

# Multinatural Perspectivism and Structural Transformation - an experiment

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The object of this paper is to demonstrate that what has come to be known as multinatural perspectivism (MP) can be seen as a structural transformation of totemism and that for this very reason MP has an intimate relation with Lévi-Strauss's canonical formula for myth (CFM). The first part of this paper shows how we can arrive at MP's particular arrangement of the nature/culture and human/non-human categories by applying a "double twist", CFM's characteristic transformation, to the classic Lévi-Straussian description of totemism. The second part explores Lévi-Strauss's own demonstrations of the transformations totemism is subject to, as they were developed in *The Savage Mind*. This section closes discussing Viveiros de Castro's (2009) own reflections on MP as a transformation of multiculturalism and will lead us to the conclusion that MP, totemism and Naturalism constitute a "transformation group" under the CFM transformation of our Nature and Culture concepts. The third and last part of the essay builds on the conclusion of the first part and attempts to show that if MP is the result of applying a double twist to totemism, and if the CFM can be considered the essential operator of structural transformations, then MP and the CFM must in some way be analogues of each other. In the course of establishing the affinity between MP and the CFM, I will draw on elements of Wagner's theory of obviation (1978), and in so doing, I will illustrate some possible affinities between the CFM and Wagner's approach to meaning.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper is intended for a seminar "Antropologia de raposa: pensando com Roy Wagner" to be held in Florianópolis in August 2011 (Luciani 2010). It must be noted that Wagner himself has written about the differences between Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis and his

Before getting to the core of my argument I provide some context on multinatural perspectivism, presenting some of its main concepts and summarizing MP's relation with other nature/culture arrangements, like totemism, animism and naturalism.<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

### ***Some context on perspectivism and multinaturalism***

Multinatural perspectivism (MP) describes what comes back to us (anthropologists, mainstream western culture of science) when we play some of anthropology's fundamental concepts and premises, like nature and culture and their relation against their correlates in Amerindian thought, as expressed in myth, shamanism and native reflexive commentary on hunting, warfare and other aspects of life. MP is at once a phenomenon, in that it is an aspect of Amerindian conceptual imagination; a theory of a theory, in that it articulates in anthropological language concepts and premises more or less explicitly present in native thought about humans, non-humans and social relationships; and a counter- (to our)anthropology, for given the torsion it impresses on the nature-culture configuration, and its reflection on social relations, MP's premises for understanding and engaging with alterity are orthogonal to the longstanding anthropological assumption that culture and its diversity are myriad constructions of nature and social relations being a matter of connections between pre-existing persons.

Perhaps the most well known aspect of MP is the persepctival play of points of view, an animism with a certain twist to it, found in many ethnographic accounts. The following must be the most cited summation of this dynamic:

“Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals, and spirits (if they see them) as

symbolic obviation (1978:31-37; 1981:150-1; 1986: 131). I am here more specifically concerned with the canonical formula for myth, where Wagner's and Lévi-Strauss's approaches to myth and meaning would seem to come closer to each other.

<sup>2</sup> This introduction draws directly from a more general piece I wrote on multinatural perspectivism to be published as an encyclopedia entry (Luciani 2016).

spirits; however, animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture – they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks, etc.) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc.).” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998: 470).

This complex play of points of view is MP’s diacritical feature, its phenomenal aspect, so-to-speak, yet it is a common mistake to think it is limited to this, for MP articulates a constellation of concepts, like a specific concept of ‘body’ and knowledge practices, that taken together give its theoretical character. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will only touch on MP’s arrangement of the categories of nature and culture, for it is through these categories that the contrast with totemism comes into view.

