both chapters state that while filiation is not insignificant in Amazonia as an operator, in the Andes descent does not totally determine sociality. In consequence, as suggested by one wise reviewer, it appears as if here the domain of the dead (as considered in the cases observed by Brabec and Salas) would be simultaneously increasing the flexibility of the Amazonian conceptualisation of the ancestors and also moderating the existence of Andean descent ties. Finally, as Salas himself suggests in his conclusions, these contrasts seem to provide a good example of the fictional and inert aspects of the frontier between the Andes and Amazonia.

Alfonso Otaegui's chapter also deals with cultural manifestations related to death (as does Salas') and verbal arts (as the studies of Yvinec and Brabec, this volume), but in an ethnographic area that is as relatively little studied as it is particularly interesting.[48] In fact, addressing a society that is neither from the Andes nor Amazonia, Otaegui's chapter (along with Ventura's) can provide a strategic triangulation

of the issues sketched by this book's other chapters. Otaegui explores how the belonging of non-human beings to different clans produces a mutual interdependence – both affective and economic – between their members. And, at the same time, these clans' relationships are addressed through ritual songs[49] and food sharing that do not relegate humans and non-human beings to different realms.

'What object was this that allowed all other objects to be obtained, but which was never in a fixed relation with a determined quantity or quality for objects?' (Fausto 2012: 309). This question could illustrate the issues that run through the chapter by Minna Opas, which examines the conceptions surrounding a non-human being called *Kaxpomyolutu* or Hand-whistler among the Yine. In so far as Opas deals with an 'owner-master' figure, it pairs with and complements Brabec de Mori's study on the Shipibo-Konibo (neighbours of the Yine), and Sax's chapter on owner spirits (of Andean mountains and lakes). The author suggests that, contrary to previous studies, indigenous understandings of late capitalism and monetary economy (as they are highlighted by the notions around the Hand-whistler) should be considered not just as 'reactions' to a shifting economic scene, but also as 'pro-actions' simultaneously directed towards guarding the integrity of their community and embracing a controlled change. The Other here is both required and generative to the extent that, for instance, dangerous relationships linked to the production and circulation of money are at least welcomed, if not sought out. In short, Amerindian understandings of capitalism and the monetary economy, according to Opas, actually comprise moral actions that simultaneously embrace otherness and safeguard the integrity of their community.

In sum, the second part of this book describes responses to a continuously changing scene, attempts to secure indigenous' collectives and to incorporate externally driven transformations, daily reinventions and new understandings of the relations between humans and non-humans, and also new ontologies developed through an active engagement with material surroundings. These creative processes are subject to variation and negotiation in everyday life and are certainly open to failure, which could, for instance, switch the socialities between human and non-human beings into an extreme form of predatory alterity (Salas and Otaegui, this part, along with Ødegaard in Part III).

Finally, let us note that what distinguishes these first two parts from the chapters of the last one is the weight put on certain balance in the relationship between humans and particular components of the environment (cattle, mountains, Hand-whistler, death, Incas, clan's

possessions and diverse components of the person). In the next part, the locus of this persistence is replaced by transformation.

Part III. Transformations and Slow Turbulences

The third part includes ethnographically tailored studies of the strategies performed to face the transformations – usually attached to the 'slow violence' (Nixon 2013) or the turbulences mentioned by Bessire (2014) – undergone by human/non-human relationships (Long and Moore 2013: 13). The chapters in this part test and discuss developments related to some of the most significant processes of continuity and discontinuity experienced by contemporary South American indigenous collectives. The possibilities for socialities between humans and non-humans to allow the enactment of different types of current and historical adaptations to new components of the environments (associated, for example, with migration, late capitalism or monetary economy) become visible in various forms in this part. Some of them are the 'naturalized social space' in which human interactions are interwoven with the sounds and behaviours of non-humans (Hill, this volume), particular grammatical procedures and rhetorical patterns (Yvinec, this volume), and the re-signification of conceptions of well-being and prosperity (Ødegaard, this volume, and also Opas as mentioned in Part II).

As a whole, these contributions engage with those incessant transformations that emerge at the interface of indigenous understandings of historical dynamics and current intercultural relations and expectations (High 2015: 74). Stressing either national or international dimensions, or internal structures observed during fieldwork, the authors deal with one particularly recurrent figure in debates on 'cultural changes' within indigenous peoples: the adoption and incorporation of foreign powers and wealth. One chapter is concerned with the Andes (Ødegaard), and two with South American lowlands in the Amazonian region – the Wakuénai of Venezuela (Hill) and the Suruí in Brazil (Yvinec). While Hill provides a comparative framework for examining social transformation, Yvinec explores the Amerindian logics of religious conversion. Yvinec studies the forms in which 'outside' urban worlds are read by non-urban societies (as Opas, who in the previous part examined the inner mechanism of incorporation of late liberalism). Their chapters are at the same time complementary to, and the inverse of, Ødegaard's exploration of the forms in which an Andean indigenous society's worldings are

challenged by urbanisation and the impact of migration to the cities. Additionally, as will be detailed below, Ødegaard's chapter addresses aspects that have so far received little attention from scholars interested in the relationships between human and non-human beings.

