



I. CULTURE AND CREATIVITY IN THE MODERN WEST

BEYOND NATURE AND CULTURE?

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In this paper, we will analyze how anthropological thinking, in the last twenty years, has put the conceptual categories of Culture and Nature into radical questioning. Nature was “denaturalized” and deemed as a social construction that was specific to the history of Western world. But to avoid the alternative between nature and culture one should develop a “non-dualist” approach and, in this sense, we will then consider Tim Ingold’s works. According to the British anthropologist, the nature and culture divide is usually the outcome of an assumption recurrent in anthropology, that according to which our cultural frames determine our perception of outside world. For Ingold, phenomenological thinking reversed the ontological priorities of Western rationalism.

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Introduction

The binary opposition between nature and culture has been the object of strong criticism and even rejection in recent theory in human sciences. Revisions and reconsiderations are of course part and parcel of all scientific research, but the moment in which the humanities put into question their core assumptions is particularly significant and philosophically productive. In fact, almost all elaborations of human sciences can be seen as an interminable effort in establishing the border that separates, and at the same time connects, the human world and the environment. In this paper, I will consider some aspects of the debate over the nature / culture binary that has taken place in social and cultural anthropology, with some references to environmental studies and feminist theory.

In very broad terms, anthropological theories can be grouped around two opposite polarities, according to their account of the relationships between nature and culture

(Guribye 2000). On the one hand you have materialistic or naturalistic approaches, which consider nature – either in the shape of internal biological drives or external environmental resources, or both – to be the most important factor in determining the cultural and social forms of human groups. From this perspective, culture is therefore the extension of a process of biological adaptation to the environment, a very special adaptive skill that is exclusive to human beings but that can nonetheless be reduced, more or less directly, to a limited subset of material vectors.

On the other hand one may consider that our relationships with biological life and the surrounding environment, far from being straight and direct, are on the contrary always mediated by cultural representations. Nature dictates the initial conditions, of course, but after that it becomes no more than a background for the intricate and kaleidoscopic elaborations of the symbolic mind. In this perspective, if symbolic mediations are not taken into account, our understanding of human cultures will inevitably fail. To different degrees and often with incompatible tones, cultural ecology (White 1949; Steward 1955) and cultural materialism (Harris 1979) are representative of the naturalistic stance, while anthropological structuralism (Lévi-Strauss 1958) and interpretative anthropology (Geertz 1973) are fine examples of the symbolic approach (Keesing 1974, for a review see Keesing 1994).

Nature and social construction

It is tempting to say that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, that both nature and culture are certainly relevant and that it is only a matter of interaction between the two. All the most interesting anthropological theorists of the 20th century would probably agree, but they would also immediately start a heated debate over precisely how the two interact, where the border lies, and which one is ultimately playing the leading role. Far from reaching any general agreement, recent years have seen positions become more and more polarised.

Socio-biology (Wilson 1975) brought a new impulse to the materialistic perspective by applying neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory to the explanation of social phenomena. Socio-biologists admit that the influence of genes is complex and indirect. Nonetheless, they believe that the social behaviour of humans – not unlike that of other animal species – is explainable in terms of their evolutionary advantage. The other side of the polarity structuring contemporary anthropological theory also underwent profound radicalisation with the advent of so-called postmodern thinking (a huge footnote should be added any time one refers to postmodernism since it is commonly used to label aesthetic, political and philosophical positions which are extremely diverse, if not conflicting, such as post-structuralism, deconstruction, or critical theory; though, in a postmodern context, conflicting points of view are far from being a drawback). In his introduction to *Writing Culture*, James Clifford wrote that for a long time the writing of ethnography was seen as little more than a transcription, on the grounds of a supposed “transparency of representation and immediacy of experience” (Clifford 1986: 2). However, those were ideological assumptions and “this ideology has crumbled” (Clifford 1986: 2). As such, far from taking place in an objective and virtually

transparent common ground, ethnographic accounts arise from an opaque field deeply rooted in narrative contexts and power relations which, regardless of the researcher's good or bad faith, can not be avoided or even bracketed.