It is against anthropological notions of nature and culture and their relations that MP’s originality can best be grasped. The most common anthropological descriptions of culture include the idea that nature is unique, universal and the common substrate – the materiality and the natural laws – providing the potential and the limitations to human and other forms of life. In this view, humanity is itself an outcrop of this unique nature, and culture refers to the many different ways in which societies construct their view of the world – hence the term multiculturalism. Culture is considered a human capability associated with the mind and visible in humans’ ongoing signs of creativity. Relativism is a correlate of the diversity of cultural constructions of the world. One of its basic premises states that all cultures are the product of human creative capacity and hence analogous of each other. Now MP is ‘orthogonal’ – to use Viveiros de Casro’s own term – to these premises. In the first place, what is characteristic of MP is that animals and other beings see themselves as humans and as such they partake of human culture. Culture is thus unique and shared across

species and most commonly associated with the possession of an anthropomorphic soul. On the other hand, all beings see in the same way, but what they see is different – like the jaguar that sees human blood as maize beer. What is multiple and diverse here is nature – hence the term “multinaturalism”.

“Multicultural relativism supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each trying grasp an external and unified nature, which remains perfectly indifferent to those representations. Amerindian thought proposes the opposite: a representational or phenomenal unity which is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity. One single ‘culture’, multiple ‘natures’ – perspectivism is multinaturalist, for a perspective is not a representation.” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998: 478).

In this sense Western naturalism and Amerindian MP display inverse distributions of the qualities of nature and culture: innate vs. artificial; unique and shared vs. diverse and specific.

As perspectives, how are nature and culture articulated in MP? We have seen that all beings with soul see themselves as humans, culturally Indian humans, that is. Culture is “the reflexive perspective of the subject, objectified through the concept of the soul” (478). On the other hand, beings with soul see other beings with soul as animals or spirits, in any case, as beings with different bodies. Hence, “it can be said that ‘nature’ is the view point which the subject takes of other body-affects; if Culture is the Subject’s nature, then Nature is the form of the Other as body, that is, as the object for a subject” (478). Lévi-Strauss showed throughout the *Mythologiques* that the passage from nature to culture was a fundamental concern of Amerindian thought. It is appropriate then that the description of MP does not do away with this often-criticized opposition, but rather offers us an original articulation of it: here Culture and Nature mean above all perspectives, relational positions with respect to self and other, pronouns not nouns.

Let me now provide some examples taken from Amerindian auto-ethnographic accounts to both exemplify the way MP appears in indigenous discourse and dispel the idea that it is an abstract anthropological construct at a remove from Indian’s experience. These fragments come from two Amerindian peoples: the Yekuana, Carib speakers that live in Venezuela and Brasil; and the Makuna, speakers of

the Oriental Tukano language family, living in Colombia and Brasil. The source of the Yekuana fragments is de Civreux's (1970) transcription from native informants of their mythical cycle known as *Watunna*. The source of the Makuna fragments are the texts of Makuna school teachers' auto-ethnography collected by Århem, et al (2004). I have chosen these fragments to illustrate the aspects of MP we have presented thus directly relating them to Viveiros de Castro's original writings on the matter (1998).

*Animals are people; each people have their world; animals see themselves as humans having culture (Makuna auto-ethnography).*

“The majority of beings can be considered as *masã* (people), that is, as organized groups that act upon nature in visible and invisible ways: they are people that think and have the capacity to reproduce and recreate nature, for they have some reflection about it.” (242)

“All of them [game animals] act as people, and in their world they are *masã* (people). Moreover, when they collect their fruit they do the same as humans do: they wander with their *yuruparí*, they go to another house, they ritually treat the fruits in their world, they act upon nature, they go to fixed places, they have their own places, eat their own fruits, they reproduce, they are organized by a leader that is their owner and have to do as he says.” (242-3)

“For us, trees are persons and are people that have a life but that live in a world that does not have a direct relation with humans; we take care of them and use them when we are going to make a garden and when we collect fruits, that's all.” (307)

“When we organize a feast, we invite many people. Animals or boas will do the same in their world, but we do not know which animals they invite. The world of anacondas is totally different and [our] history does not detail such things...” (356)

“Animals are the same as people and in the same way as we need radios, recorders and watches, they too need salt, shotguns and fishing hooks; but this only happens in thought.” (368).

*Every species sees in the same way, but what they see is different (Yekuana myth: Wattuna).*

This fragment is taken from a myth about *Medatia*, a man who went to

the sky and became the first shaman. The episodes presented take place when he is already in the sky.