Following previously proposed itineraries (Blaser 2009; Costa and Fausto 2010: 100; Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva 2012: 19; Bessire 2014: 221–29), this part deals with transformations in people's symbolic engagements with non-humans in the context of a conversion to particular forms of Christianity (Yvinec, this volume) and a practical involvement with ecosystems in urban contexts (Ødegaard, this volume) (additionally, let us remember that in Part II Opas discussed the insertion in a monetary economy and state systems).

The first chapter of Part III, by Jonathan Hill, is about constructing landscapes through discourse, music and ritual among the Arawak-speaking Wakuénai of the Venezuelan Amazon. This chapter provides a framework for understanding socialities between humans and non-humans and their potential for facilitating social transformation and adaptation within new environments (Hill and Chaumeil 2011; Bessire 2014: 110–93; High 2015: 50–97). Following his previous work of this concept, 'musicalisation' is here understood as a process of creating a 'naturalised social space' in which human interactions are interwoven with the sounds and behaviours of non-human animals. This semiotic use of sound might allow the enactment of different types of transformations (for instance, from life-cycle transitions, to politico-economic resistance), as is suggested also by Yvinec's study of Suruí evangelical singing in this book. This opening to transformation may be found not only in contemporary ethnographies, but also in comparative approaches to Amazonian cultural creativity across diverse historical periods. Showing how human and non-human relations are crystallised in ritual through attention to their aural aspects, the notion of 'musicalisation' suggests a critique of perspectivism contextualising its overemphasis on vision, as Brabec (2012) and Lewy (2015) have also proposed.

Cédric Yvinec's linguistic-anthropological approach to Amazonian ritual songs as a window into human/non-human relationships highlights the forms in which certain grammatical procedures of Amerindian languages contribute to the expression of a specific type of personhood, ontological set and epistemological choice. Yvinec analyses the recent religious conversion of the Suruí (a Tupi-Mondé-speaking population of Brazilian southern Amazonia) to Protestantism in terms of the invention of 'a new system of ritual speech'. Suggesting that among the Suruí 'before turning into "beliefs"

and representation, Christianity first appears as a set of discursive and ritual practices', the author focuses on the role played by verbal arts[50] in their conversion. He proposes that the 'success' of the new verbal arts lies in their interaction with performative properties and symbolic values implicit in the kind of authorship used in previous indigenous songs. In the case of the Suruí, and in contrast to previous approaches indebted to visual metaphors, Yvinec explores shamanic singing (and its ambiguous subject position between human and non-human) through its specific authorship. Spirits sing their own songs, and are the 'official authors', whereas trans-specific beings, such as shamans, merely execute or 'perform' them to ordinary humans, for whom they stay largely incomprehensible and radically different from everyday songs. Describing the rhetorical patterns shared by evangelical and previous Suruí songs, Yvinec shows how they maintain an elusive authorship, and an ambivalence in its authoring pattern, which allows the advantages of older genres to be retained. In resonance with what has been stated by other studies of Christian conversion (Vilaça 2016), Yvinec finally suggests that it is this indigenous pragmatic issue (the avoidance of 'witnessed evidentiality' that lies behind the introduction of 'co-speakers'), rather than beliefs or stylistic devices, that constitute a dynamic aspect in the renewal of verbal arts.[51]

How are relationships to beings linked to the environment reproduced or discontinued among indigenous peoples who have radically changed their environments? Recent developments of cosmological understandings across rural–urban differences are explored by Cecilie Ødegaard through the resignification of non-human beings in contexts of displacement to urban contexts, rather than in terms of loss, alienation or even infection (as noted also by Yvinec, this volume). Always with a comparative attention, Ødegaard analyses the meanings of Andean forms of communication with place-based beings (called *apus*, and examined in this volume also by Sax, Dransart and Salas) in specific processes of mobility: indigenous experiences of leaving their rural communities for the city. The main forms of communication in this context are now ritual offerings related to the creation and maintenance of well-being and prosperity in urban forms (such as money and business). As Minna Opas (this volume) and other ethnographies of the lowlands point out, these interactions with place-based beings are subject to variation and negotiation in everyday life. For instance, the *apus* in the city may have different desires compared to those in the highlands. The transformative capacities of a relationship of reciprocity and sharing – studied also by Salas and Otaegui (this volume) – become visible when humans fail to give a

ritual offering to the *apus* (who see it as human food). According to the author, this failure might involve not only an omission, but also an active refusal that could switch the socialities between human and non-human beings into an extreme form of predatory alterity.

The studies joined in this part all account for transformations by paying attention to inner dynamics, rather than by focusing exclusively on exogenous (either regional or national) conditions (Bessire 2014; High 2015) or in terms of loss or infection. This is particularly the case of religious conversion, in which cultural changes are considered in terms of practices that follow previously established and functional features of the composition of ritual songs (Yvinec). The influence of previous analyses of Amerindian socialities – where humans establish relations of exchange with a multiplicity of worlds inhabited by ontologically diverse beings in order to appropriate their forces and resources – is also visible in the relationship between Amerindian groups and external power structures (Ødergaard, and also Opas in the previous part).