Objectivity and universality, as well as the very idea of understanding and describing the "other", are not only contradictory but deeply embedded in the ever-growing will for power and control that underlies the Western myths of "Science" and "Reason": "<...> the poetic and the political are inseparable" and "science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes" (Clifford 1986: 2). As nothing is more modern than the very idea of critique and reflexivity, the only way out is accepting the inescapable interrelation and dispersion of the multiple explanatory dimensions available. In doing so, we may on occasion open room for freedom and creativity.

In more recent times, a critical stance towards the core concepts of Modernity, which is often and to a great extent related to what is commonly referred to as post-modernism (but not always and not entirely), is generally known as "social constructionism". The apparent self-standing character of such fundamental notions as Human Nature, Gender, Society, or the State, is brought into radical questioning and these notions are said to be "constructed" through the interplay of social forces. And so is Nature. The concept of Nature does not refer to some state of affairs that quietly sits "out there" waiting to be discovered or described by the methodological practices we call science and, more generally, knowledge, but is the result of a construction (Evernden 1992; Eder 1996; Ellen, Fukui 1996). The vectors that form this construction differ according to the authors' theoretical perspectives: social relations, culture and symbolic elaborations, historical processes and political conflicts.

The idea of social construction is not *per se* necessarily shocking: the fact that powerful objects such as money and national borders are constructed is not particularly contentious (which does not mean they can be created, modified or extinguished at will, as Europeans know well). After all, to say something is constructed is to say it did not need to be like that, it could have been different, it is not "determined by the nature of things" (Hacking 1999: 6). Generally, we believe that objects and events pertaining to the sphere of culture, social relations and history, are manifold and always subject to unpredictable changes. The idea that social reality is socially constructed is almost a tautology. But talking about the social construction of nature is much more problematic as nature is usually considered to be a stable, self-sufficient order that is external to human affairs. Nature is supposed to be precisely that which is not constructed.

It is not by chance that the issue of the social or ontological construction of nature has emerged at a time of deep environmental crisis. The inexorable industrialisation of modern times has put the natural environment into great danger, as we all know. But everything we may try to do for the "protection" and "conservation" of the natural environment still relies on that same "result-oriented techno-scientific praxis" that caused the problem in the first place. So we seem to be caught in a distressing dilemma: either we endow nature with an objective essence and address the environmental crisis with theories and instruments that are intrinsically associated with the

techno-scientific thinking that at the same time represents the deadliest threat to its existence, or we believe that nature is a cultural construction and then the discourse of conservation and protection becomes highly suspicious, as it may actually constitute, despite the good faith of its upholders, nothing but a further and optimised extension of the human colonization of the world. It appears that, as long as only two positions are admitted – either culture rests on nature or nature rests on culture – we always end up at a dead end.

Between environmentalism and feminism

In *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Glacken 1967), one of the most encompassing essays on the history of the environment in the Western tradition, Clarence Glacken developed a detailed critical assessment of the assumption according to which the sphere of human activities is separate from the natural world. According to him, the idea that men and nature belong to two separate domains, an idea deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian religious and cultural heritage, sanctioned the devastation of nature in modern times. The notion according to which a sort of primordial “pact with nature” would have been broken at some point in the history of humanity by the introduction of a sharp contrast between human beings and the natural environment has been unfolding in many different directions. More recently, Max Oelschlaeger to a certain extent reversed Glacken’s approach and emphasised the material basis of that momentous event. It was the progressive transition from a hunter-gatherer economy to herding and farming that arrived at a turning point he portrays as a “fall from paradise” (Oelschlaeger 1991: 31) and initiated the relentless and increasingly effective (and destructive) exploitation of nature. The supremacy of man over nature affirmed in the Biblical texts would then be not the cause but the result, on the symbolic level, of that radical change, and a retrospective justification: “By the time the Genesis stories were composed [...] man had already embarked on the task of transforming nature. In the Genesis stories man *justifies* his actions” (Passmore 1974, cited in Oelschlaeger 1991).