“The *mawadi* [spirits] arrived saying: ‘Here we are. We brought you gifts. Here are dogs and manioc.’ But what they were bringing were not dogs but jaguars. Neither was there any manioc, only fish.

Then came the *Teditumadi*, the Lightning people, ‘here we are’, they said, ‘take these hammocks.’ But they were spider webs not hammocks.

Then the Thunder people came running in fear. ‘Protect us’, they told to *Medatia*, ‘that falcon wants to eat us.’ But they were running away not from a falcon but only a mosquito...” (218)

“*Medatia* felt sad. He could not understand those people. He told the Masters of the Word: ‘I don’t know what is happening. Everybody comes speaking crazy things. I don’t know who here is crazy, is it them or myself.’

The Masters of the Word told him: “These are the languages of the spirits. You have changed your ears, your throat: that is why you can understand their words and speak with them. Now you must change your eyes too. Change them and you will understand what they say. You will see how things really are.” (219)

[*Medatia* is taken to another house of a people called *Setawa Kaliana*]

“They gave something for *Medatia* to wash his eyes. It was a juice of ginger and hot pepper.

‘With this you will change your eyes’, they said. ‘You will be able to see in the dark. You will understand everything. In each house you will change your eyes. Each people has their own eyes. When you speak to the parrots, you will see as they do. When you find the snakes, you will be like them. You will be able to speak to anyone; you will go to their houses as if they were your own’...” (219)

“These were the words the wise people told *Medatia* there in the Sky. They changed his eyes. They taught the *bubai* [shamans] that ascend to the sky from Earth; *Medatia* was the first shaman, the first to go to the Sky and listen to their words.” (219)

*MP is not relativism, it is multinaturalism. (Yekuana myth: Wattuna continued from above).*

“Then *Medatia* wanted to try out what he had learned. He sang. He called for the Masters of other houses. Some saw him as a deer when they arrived. Others thought he was a spider. *Medatia* himself began to wonder: ‘perhaps I am not a human being’, he thought.

‘Don’t be concerned’ said the *Setawa Kaliana* ‘They are all speaking the truth. You are as much a human being as you are a deer, a spider. You are all that which everyone can see. You are not a *so’to* [Yekuana term for person]: you are a shaman. You can become anything you want. You are all that which the eyes of the people on Earth and Sky see.’

*Medatia* began to understand the Masters. Their words no longer appeared bizarre. They were all his brothers, his family. He could speak like the *mawadi*. He saw dogs as dogs no longer as jaguars. And saw the *mawadi* as they really are, not like snakes and anacondas but as people...

This is how *Medatia* became a shaman...” (220).

### ***MP, animism and totemism***

The relation between MP and the more historically established, so-to-speak, ontological arrangements such as totemism, animism, and naturalism has been debated ever since Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) paper. To cut a long story short, Descola (1996), inspired by his study of human-nature relations among the Achuar, recovered the concept of animism, positing it as an inversion or opposite of totemism due to its emphasis on the social nature of human/non-human relations. Viveiros de Castro (1998), drawing from Tupi ethnography (Viveiros de Castro, 1992, Lima, 1996) and a large pool of Amerindian ethnographic material, suggested that what Descola had been calling animism was best described as MP, and that due to its particular nature/culture and universal/particular configuration (see above), it was in fact an inversion of Western naturalism rather than totemism. Descola (2005) converges with this point even if he holds an ongoing debate as to the geographical distribution of the MP phenomenon with respect to what he calls “standard animism,” and thus disputes whether it is MP or animism that could be seen as an essential feature of Amerindian socio-cosmologies and conceptual imaginations.