Right after this third part, the book finishes with an epilogue by Mark Münzel, who pinpoints some wider issues that have started to be discussed only recently (Candea 2017; Holbraad 2017). Münzel regrets how a sort of excessive interest to enter into dialogue with Western metaphysics might have suffocated indigenous philosophies in recent writings on Amerindian ontologies. As suggested by some of the authors grouped in this Introduction under the label of 'sceptics', Münzel is actually pointing out precisely what the chapters of this book have aimed to avoid through their different ethnographic engagements.

Some Final Remarks

Other issues arise when considering Amerindian collectives in the context of the so-called 'Anthropocene'[52] (Kohn 2014c), globalisation, and the world ecological crisis that exacerbates 'the translation of nature into resources' (de la Cadena 2014). One of these is 'the ecologically destructive and socially disruptive forces' (High 2015: 101) that continue to pressurise those indigenous people who are nowadays struggling 'to engage these processes on their own terms' (ibid.: 170). This compilation aims to explore those aspects of indigenous cosmologies that express particular strategies linked to the incorporation of what is recognised by many indigenous community members as external and new.

Nowadays Amerindian collectives of South America are facing remarkable dilemmas associated with ideologies and processes characteristic of globalisation. In this context, on the one hand, some scholars have shown ethnographically how 'the modern world or ontology sustains itself through performances that tend to suppress and or contain the enactment of other possible worlds' (Blaser 2009: 16). These aims to subject (Escobar 2016: 15) – but also to collaborate or depend on one another (Mol 1999: 83. See also Kohn 2015) – are implicit in the imposition described as part of a 'war of worlds': 'the world ("as we know it") is imposed in myriad ways on other peoples' worlds (as they know them), even as this hegemonic world seems to be on the brink of a slow, painful and ugly ending' (Viveiros de Castro 2015b. See also Kohn 2015, Schavelzon 2016 and Escobar 2016).[53]

On the other hand, most of the ontologically inflected authors mentioned in this Introduction persistently stress that 'culture', as opposed to nature, would not be sufficient to understand the challenge that represents indigenous politics and its quest to promote their rights (Blaser 2009; de la Cadena 2010, 2015). This challenge concerns an ontological politics, a so-called 'cosmopolitics', by which different possible entanglements between humans and non-humans become occasions for ethical controversy (Latour 2014a: 14–15; Wardle and Schaffner 2017: 9–24). One example would be contemporary indigenous movements that fight nowadays not only against the predatory politics of multinationals, but also against the great infrastructure building projects of the developmentalist Left. Some authors discern in these protests what they call 'a third suggestive path that re-establishes the long-distended links between humans and nonhumans in what concerns the forms of sovereignty that each of them exercises over themselves' (Descola 2014b: 55).[54]

Previous approaches to the conceptualisation of these processes among contemporary Amerindian collectives have tended to focus on the relationship between ethnic groups and external capitalist agents, or upon questions of individualism, monetisation and inequalities between indigenous peoples and capitalist modes of production.[55] Instead, this book examines the relationship between the individual and his or her own group, asking how Amerindian groups can maintain their ability to be part of a localised (place-based) community (in a socially legitimate manner) while simultaneously facing, for example, the forceful expansion of a monetary economy and wage labour. Taking into account this encounter between different perspectives, ideologies and praxes – by no means new, but in many cases with 'a new rhythm' (Brightman, Fausto and Grotti

2016: 2) – scholars concerned with indigenous societies have had to broaden the scope of their reflections and adopt new analytical tools.

Before ending this rather long Introduction, I would like to stress that these chapters neither intend to deny the depth of the transformation, nor assert its ineluctability or radicalness – both options typically employed, for instance, in the study of Andean 'syncretism' (Marzal, Romero and Sánchez 2004). Instead, they try to test how turbulences and changes in Amerindian collectives could be explained by indigenous patterns that have been called 'constitutive alterity' (Erikson 1986), 'cosmopolitanism' (Ortiz Rescaniere 1999), 'infidelity' (Pitarch 2003), or 'inconstancy' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a, 2011) across diverse Amerindian regions (Erikson 1999; Fausto [2001] 2012; Gutiérrez 2001; Rivera Andía 2008; Santos-Granero 2009). Despite their differences, all these terms try to summarise the strategies used in the incorporation of the Other as an indispensable feature of the making of the self (High 2015). 'In Amerindian mythology, the origin of cultural implements or institutions is canonically explained as a borrowing, a transfer … of prototypes already possessed by animals, spirits, or enemies. The origin and essence of culture is acculturation' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 475).

But is not the ostensible consideration of what is own as foreign originated (Coelho de Souza 2016) logically linked to the 'capacity of self-transformation' detected, for instance, by Lucas Bessire (2014: 228)? Furthermore, one of the latter's requirements to understand an indigenous 'project of rupturing-becoming' (ibid.) might be found in those 'more sophisticated and appropriate' (Escobar 2016: 14) knowledges linked to that persistent Amerindian borrowing, as the model of 'familiarising predation' (Fausto 2012 [2001]) shows. Is the 'anthropology of unauthorized becomings' (Bessire 2014: 229) not at the basis of the 'permanent decolonization of thought' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 75)? As we can see, despite their explicit differences, Bessire and Viveiros de Castro are not so far apart as they might at first seem: the same ethnographically inspired question is actually behind their apparently dissimilar projects.