From the mid 1970’s, several feminist thinkers and activists argued that the domination of culture over nature was deeply connected, both historically and conceptually, to the domination of men over women, inaugurating an original intersection of feminism and environmentalism commonly known as eco-feminism. The link between male domination and the exploitation of nature, and thus between the male / female and culture / nature dualisms, may actually take on very different connotations. One may argue that the oppression of women is part and parcel of the effort to control the environment brought forward by men since, as “producers of life”, as Vandana Shiva (Shiva 1989: 38ff) would put it, women and nature are infused by the same life-giving principle and thus closely related to each other. “The ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother”, wrote Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*, “links women’s history with the history of the environment and ecological change. The female earth was central to the organic cosmology that was undermined by the Scientific Revolution and the rise of a market-oriented culture in early modern Europe” (Merchant 1980: xvi).

However, several feminist, and even eco-feminist, thinkers and activists considered that postulating a “natural” connection between women and nature carried an essentialism that undermined its liberating goals and “reinforced women’s continued subordination to men” (Braidotti *et al.* 1994: 98). This is an issue that Merchant herself acknowledged in her later works, where she adopts a socialist approach to feminism and eco-feminism: “<...> in emphasizing the female, body, and nature components of the dualities male / female, mind / body, and culture / nature, radical feminism runs the risk of perpetuating the very value hierarchies it seeks to overthrow <...>. If “female is to male as nature is to culture”, as anthropologist Sherry Ortner argues, then women’s hopes for liberation are set back by association with nature” (Merchant 1989: 269; Merchant 1990: 100–105).

Though her disapproval may be seen as an indirect criticism of her own former positions, Merchant is here objecting to Ortner’s influential paper *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* In that 1972 essay, cultural anthropologist and feminist theorist Ortner intended to explain the universality of male domination by means of a structural analysis based on the opposition between nature and culture. According to her, an effective agenda for the emancipation of women must not be limited to the transformation of social conditions but should also try to defy and deconstruct its symbolic underpinnings.

Ortner actually recognised that the polarity between nature and culture, and even more so the female subordination that was associated with it, are themselves “a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature” (Ortner 1972: 87). Nonetheless, inheriting to a certain extent the ambiguous role the nature / culture opposition plays in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropology, these constructs are universal or “pan-cultural” facts that, through many local variants and at different degrees of polarisation, respond to a general “logic of cultural thinking” (Ortner 1972: 68). First of all, Ortner holds that culture is by definition the transcending of natural circumstances: “<...> culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to ‘socialize’ and ‘culturalize’ – nature” (Ortner 1972: 73).

Due to their crucial role in the reproduction of life, women tend to be “seen” as being more closely connected to their body and thus to nature. However, women are not simply equated to nature but are often recognised as taking part in important cultural activities. Nonetheless, Ortner contends, they tend to be placed in an intermediate position between the natural sphere and the domain of culture.

Owing to their physiological attributes, particularly during pregnancy and breastfeeding, women are constantly associated with babies. This association is often prolonged during the whole period of young children’s dependence, during which women raise and feed them. According to the “logic of cultural reasoning”, raising a baby can easily be equated to the process of socialisation of a wild creature, while cooking is the process through which raw materials are “culturalised” and brought to an edible form. Women are connected to crucial transfers from nature to culture, but this means they have a peculiar relationship with nature and thus, unlike men, do not definitely

and entirely belong to the sphere of culture. This supposed “middle-position”, according to Ortner, accounts for the “pan-cultural” devaluation of women. When also interpreted as a mediating role, it may explain the tendency to limit and restrict their field of action, since the domain of culture must have the last word in regulating the transfers between nature and culture. If viewed as “ambiguous”, women’s peculiar status may on occasion bring about an inversion as, for example, among the Sirionó of Brazil, for whom nature, maleness and raw food are in opposition to culture, female-ness and cooking (Ortner 1972: 86).

As we have seen, the reference to a “pan-cultural logic” that would explain women’s devaluation on account of their biological peculiarities, and notwithstanding the diversity of social and historical contexts, sparked prompt accusations of essentialism. The most articulated response to Ortner’s article is probably the essay “No nature, no culture: the Hagen’s case” (Strathern 1980) by the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern.