I briefly recover this history, not to enter the debate, but rather to point out that the possible relation between MP and totemism was somewhat subdued by the clear-cut contrast with naturalism and the debate

revolving around MP and animism (see Descola, 2005; Viveiros de Castro, 2008a). It is also the case that both Viveiros de Castro and Descola, inspired by their ethnographic experience, felt the need to recover the elements of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism that had played second fiddle to metaphor, discontinuity and totemism, elements emphasizing metonymy, continuity and sacrifice (see Viveiros de Castro in Descola & Viveiros de Castro, 2009). So whilst with Lévi-Strauss totemism was selling high, by the time MP entered the scene and animism was unearthed, it appeared to have passed its sell-by date.<sup>3</sup>

### **Part I: MP and totemism**

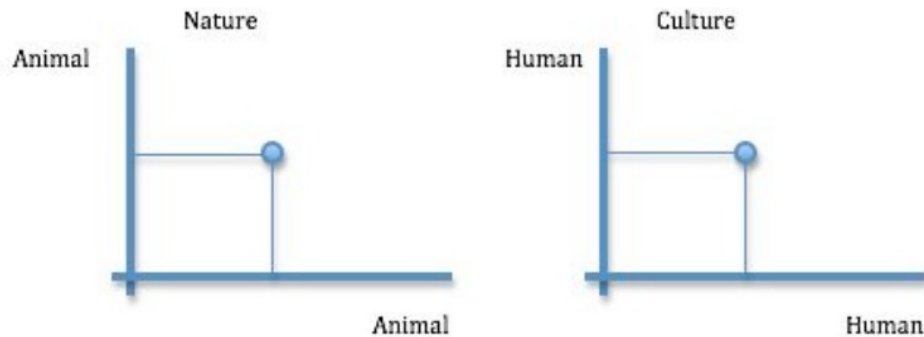
Having presented some necessary context about MP and its relation to other ontological arrangements, I begin the first part of my demonstration. MP is clearly neither an inversion nor a type of totemism, but perhaps a true structural transformation of it. The inspiration for this argument comes directly from Viveiros de Castro's own intimation of this relation in the following passage about the CFM and totemism:

“It is certainly no accident that Lévi-Strauss' last two mythological books are constructed as developments of precisely these two figures of 'anti-static' dualism: *The Jealous Potter* (1985) is a systematic illustration of the canonical formula, while the *History of Lynx* (1991) focuses on the dynamic instability (the 'perpetual disequilibrium') of Amerindian dualities. This makes me wonder whether we are not faced by a single macro-structure, of which the canonical formula (which 'pre-deconstructs' the totemic schematism of the type A:B::C:D) and the dynamic dualism (which corrodes the static parity of binary oppositions) are but two formulations. With the canonical formula, instead of a simple opposition between totemic metaphoricity and sacrificial metonymicity, the emphasis shifts to the equivalence between a metaphoric relation and a metonymic relation, the 'twist'... involved in the passage from a metaphor to a metonym or vice-versa... – the celebrated 'double twist' that embodies the

<sup>3</sup> Truth be told this contrast holds best when considering Lévi-Strauss's core structuralist moment represented by his writings in *The savage mind* and *Totemism*. As Viveiros de Castro has written (2008b), with the *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss can be cast himself as the founder of post-structuralism.

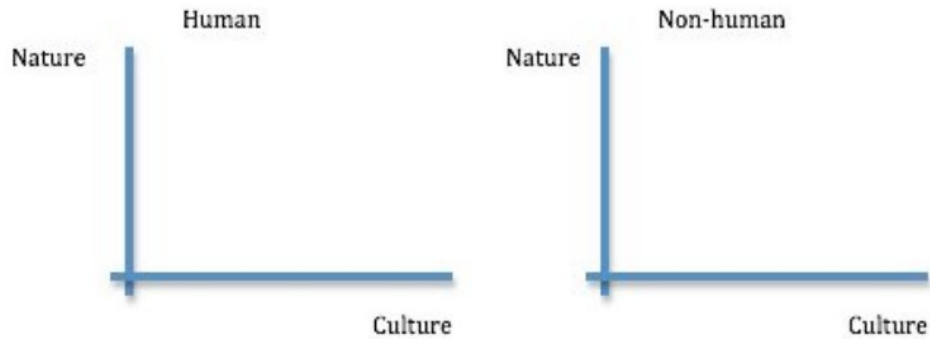
operation of structural transformation par excellence. The asymmetric conversion between the literal and figurative meaning, the term and the function, the container and the contained, the continuous and the discontinuous, the system and its exterior – these are the true structuralist themes. Becoming is a double twist.” (Viveiros de Castro, 2007:20; 2008:112)