Nowadays, 'rights of the earth' (in Bolivia) or 'rights of the nature' (in Ecuador) are becoming part of national agendas and policies in South America (and beyond). In a region that includes many of the few remaining 'wilderness' areas of the world, some think they could constitute 'a movement for the right to exist differently' (Escobar 2016: 26). Instead of allowing them to be 'swallowed' by modern politics (de la Cadena 2014), indigenous social movements – in a context considered as threatening for environmental and land defenders

(Álvarez-Berrios and Aide 2015) – have invoked non-human beings linked to the landscape (mountains, water and soil) as 'actors' in the political arena. These invocations that apparently oppose local populations to states and multinationals stress divergences of basic ontological interpretations concerning what the world is made of, what is valuable within or about it, and why. Whichever value one allocates to these movements, it is clear that if we want to escape the catastrophic world scenario in which we seem to be caught nowadays (Alberti et al. 2011: 898), it is important to enter into a dialogue with these concrete differences. In other words, we need to overcome that form of 'autism' (Cockburn 2013: 170) – and maybe also the search for a 'cosmopolitan human reason' (Rival 2012b: 140) – that is suffered by many of us today, and to consider the idea of a 'world not predicated on the essential difference of Indigenous peoples but on our shared capacity to transform ourselves' (Bessire 2014: 227). Or, in a less dramatic form, as depicted by Evan Killick:

> [N]o single ontology offers any hope of remedy in any simple manner … the focus must turn precisely to ways in which such ontologies transform, interact and blend over time and the everyday practices and encounters in which this occurs … [T]he anthropological imperative, rather than focusing on alterity and purity, should *be to focus on the encounters and collaborations* that emerge in the real and everyday world, and the manner in which new ways of living and interacting are produced. (Killick 2015, emphasis added)

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Notes

1. Important differences between these compilations and the present one should be mentioned. First of all, this volume differs from Urton's landmark compilation in that it does not restrict the study of non-human beings to animals; and it differs from Ortiz Rescaniere's in that it is not restricted to oral traditions. Secondly, the present compilation deals with theoretical perspectives that have been developed after the late 1980s, and therefore after both Urton's anthropological collective approach and Sullivan's comprehensive study on history of religions had been published. Thirdly, another important difference between these two remarkable works and the present volume is that the former do not directly address transformations among indigenous peoples. Fourthly, in contrast to Brightman, Grotti, and Ulturgasheva's (2012) and Laugrand and Oosten's (2007) encompassment of apparently distant geographical contexts (such as Amazonia and Siberia, or South and North America), this present book intends to cover areas (Amazonia, the Andes and the Chaco) that, while quite distinct from one another, maintain strong historical, cultural and geographic continuities. Finally, and also regarding the areas covered in South America, both Laugrand and Oosten (2007) and Brightman, Grotti and Ulturgasheva (2012) leave unaddressed the Chaco region (not to speak of intermediate zones between the Andes and Amazonia) and – in contrast to Urton (1985) and Ortiz Rescaniere (2006) – also the Andes. Sullivan's ambitious study does address all the main areas of South America, but is not primarily based (as this compilation and the other ones mentioned here) in any specific anthropological fieldwork. Although it is not aimed to be a review essay, this introduction is profusely citational in order to honour the insights of the authors who inspire it and to show that it represents their arguments accurately. Previous versions of a few sections of this Introduction have been published in Rivera Andía (2015) and in Rivera Andía and Ødegaard (forthcoming).

2. Although the images of non-humans can usually be linked to what is construed as 'asocial … and certainly amoral … as negative examples of just what sociality should not be' (Overing and Passes 2000: 6), it is not a priori taken as such by these contributions. See Münzel, this volume. On the term 'sociality', see endnote 41.

3. See Hornborg (2006: 29) for a restricted or 'more strictly defined category of animism … reserved for … *all living things*'. Here the attribution of agency and subjectivity to inert objects (as stones) would rather be a form of fetishism. In a similar vein, but in an opposite direction, Laura Rival has argued the need to 'renew' an ontological animism based on 'symbolic ecological data, mainly derived from the treatment of animals … by refocusing the analytical lens on representations involving plants' (Rival 2012a: 70. See also Hill 2011). Finally, Istvan Praet defines 'animist' societies in the following terms, which may not be so far from those suggested for the Andean region by Ortiz Rescaniere

(1995): 'Animists propose metamorphosis instead of evolution, catastrophe instead of permanence, and regular extinction instead of perpetual continuity. However, this alternative is never taken entirely seriously' (Praet 2013: 138). For a rather simplistic application of the concept of animism to the Andes, see (Di Salvia 2016).

4. Still an unstable term (Pedersen 2017: 229) and movement (Kohn 2015), the label of the ontological turn is sometimes replaced by others such as relationalism, non-dualism, phenomenological anthropology, new animism, post-humanism, speculative realism, speculative turn, political ontology, symmetrical anthropology and perspectival anthropology. Some of its proponents have defined ontology as the 'comparative, ethnographically grounded transcendental deduction of Being … as that which differs from itself" (Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014; see also Lebner 2017: 223). In this Introduction, I will not describe in detail the fundaments or developments of Viveiros's perspectivism or of Descola's animism. I will restrict the debate here to the relevant methodological aspects of what I call an 'ante-predicative movement' as it appears in those authors with a strong ethnographic interest in South America.