Complicating the dualism

In *Self-Decoration in Mount Hagen* (Strathern, A.; Strathern, M. 1971), based on the fieldwork they conducted in Papua New Guinea, M. Strathern and Andrew Strathern showed how among the Hagen people practical and symbolic activities are frequently organised according to associated pairs of contrasts: an opposition between domesticated things (*mbo*) and wild things (*rømi*), which often corresponds to an opposition between male and female. Human activities and their results, such as settled areas, cultivated vegetables and domestic pigs are considered *mbo*, while wild animals, wild vegetables and the bush are *rømi*. *Mbo* also refers to actions and attitudes with a social character, which encourage relationships, while individualistic and solitary attitudes are *rømi*. Men are in charge of all activities that support social relationships and transactions, which grant them a prestigious status, while women are held to be anti-social and driven by personal goals, which are on the contrary deprecated traits and the basis of their lower status.

In “No nature, no culture...”, M. Strathern identifies a persistent tendency among anthropologists to trace back all references to an opposition between wild and domesticated or between female and male to an opposition between nature and culture. Ortner’s essay brought this approach to its most fully developed form. Nevertheless, much to M. Strathern’s surprise, this interpretation also appeared in the reviews of *Self-Decoration in Mount Hagen* despite the fact that its authors never made reference to the nature / culture opposition. According to M. Strathern, this is an unjustified extension of Western categories to non-Western contexts that may tell us more about the former than the latter. First of all, the Western concepts of nature and culture do not actually correspond to a clear-cut opposition between two fully determined domains. Men can be seen as closer to culture and more detached from their natural bodily dimension than women, as in Ortner’s argument. However, they are also believed to possess a more basic and self-expressive nature than women, who are on the contrary more cultivated and more adjusted to inter-subjective relations. Women are often con-

sidered to be tame while men are more prone to violent behaviour. From this point of view, men are closer to nature and women to culture: “No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in western thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts” (Strathern 1980: 177). However, nature and culture are still widely regarded as a valid and stable frame of reference in the social sciences because only certain tracts of what is actually a complex matrix are emphasised. These belong to a particular subset of oppositions that are in tune with the idea that culture is essentially “production”, i.e. the action that tames, transforms and extracts goods from nature.

As Roy Wagner, a frequent reference in Strathern’s writings, observed, we have no problem in endowing non-Western people with culture, but these are actually not the equivalent of a “total system of conceptualization” (Wagner 1981: 100), as ours is to us, but mere variations on one and the same theme: “nature as we perceive it” (Strathern 1980: 177). It is precisely an implicit “essentialist” assumption that causes the reference to a nature / culture opposition when a Western (or Western-educated) social scientist is confronted with ethnographical evidence of a distinction between wild and domestic, interpreted as mirroring vernacular forms of environmental control, or male and female symbolism. It is “us” who tend to see a homology between the control of the environment and the relationships between men and women, which can then be subsumed as relationships between nature and culture. And, as M. Strathern adds, “it is even arguable that a male-female distinction in western thought systems plays a crucial role as symbolic operator in certain transformations between the terms nature-culture” (Strathern 1980: 176). However, the focal point here is that homology does not lie in empirical data but in our frame of reference (particularly in the symbolic role of the male-female distinction), as “<...> there is no such thing as nature or culture. Each is a highly relativized concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics” (Strathern 1980: 177).

Though understandable from the point of view of “Western metaphysics”, the use of the nature / culture opposition pair is completely inadequate when applied to the Hagen’s distinction between wild and domesticated or male and female. First of all because these two sets of opposition are a “matrix of contrasts” that only partially overlap. As we saw, Hagen men are connected to social life, which is considered *mbo* or domestic, while women are connected to individualistic attitudes, which are *romi* or wild. At the same time however, men are free to roam in the wild when hunting, while women are restricted to the domestic sphere and tend gardens. Analogously, male to female relationships among the Hagens can not readily be equated to those in the Western world. As a category, women are in fact considered to be of lower status, because their individualistic and “wild” nature prevents them from achieving the social goals that earn prestige, which are men’s exclusivity. “In power terms, however, male supremacy is much more ambiguous. The dangers which they locate in females are a source of threat to themselves” (Strathern 1980: 209).