Totemism, in Lévi-Strauss’s (1962) classical description establishes a relation of homology between the differences internal to a natural series of animals and the differences internal to a social or cultural series of human groups. Differences in the natural series thus correspond to differences in the cultural/social one. In this view, no true transformation occurs between the natural and the cultural series, just a homology of relations  $A/B = C/D$ . This can be expressed in the following – admittedly unorthodox – graphic representation totemism:



The plotted point represents a relationship, whichever it may be, between animal and animal (A/B), and between human and human (C/D). Their identical location in both the ‘natural space’ and the ‘cultural space’ signifies the homology; the lack of any transformation in the passage from one space to the other (The ‘=’ sign).

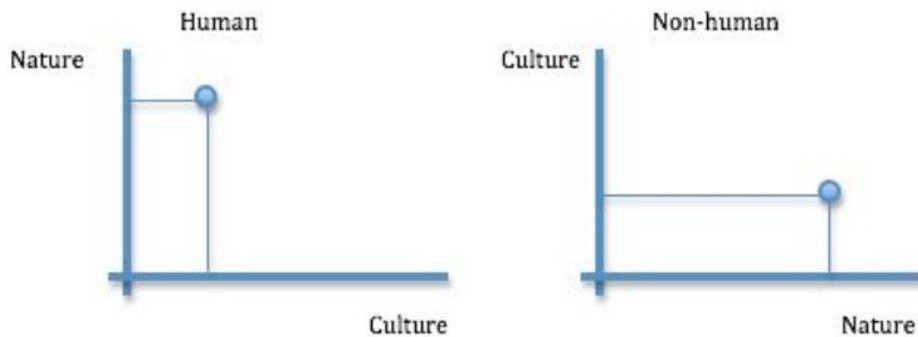
A structural transformation of totemism would require us to apply a “double twist” to this configuration of the type that appears in the last term of the CFM:  $F_x(a):F_y(b)::F_x(b):F_{a-1}(y)$ . First, terms must substitute for relations. This constitutes a figure ground reversal and corresponds to the twist in the CFM of ‘y’ in  $F_y(b)$  being a function to ‘y’ being a term in  $F_{a-1}(y)$ .



Step one transforms what was a space into an axis, that is, 'nature' and 'culture' now operate as axis and, correspondingly, 'human' and 'non-human' become spaces. This already gets us closer to the MP arrangement, for now, 'nature' and 'culture' are not two ontological domains but variables internal to human and non-human spaces. Any point plotted on this space, any relation that is, is an N/C relation that we could interpret as the conjunction of a self reflexive view – 'culture' or 'humanity' – and a 'perspective of the Other' – 'nature'.

The second twist requires us to invert the two new terms to be related, namely 'nature' and 'culture'. This corresponds to the twist in the fourth term of the CFM from 'a' to 'a-1'. In our case, we can interpret 'a' as 'nature' and 'a-1' as 'nature-1', that can only be 'culture'; that against which nature is defined (the inverse operation is equally valid, where 'culture-1' = 'nature').

The second transformation or twist leaves us with the following graph:



This time, the different location of the plotted relation is a consequence of the switch in the axis of the non-human space, in such a way that ‘nature’ in the human space maps onto ‘culture’ in the non-human one. This represents the difference in perspective between humans and non-humans (one’s blood is the other’s maize beer, for example). This leaves us with the reciprocal perspectival arrangement of MP, where the form of the Other (animal, spirit, the dead, non-humans in general) is ‘nature’. As we can see, MP operates a bidirectional  $H \leftarrow \rightarrow NH$  transformation where N/C becomes C/N, each relation indicating a double (reflexive and Other) perspective internal to each space.

If this demonstration holds true we can say that there exists a function called “structural transformation” that converts totemism into MP:

$$F_{\text{structural transformation}}(\text{totemism}) = \text{MP}$$

In the third part of this paper I explore some implications of this connection. Before getting there, however, it is worth considering some of Lévi-Strauss’s own reflections of the possible transformations of totemism.