5. Issues, for instance, like the distinction between ontology and culture could certainly be relevant, but only in so far as it allows us to rethink ethnographic work on how non-humans and animism are being treated today, and not as a specific problem to which this volume contributes possible solutions (Carrithers et al. 2010; Kohn 2015).

6. Author's translation of 'ces composantes du paysage jouent un role essential dans la coneption que se font les gens de l'appartenance sociale; ce sont des composantes à part entière d'un collectif beaucoup plus large que la communauté humaine' (Descola 2014b: 324).

7. Furthermore, Law and Lien state that 'if ontological matters emerge locally, then the cosmos as a whole (except that there is no whole) is no longer endowed with any specific form. It becomes vague, fluid, indeterminate, multiple, and contextual … there is no cosmos … the world is acosmotic' (2012: 14. See also Alberti 2016). It is worth noticing that, according to Holbraad and Pedersen, the proposers of this kind of approach (such as Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena) are still (sometimes implicitly) 'grounding the possibility of political difference in a prior story of how the world(s) must work' (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: 54).

8. The modes of relations are exchange, predation, gift, production, protection and transmission (see also Ventura i Oller's and Otaegui's chapters in this book). For a genealogy of the definitions of the four modes of identification, 'animism', 'naturalism', 'analogism' and 'totemism', see Descola (2014b: 198–217). For an exhaustive explanation of some of its logical implications and some of its most salient problems and ambiguities (in particular with analogism and history), see Howell (1996), Stengers (2012), Scott (2014), Kohn (2015), Millán (2015), Viveiros de Castro (2015a), Tola (2015), Dos Santos and Tola (2016) and Skafish (2016a: 69–70, 75). Descola's schemas have been applied in quite diverse

fields (Serres 2009; Baschet, Bonne and Dittmar 2012; Wengrow 2014; Tournay 2014; Rochabrún 2014; and Carstensen 2014).

9. Author's translation of 'la solidification, l'actualisation, l'objetivation de ces schèmes dans des institutions … la stabilisation des compositions des mondes dans des dispositifs dont la puissance et la durée persistent audelà de l'existence individuelle' (Descola and Ingold 2014: 44).

10. Additionally, this might constitute a path towards the inclusion of ritual in debates whose 'privileging of the order of concepts over the order of practice' has already been pointed out by other authors (Costa and Fausto 2010: 95–96. See also Neurath 2015: 59; Alberti et al. 2011: 898). On the emergence of perspectivism from the analysis of the concepts of ritual songs, see Viveiros de Castro (2015a: 185) and Skafish (2016b: 403).

11. Sahlins' rearrangement of Descola's proposal in terms of anthropomorphism – the 'default scheme of things' (Sahlins 2014: 281) – seems in fact prefigured in previous works of Karadimas (2012: 49) and Halbmayer (2012b: 14). Bartolomé (2015) makes a proposal similar to Sahlins', but replacing anthropomorphism by analogism.

12. A recent compilation (Brightman, Fausto and Grotti 2016) focusing on Amazonian cases provides various illustrations of these hybrid combinations when discussing indigenous notions related to ownership.

13. Descola has also considered indigenous visual worlds as 'an effect of the inflection that the terms receive when they are displaced in a different pragmatic setting' (Descola 2014d: 442). Thus, the problem of 'ontological hybridity' is also at the base of current analyses of the ontological predication of indigenous images as 'un révélateur d'un régime hybride' (Descola 2014b: 262).

14. As with academics, we could also ask who, among their indigenous interlocutors, are those who are being institutionally authorised to illustrate such theories (I thank to J. Devore for calling my attention to this issue).

15. Perspectivism has been characterised as lacking a point of view on the 'whole' (Stolze Lima 2000: 50) – crucial, as will be explained later regarding Ingold's response to Descola's model (see also endnote 35), for the flourishing of 'an ontology of many worlds' (Strathern 2011: 92) – and for too quickly dismissing objective associationism as the determining constituent of the 'spiritual' identities of all creatures (Turner 2009: 11).

16. The literature on perspectivism as part of the 'ontological turn' (Martínez 2007; Luciani 2010; Rocha 2012; Martins 2012; Halbmayer 2012a, 2012b; Kohn 2015; González Varela 2015; González-Abrisketa and Carro-Ripalda 2016; Wright 2016; Jensen 2017) and its ethnographic applications (Vilaça 1992, 2006; Stolze Lima 1996, 1999; Teixeira-Pinto 1997; Fausto 2001; Gonçalves 2001; Lasmar 2005; Gordon 2006; Andrello 2006; Calavia Sáez 2006; Lagrou 2007; Pissolato 2007; Cesarino 2011; Pacini 2012; Pansica 2012; Citro and Gómez 2013; Bacigalupo 2016: 55–67; Brightman 2016: 13–16) has been constantly increasing in recent years. Although most of this literature is based on ethnography from the

lowlands, a few authors have began to apply this theoretical frame to the Andes (Allen 2015, Ødegaard 2016). On perspectivism's antecedents as 'perspectival quality' or 'perspectival relativity', see Århem (1993) and Gray (1996).