But there is an even more fundamental aspect that prevents the extension of the categories of nature and culture to the Highlands of Papua. The homology between the wild / domestic, female / male, and nature / culture distinctions is based on a

metaphor of control: domesticity is the control of wildness just as culture is the control of nature. This means that, in the West, these categories are thought to entertain a dialectical relation: one may affect and influence the other, nature is the object of culture's action, thus becoming a part of it. This is not the case for the *mbo* and *rømi* categories, which, on the contrary, are not considered dialectically but as being in an innate relationship of pure difference. They are juxtaposed but not contrasted, and they can be recognised but not transformed into or reduced to each other. In brief, in Hagen thought, according to M. Strathern: "There is no culture, in the sense of the cumulative works of man, and no nature to be tamed and made productive" (Strathern 1980: 219).

Double bind

Since the "crisis of representation" associated to postmodern critique affected anthropological thinking, almost all of the discipline's traditional conceptual tools have been the subject of severe scrutiny and suspicion. Although this does not entail her approach being associated with postmodernism (see Holbraad, Pedersen 2009), M. Strathern's essay carried one of the last fatal blows to the time-honoured categorical pair nature / culture and today its rejection has become an almost implicit assumption in anthropological theory.

The problem, as Martin Holbraad points out, is that the growing unanimity in rejecting the nature / culture dualism is often taking place *minimo sumptu*, at the lowest costs: "Perhaps the most blatant sign of this in anthropology is that the repudiation of the distinction between nature and culture is typically done in the name, precisely, of cultural relativism" (Holbraad 2012). Saying that the nature / culture opposition has no universal validity because nature is a construction that varies according to local *cultural* variables is self-contradictory or, at least, insufficient. In a genuine anti-ethnocentric spirit, we aim at overcoming the dualism reducing nature to a cultural construction, thus implying that the very idea of cultural or social facts has suffered no consequences. Paraphrasing Jacques Lacan's famous slogan, *ne devient pas fou qui veut*, we may say that one does not become non-dualist just by deciding it. This is an intricate *double bind* that can not be easily surmounted: "How might the 'non-universality' of the distinction between nature and culture be conceptualised without recourse to that very distinction?" (Holbraad 2012). If one admits that "[t]he matrix of [the] opposition between culture and nature is the very matrix of Western metaphysics" (Benoist 1975, cited in Strathern 1980: 178), it is undeniable that the philosophical stakes of such a question are quite high.

Coming from different backgrounds and following different theoretical paths, several anthropologists, such as Tim Ingold (2000), Philippe Descola (2005) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2002), have tried to tackle this question in recent years and have developed alternatives to the ordinary "constructionist" move. I would like to conclude this paper with a brief outline of Ingold's approach. A common starting point is the observation that, as Strathern argued, there are non-Western groups that seem not to make any distinction between nature and culture. This becomes particularly

apparent in the fact that in these contexts what we usually term “social relations” are not restricted to human beings but include animals, plants, and even non-living or supernatural things. Anthropologists have of course always been aware of this, but generally tend to “interpret” it as motivated, more or less directly, by symbolic or material relationships between “real persons”. As the recent renewal of interest in what is traditionally labelled as “animism” shows, some feel that when people treat a jaguar or a tree like a person they should be taken more seriously.

For the Achuar of equatorial Amazonia, among whom Descola developed his field research, “all of nature’s beings have some features in common with mankind, and the laws they go by are more or less the same as those governing civil society. Humans and most plants, animals, and meteors are persons <...> with a soul <...> and an individual life” (Descola 1996: 93). Blood and affinity relations extend well beyond the human world: women are said to be the mothers of the plants they cultivate while men are brothers-in-law of the animals they hunt.