## Part II: Transformations of totemism

It is well known that Lévi-Strauss de-institutionalized totemism and made of it a primary and universal mode of logical reasoning, this he did mainly in *The Savage Mind* by analyzing a series of nature/culture arrangements as transformations of totemism.

Whilst considering the relation between totemic groups and food prohibitions he actually encounters a scenario among the Chippewa that he casts as a double twist on the standard totemic arrangement.

“Finally there are cases where the idea of eating prohibitions is as it were turned inside out. The prohibition is turned into an obligation and applies not to Ego himself but to someone else; and it no longer relates to the totemic animal thought of as food but to the food of this food.” (1969 [1962]: 100-102).

As he comments on his later work on myth, Lévi-Strauss used the CFM ‘all the time’, even if that is hardly apparent to the reader of *Mythologiques*. Later on, discussing a Tikuna form of totemism he writes on their use of animal ‘clothes’ as emblems for differentiating social

groups and concludes:

“The fur, feathers, beak and teeth can be mine because they are that in which the eponymous animal and I differ from each other: this difference is assumed by man as an emblem and to assert his symbolic relation with the animal. But the parts which are edible and so can be assimilated are the sign of genuine consubstantiality which, contrary to what one might suppose, it is the real aim of the prohibition on eating them to deny. Ethnologists have made the mistake of taking only this second aspect into account and this has led them to conceive the relation between man and animal to be of a single kind: identity, affinity or participation. Matters are in fact infinitely more complex: *there is an exchange of similarities and differences between culture and nature*, sometimes amongst animals on the one side and man on the other and sometimes as between animals and men.” (Idem.: 107, emphasis added).

I point this out because we shall see in Part III that the CFM offers a holographic view of relations, where the asymmetry Lévi-Strauss notes here between sameness and difference, where the former must cede to the latter for culture to extract itself out of nature and simultaneously render human groups different from each other, is dissolved and shown to be reversible – and hence an illusion, even if a necessary one. What Lévi-Strauss here calls a negation, *tout court*, his own CFM shows to be an obviation (Wagner, 1978): sameness can only be backgrounded at the expense of overlooking other contexts in which it will be the difference which recedes with sameness correspondingly taking the foreground.

This is precisely what happens when Lévi-Strauss shifts his classic formulation of totemism, from a system of homological relations between differences to a system of homological relations between terms.

“In this case the implicit content of the structure would no longer be that clan 1 differs from clan 2 as for instance the eagle differs from the bear but rather that clan 1 is like the eagle and clan 2 like the bear. In other words *the nature of clan 1 and the nature of clan 2 would each be involved separately* [*isolément mises en cause*, in the French version] *instead of the formal relation between them.*” (115, emphasis added)

The shift is necessary to account for the ethnographic evidence of totemic groups and animals often sharing important (physical or behavioral) aspects of their makeup. Moreover, it can be said that one of the effects of MP is precisely to render suspect the nature of humanness. At this stage Lévi-Strauss notes, more as an ideational experiment, how both aspects of totemism work against each other, the more social differences among human groups is stressed the less the sameness with animals can be affirmed, and the further the sameness with animals goes the “more difficult it will become for it to maintain its links with other social groups and, in particular to exchange its sisters and daughters...” (Ibid. :116-7). The effect that Wagner ascribes to the combined work of two forms of symbolization – conventionalizing and differentiating – Lévi-Strauss finds in the perpendicular, so-to-speak, work of two conventional symbolization efforts (i.e. two forms of classification at cross purposes). This again, is what Lévi-Strauss’s CFM will “correct” by showing the interchangeability of metaphor and metonymy.