17. Furthermore, other scholars have asked whether nature would here be 'reduced to a ward of humanity … [to the extent that] what might appear as the recognition of non-human beings may quickly slip into instrumentality' (Devore 2016: 202).

18. A statement that, in fact, could be considered as a variant of a more widespread anthropological perspective, which can be illustrated, for instance, by this well-known quote from Edmund Leach: 'Nats [spirits] are … nothing more than ways of describing the formal relationships that exist between real persons and real groups in ordinary Kachin society' (Leach 1965: 182).

19. As Bessire and Bond (2014b) note (and perhaps inaugurating real time online anthropological academic debates), mainly on websites hosted by Savage Minds, Somatosphere, Cultural Anthropology and HAU.

20. Therefore, depending on the context in which it is experienced, a stone in the Andes, for example, could be either just that, or a person with its own intentionality and agency, i.e. a *wak'a*. The same goes for the mountain, whose personhood in the Andes is usually called *apu*, as described in this volume by Salas, Dransart and Sax.

21. The concept of 'worlding' has certainly been used by many other scholars, some of them beyond indigenous ethnology (Long and Moore 2013) but still relevant for anthropological debates on the relationship between ontologies, social changes, colonialism (Escobar 2016) and multispecies collaborations in the Anthropocene (Haraway 2016).

22. On how Ingold has helped crucial previous insights – as those of Irving Hallowell (1960) – to have an impact on anthropology, see Costa and Fausto (2010: 90). On a critique of Ingold's proposals, see Rival (2012a and 2012b) who consider that he, along with Descola and Viveiros de Castro, 'equally agree that whatever animism is, it is antithetical to modern scientific knowledge' (2012b: 138). Finally, on a strict application of Ingold's concepts linked to 'ontogenesis', see De Munter (2016).

23. Author's translation of: 'Il s'agit d'un processus historique. En me concentrant sur l'étude de ce processus, je me suis davantage intéressé à distinguer les ontogénies (c'est-à-dire les différents chemins de développment) que les ontologies… J'essaie de ne plus penser en termes d'animisme… mais plutôt en termes de processus animiques (ou non-animiques) en développment… je ne considère pas les humains comme des êtres humains… mais comme des êtres en devenir… car nous ne cessons jamais de nous construire, ni de contribuer à construire les autres de la même manière que les autres êtres nous construisent. Il s'agit d'un processus ininterrompu'.

24. On some of the consequences of this imputation of an 'allegedly wonder-sustaining relational non-dualism', see Scott (2013: 861).

25. The label of 'anthropology of life' has also been used, with different variations of Kohn's proposal, by other authors working on South American lowlands (Rival 2012a; Praet 2013) and more recently in its highlands (Arnold 2017).

26. The consideration of interactions between humans and non-human components of the environment with an emphasis on sensitivity and responsiveness has been labelled 'sentient ecology' (Anderson 2000). On studies of Amerindian cultures, the concept has been applied, for instance, among the Yoreme of north-west Mexico as a way of bringing humans into 'communicative relationships with the ecological world' and extending 'the concept of personhood … to all ecological life' (Simonett 2014: 122). For a brief insight on Venezuelan cases, see Kapfhammer (2014).

27. For some authors, nevertheless, 'epistemology need not be derealization' (Boellstorff 2016: 397).

28. A couple of examples might illustrate how particular South American indigenous descriptions of an original common condition of both humans and non-humans could challenge our own assumptions about personhood. One could be the deduction that 'the self is always the gift of the other' (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 480). The other is the consideration that there are 'no pure species, but rather a variety of species manifesting the affects and capacities of a diversity of other living beings' (Santos-Granero 2009: 7). See also Rees (2016).

29. Those criticisms that stand out because of their rather unrestrained causticity or because of their pamphleteering style (Reynoso 2015; Morales 2015, 2016; Todd 2016) will not be discussed here. There is also a group of works that seem to miss the point about the ontological dimension of relationalism (Keane 2013; Bartolomé 2015; Boellstorff 2016; Wardle and Schaffner 2017). Regarding those critiques coming from within the field of cognitive sciences (Guthrie 1995; Gatewood 2011; Bloch 2012), I will not discuss them in detail for the sake of concision. I might only mention that, despite its importance, their role in the debates on the 'ontological turn' seems somewhat marginal. Some followers of the latter have proposed that animism as an 'innate' cognitive attitude (i.e. naturally selected for its attention-grabbing potential and its practical predictive value) could also be a completely cultural feature susceptible to 'systematic and deliberate use' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 469). Others have dismissed the relevance of cognitive anthropology for the ethnographic understanding of cosmologies (Willerslev 2013), declaring they had either little to say on its consideration about anthropomorphism (Descola 2014e: 295) or 'little to expect from, and little to contribute to, cognitivist theories and concerns' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 216).