As A. Irving Hallowell observed, for the Ojibwa, hunters and trappers of Canada’s boreal forest, “vital social relations transcend those which are maintained with human beings” (Hallowell 1960, cited in Ingold 2000: 43). Thunders and stones may on occasion speak to humans. However, this should not be too hastily labelled (and, in a certain sense, neutralised) as “animism”, implying that the Ojibwa indiscriminately attribute a soul to everything. Instead, they “recognize, a priori, potentialities for animation in certain classes of objects under certain circumstances” (Hallowell 1960: 65). For them, “the conception of ‘person’ as a living, functioning social being is not only one which transcends the notion of person in the naturalistic sense; it likewise transcends anthropomorphic traits as a constant attribute of this category of being” (Hallowell 1960: 34).

Unfolding fields of engagement

For this ethnographic evidence to be taken seriously, the dualism between nature and culture needs to be abandoned. The British anthropologist Ingold was probably the first to observe that dismissing the nature / culture distinction on behalf of some form of “cultural construction” would bring about a “vortex of infinite regress” (Ingold 2000: 42). On the one hand, there is the cultural context of the indigenous people who do not distinguish between nature and culture. On the other hand, we have the Western cultural context according to which nature and culture are opposite poles. But then there must also be a third point of view, that of us who are now comparing between the two and thus somehow do not identify entirely with none of the previous positions. Moreover, we must have our own idea of nature in order to be able to compare these two and say that one is dualistic while the other is not. If we are consistent with our argument, we must then admit that also this idea of nature, as something that may or may not be distinguished from culture, is itself a product of our specific cultural context, and so on, in an *ad infinitum* spiralling regression.

The problem, according to Ingold, lies in the notion according to which human beings need to have some sort of conceptual schemata in order to give meaning to their experience of the external world, which *per se* is only an amorphous and chaotic flux (here, we may add, anthropology declares its Kantian descent, reproducing the opposition between *a priori* categories and sense impressions). Traditionally anthropologists adopt what they call a “building perspective”, according to which “people inhabit a world – of culture or society – to which form and meaning have already been attached. It is assumed, in other words, that they must perforce ‘construct’ the world, in consciousness, before they can act in it” (Ingold 2000: 153).

Our body gives us the building blocks, the sensations, but we need a construction scheme in our minds in order to classify and properly arrange those raw building blocks into something meaningful. However, this is the Western modern understanding of our relationship with the world, which inevitably ends up domesticating the challenge posed by non-Western cultures. For the members of many hunter-gatherer societies distinguishing between nature and culture makes no sense. Their relationships with the environment are not dependent on building symbolic representations of the external world inside their heads but are instead a matter of “being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with the constituents of the dwelt-in world” (Ingold 2000: 42).

To come to grips with this, the “building perspective” must be inverted into what old (Ingold 2000: 172ff), in a reference to Martin Heidegger’s 1951 lecture “Building, dwelling, thinking”, calls “dwelling perspective”. The ordinary view, i.e. that which is ordinary for Western modernity, is that building a house and inhabiting a place are two separate but complementary activities. We build places in order to live in them. And we can only inhabit a place that has been built. In his lecture, through one of his characteristic exercises in etymology, Heidegger argues that modern thought reversed the priorities: now building precedes and grounds dwelling, while originally building derived from dwelling: “We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers <...>. To build is in itself already to dwell <...>. *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*” (Heidegger 1971, cited in Ingold 2000: 186).

It is not simply a matter of comparing two different “world views”, Western science and hunter-gatherers for example, since, as we have seen, for Ingold (2000: 42) the very idea of comparison relies on Western representational assumptions: “The contrast <...> is not between alternative views of the world; it is rather between two ways of apprehending it”. “Our” modern concept of perception as the intellectual grasp of a given external world is the precise opposite of what hunter-gatherers believe and of what everybody does most of the time. Through this “logic of inversion”, which is peculiar to Western modernity, “the field of involvement in the world, of a thing or person, is converted into an interior schema of which its manifest appearance and behaviour are but outward expressions” (Ingold 2011: 68).

Following the ecological psychology of James Gibson, Ingold (2000: 166) argues that perception should not be seen as the result of the encounter between the shaping activity of the mind and the raw data of the senses, but rather as “an active and

exploratory process of information pickup; far from working on sensations already received, it involves the continual movement, adjustment and reorientation of the receptor organs themselves”.