30. In fact, a proposal that draws a parallel between the importance of humour – which has been stressed by different authors in various regions (Ortiz Rescaniere 2002; Overing and Passes 2000: 15–16) – and the 'cynical' attitude of the US administration (Willerslev 2013: 52), may raise further doubts. Does laughing at beliefs in certain contexts imply that they

are never intimately adopted? Does the acceptable 'ironic distance from its official rhetoric' reduce animism as practised to an 'illusion' (ibid.)? Could the issue of seriousness also be understood as an expression of certain gravitas that affects human sciences in general (Hobart 1995)? Finally, to what extent and in which terms is it possible to distinguish metaphor from reality, and how could the debates on the 'metaphors of daily life' be related to the discussions on animism? (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Hesse 1988; Ortony 1993; Gibbs 2008; Sahlins 2014: 282, 288).

31. See also the accusation of a 'vile fundamentalism' (*vil fundamentalismo*) (Reynoso 2015: 192) and a 'militant methodology' (*metodología militante*) (Ramos 2017) 'verging on the prophetic and the messianic' (González Varela 2015: 41). It is not without interest to contrast these tacit comparisons with dogmatism and the allusions (linked to transgressors) used by the authors of an ontologically inflicted anthropology to describe themselves: 'delinquents' (Viveiros de Castro 2015b) and 'partner in crime' (Pedersen 2012).

32. On the public afterlife of ethnography (although in a completely different setting), see Fassin (2015).

33. Author's translation of 'l'observateur n'y occupe aucune place, il n'est nulle part, il ne reconnaît comme sienne aucune ontologie … il affirme être lui-même un pluraliste ontologique. On dirait qu'il observe le monde depuis un sorte de paradis ontologique dont nous serions tous exclus, nous qui sommes emprisonnés par nos philosophies de l'être respectives … depuis sa position d'observateur transcendentale, il pourrait affirmer qu'il y a ainsi différentes manières de composer un monde unique. Mais cette posture transcendentale est en fait l'un des fondements de ce qu'il appelle l'ontologie naturaliste … quoi qu'il dise, il adopte comme point neutre une certaine ontologie: le naturalisme'. A similar concern has been expressed by Salmon and Charbonnier (2014: 570–72), Bartolomé (2015) and Skafish (2016a: 70–71). See Karadimas (2012: 29), Charbonnier (2017: 169) and Descola (2017: 35) for an opposite consideration of the same feature of this proposal.

34. Author's translation of 'modernisateur masqué qui, sous couvert de pluralisme, restaure en fait la science anthropologique dans une fonction rectrice, et conforte ainsi l'Occident dans son impérialisme intellectuel' (Descola 2014b: 116).

35. Note that Viveiros de Castro does explicitly deny the existence of any figure similar to Descola's 'arbiter' (as Ingold critically assesses above): 'maintaining an Other's values implicit … amounts to refusing to actualise the possibilities expressed by indigenous thought – choosing to sustain them as possible indefinitely, [without] fantasising ourselves that they may gain their reality for us. (They will not. Not "as-such", at least; only "as-other". The self-determination of the other is the other-determination of the self.)' (Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 12). See endnote 15.

36. To the denominations of 'ultras' and 'default sceptics', it could be added that of 'indulged': 'to indulge in the heliocentric trick of making the

observed turn (ontologically) around the observer' (Viveiros de Castro 2015b).

37. For a recent summary of the arguments given by an opposite position, see Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish (2017a).

38. It might be worth noticing that this search for a radical alterity has been illustrated, by some authors, with controversial works such as those of the Peruvian anthropologist Carlos Castañeda (Abramson and Holbraad 2014: 25; González-Abrisketa and Carro-Ripalda 2016: 117).

39. Nevertheless, at least in the case of perspectivism, it has been made explicit that 'the decision to concentrate on some similarities internal to (but not exclusive to) the Amerindian domain and on an overall contrast with the modern West is mostly a question of choice of level of generality; it has no "essentialist" value' (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 211–12). Another counterargument can be found in Candea (2017).

40. Escobar has also proposed the concept of 'futurality' to describe the imagination and struggle for those conditions that would allow particular communities to 'persevere as a distinct world' (2016: 19. See also Salmond 2012).

41. The term 'sociality' is used here trying to avoid 'the objectifications and valuations of the modernist use of the term 'society'. Sociality denotes an 'abstract quality of the social in general, without determining the kind of relation involved' (Fausto 2012: 72), and also 'face-to-face relationships of a community', acknowledging that 'the social requires individual agency (acting, reflecting, moral agents) and thus the two [the society and the individual] are constitutive of one another' (Overing and Passes 2000: 14). See also Santos-Granero (2007), Long and Moore (2013: 8) and endnote 2.

42. Martin Holbraad is one of the authors participating in the debate surrounding this essay..

43. Still another example could be found in the concept of 'reversibility' proposed by Corsín Jiménez and Willerslev (2007). Recent review essays have highlighted the connections between Holbraad's proposal and those of authors such as Michael Lynch (Jensen 2017: 535), Roy Wagner, Graham Harman and Albert Piette (González-Abrisketa and Carro-Ripalda 2016: 111–14. See also González Varela 2015). Additionally, Paolo Heywood has highlighted that an '*a priori* commitment to the idea that we should have no prior commitments apart from the methodological injunction to allow our empirical material to transform the concepts we use to analize it … may be seen as somewhat self-refuting' (2017: 5, emphasis in original).

44. The only exception I know to this pattern could be found in two recent works of Fernández Juárez (2010, 2012).

45. For examples of Amerindian groups where animals can be considered in much less favourable terms, see Londoño (2005: 15–16).

46. Further possibilities for a detailed comparison between specific Andean and Amazonian ideologies concerning non-human beings arise from

Dransart's chapter. The forms by which the behaviour of cattle is thought to be influenced by ritual suggests a predominance of vision in the Andes in contrast to the central importance of sound in Amazonia (Hill, Brabec de Mori, this volume) in at least two ways. First, the micro-aesthetic of the textile chromatic gradations (Cereceda 1987, 1990, 2010) used in the *herranza* (Rivera Andía 2003) seem to be analogous to that implicit in Hill's concept of aural 'microtonal rising' (Hill 1985). Secondly, the way in which Andean people reintroduce non-human behaviours (for example, reproductive ones) into the centre of visible human acts is also analogous, for example, to the case of the Wakuénai and their perception of the behaviour of spawning fish in terms of the sound it produces.

47. Andean place-based spirits are endowed with cognition, emotion and responsibility, and animate the world circulating a sort of force among themselves, the environment and people. Additionally, they seem to 'function as hypostases of the species with which they are associated, thereby creating an intersubjective field for human/nonhuman relations even where empirical nonhuman species are not spiritualized' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 470–71).

48. The Paraguayan Chaco has not only been considered as free from both the 'overwhelming weight of the Inca empire' and the 'blocking mythic figure of the Amazonian Indian safeguarding the forest' (Boidin 2011), but also as the place where current studies are 'producing an original synthesis of many of the long-standing concerns of Andeanist and Amazonianist scholarship' (Combès, Villar and Lowrey 2009).

49. Also, the Ayoreo songs studied by Otaegui illustrate the ways by which sound (or musicality, as understood by Hill in this volume) can bridge social and spatial distances in Amerindian cultures.

50. Whose relevance seems to be supported by recent studies of the 'acoustic iconicity' (Meyer and Moore 2013) in Suruí's neighbouring groups' languages.

51. A similar phenomenon – but in bodily terms – could be found among Quechua-speaking people in the Bolivian Andes, where Tristan Platt, studying a parallel between the early formation of the person and the mytho-historical origins of the society, suggests that 'a pre-Columbian pagan substance flows constantly' into a society of 'converts' (Platt 2001: 127).

52. I define here the concept of 'Anthropocene' simply as the term most commonly used to 'remark that humans are now the dominant environmental force on the Earth' (Caro et al. 2012: 185). Also considered as the consequence of a particular practice of worlding, in which the status of the planet becomes an object of human design (Chakrabarty 2009: 210), the Anthropocene has made the general public more receptive to alternative life projects, thus suggesting the possibility of 'redesigning' the planet consciously (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2011; Kawa 2016). An alternative perspective on the Anthropocene is sceptical to 'design' responses involving a unified 'conscious agent', seeing

more promise in the aggregate result of the uncoordinated and more heterogeneous practices that can coexist, but might also interrupt each other (Latour 1999; Blaser, Feit and McRae 2004; Carstensen 2014). In this scenario, politics is about fraught and always-ongoing worldings, which, while thoroughly imbricated, are nevertheless different (Povinelli 2001). It becomes an ontological politics, or a 'cosmopolitics' (Stengers 1996), that questions taking human rights as the ultimate justification for claims mobilised through identity politics (Haraway 2008). For a critic of the term 'Anthropocene', see Chakrabarty (2009), Latour (2014a), Haraway et al. (2016) and Demos (2017). Most of these ideas were developed by Mario Blaser in a paper presented at a workshop that I co-organised with Cecilie Ødegaard in Bergen (Norway) in 2016: 'Indigenous Cosmologies and Politics of Extractivism in Latin America: Ethnographic Approaches'.

53. Compare with: 'No hay un "mundo común". La cuestión de los combustibles provenientes de fuentes vegetales es una guerra' (Latour 2015), or 'struggles for the defense of territories and difference' (Escobar 2016: 13).

54. Author's translation of: 'une troisième voie suggestive en ce qu'elle renoue les liens longtemps distendus entre humains et non-humains quant aux formes de souveraineté qu'ils exercent chacun sur eux-mêmes'.

55. A tendency evident, for example, in many Andean studies, where human subjectivity has sometimes been drastically opposed to objects, and an economy of reciprocity to a monetary one (Rivera Andía 2014). In general, current Andean ethnographic studies dealing with non-humans (cf. Bellenger 2007; Ricard 2007; Robin 2008; Strong 2012 – with a few exceptions (Abercrombie 1998; Karadimas 2012, 2015) – have not entered in a long or explicit dialogue with the recent perspectives developed in South American lowlands (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Karadimas and Goulard 2011; Halbmayer 2012b; Tola, Medrano and Cardin 2013; Descola 2014b). Despite the fact that Amerindian ontologies have become an important locus of debate in the anthropology of religion, the line dividing the Andes and Amazonia is still as strong as blurred, and permeates not only national and local imaginaries, but also scholarly efforts to understand the indigenous groups in both areas (Taylor, Renard-Casevitz and Saignes 1998; Chaumeil, Espinosa and Cornejo 2012), allowing a conspicuous lack of ethnographic comparisons of both areas.

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