Notwithstanding the dynamic character of perception and its strict correlation with movement, “affordances” were for Gibson a feature of the external world, whether a perceiver was there to pick them up or not. This realist premise, according to Ingold (2000: 19), inevitably reintroduces a dichotomy of form and substance, of activity and passivity, while “we must be prepared to treat form as emergent within the life-process”; a living being is an organic structure only to an external gaze, while more fundamentally it is “a locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships”. Both agents (including non-human agents) and the environment are elements of this relational field and are formed in the perpetual creative movement of life.

Nevertheless, this goes well beyond Gibson and, in order to develop his perspective, Ingold turns to phenomenology. Drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, he writes “[f]rom a phenomenological standpoint the world emerges with its properties alongside the emergence of the perceiver in person, against the background of involved activity. Since the person is a being-in-the-world, the coming-into-being of the person is part and parcel of the process of coming-into-being of the world” (Ingold 2000: 168).

Conclusions

An informant of the ethnographer Colin Scott, who studied the Wemindji Cree of Northern Canada, once described life as “continuous birth” (Ingold 2000: 51). Ingold believes this expression perfectly fits the relationship of openness and mutual constitution that, according to him, characterises the way all organisms live their world. In his last published writing, “Eye and Mind”, Merleau-Ponty argued that painting, much like phenomenology, reveals how perception can not be explained on the basis of a distinction between subject and object. The vision of the painter is not “a view upon the outside, a merely physical-optical relation with the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 167), but rather a “continued birth” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, cited in Ingold 2011). In animism, or as Ingold would put it, in an animic ontology, life is not the result of a specified set of biological processes, to which a mental layer of symbolic meaning may or may not be superimposed, but is rather “a generation of being, in a world that is not pre-ordained but incipient, forever on the verge of the actual” (Ingold 2000: 113).

According to Ingold (2000: 15), at the heart of the idea of Western modernity – quite problematic to his own admission – there is a “double disengagement of the observer from the world”. First of all, natural sciences drew a clear distinction between nature and humanity, and then human sciences split humanity into two domains: “native” people, who are immersed in their own cultures, and enlightened Western people who, by not being immersed in any particular culture, can study and compare them. “In effect, the sovereign perspective of abstract reason is a product of the compounding of two dichotomies: between humanity and nature, and between modernity and tradition” (Ingold 2000: 15). “Dwelling” or “animic” ontology aims at overcom-

ing both these dichotomies but, as has been observed (Uchiyamada 2004), as far as the opposition between Western and non-Western societies is concerned, no major reference is made at its undeniable political dimensions.

As Ingold (2005) himself admitted, this absence is “disturbing” and its implications – which may bring to mind Theodor W. Adorno’s (1973) critical appraisal of Heidegger’s “jargon of authenticity” – should not be neglected. Nevertheless, Ingold’s works – which are of course more complex and articulate than they may appear in this brief presentation – are one of the most original reassessments of the nature / culture binary that aims at eschewing both essentialism and “constructionism”.

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ANAPUS GAMTOS IR KULTŪROS?

Davide Scarso

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip per pastaruosius dvidešimt metų antropologinis mąstymas iš esmės sukvėstavo konceptualias kultūros ir gamtos kategorijas. Gamta buvo „denatūralizuota“ ir laikyta socialine konstrukcija, būdinga Vakarų pasaulio istorijai. Siekiant išvengti alternatyvos tarp gamtos ir kultūros, turėtų būti išplėtos „nedualistinis“ požiūris. Todėl apžvelgiami Timo Ingoldo darbai. Remiantis britų antropologu, gamtos ir kultūros takoskyra paprastai yra antropologijoje pasikartojančios prielaidos rezultatas, pagal kurį kultūriniai rėmai apibrėžia mūsų išorinio pasaulio suvokimą. Ingoldo manymu, fenomenologinis mąstymas apvertė Vakarų racionalizmo ontologinius prioritetus.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: konstrukcionizmas, kultūra, Ingoldas, gamta, fenomenologija.

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