Lévi-Strauss concludes on this same subject: “Two images, one social and the other natural, and each articulated separately, will be replaced by a socio-natural image, single but fragmented.” (Ibid. :117). Now a series of dyads of socio-natural constitution will immediately reminds us of MP. However, Lévi-Strauss seems not to have pursued the full consequences of fact that the peoples where totemic arrangements can be found to stress both analogy as metaphor (classic totemic formulation) and analogy as sameness or metonymy (shifted totemic formulation).<sup>4</sup> Consider, for example, his comments on a Chikasaw ethnography where the human-animal sharing of behaviors appears extreme (the red fox people are professional thieves; the puma people live in the mountains; wild cat people sleep during the day and hunt by night, etc):

“No society could allow itself to ‘act nature’ to this extent or it would split up into a whole lot of independent, hostile bands, each denying that the others were human. The data which Swanton collected consist of sociological myths as well as or rather than ethnographic facts.” (Ibid. :119, emphasis added)

Whilst the phenomenon is different from MP, the reasons Lévi-Strauss expounds and that amount to “acting of nature” and “sociological

<sup>4</sup> It is precisely this that Wagner (1977) does to great analytical effect.

myths”, very much fit with human/non-human relations in MP.

Perhaps the most interesting transformation Lévi-Strauss examines is that which converts totemic groups, as he notes typically linked to ‘primitive peoples’, to castes, typically related to ‘higher civilizations.’ But beyond this political leveling, it is interesting because the transformation of exogamous animal totemic groups into endogamous functional castes involves a double twist of the CFM type as Viveiros de Castro (2009) reminds us.

“That said, we must follow through the consequences of the fact that the totemism’s anaologic schema, with its symmetric correspondence of natural and cultural differences, is based on an asymmetry that is its *raison d’être*: it is precisely because the totemic species are endopractic – bears marry bears, lynx marry lynx – that they are apt to signify the exopractic social species – the people of the clan of the bear marry those of the clan of the lynx. External differences become internal differences, distinctions become relations, terms become functions. A canonical formula lurks within totemism – that which transforms the totemic machine into a machine of castes, as we can see in chapter IV of *The Savage Mind*.” (143, my translation).

It is interesting that Lévi-Strauss envisions castes as a socially realizable transformation of totemism whilst he deemed the last example, a nature-based caste system as opposed to a cultural-functional one, unviable. Even when Lévi-Strauss notes the symmetry of the two,

“It is as if in America the rudiments of castes had been contaminated by totemic classifications, while in India the vestiges of totemic groups had allowed themselves to be won over by symbolism of technological or occupational origin.” (Ibid. :122).

A certain asymmetry holds as far as the full realization of the tendency goes: the one was only ‘contaminated’ the other was ‘won over’. I suspect this is at least in part due to Lévi-Strauss’s adherence to the metaphorical component of analogy which precluded him from conceiving (at least in *The Savage Mind*) of a concept such as multi-naturalism, or of the association between nature/unity/given and culture/diversity/artificial appearing in other configurations, as Viveiros de Castro (1996) and Wagner (1981) would later develop. This

is, I think, the essence of Wagner's critique of Lévi-Strauss having "fought shy of completely relativistic conclusions" in the closing pages of *The Invention of Culture* (1981:150). And it is somewhat paradoxical that these 'completely relativistic' conclusions are inscribed in Lévi-Strauss's CFM – as I have been commenting in this discussion and we shall see better in Part III when we see its intrinsic relation with MP. The following passages on the relation between castes and totemic groups illustrate the apparent impossibility of multi-naturalism and a corresponding given and unique culture in Lévi-Strauss's analysis.

"There are in fact only two true models of concrete diversity: one on the plane of nature, namely that of the diversity of species, and the other on the cultural plane provided by the diversity of functions. The model illustrated by marriage exchanges lying between these two true models, has an ambiguous and equivocal character. Women are alike so far as nature is concerned and can be regarded as different only from the cultural angle. But if the first point of view is predominant (as is the case when it is the natural model which is chosen as the model of diversity) resemblance otherwise outweighs difference. Women certainly have to be exchanged since they have decreed to be different. But this exchange presupposes that basically they are held to be alike. Conversely, when the other viewpoint is taken and a cultural model of diversity is adopted, difference, which corresponds to the cultural aspect, outweighs resemblance. Women are only recognized as alike within the limits of their respective social groups and consequently cannot be exchanged between one caste and another. Castes decree women to be naturally heterogeneous. And the final reason for this difference between the two systems is that castes exploit cultural heterogeneity in earnest while totemic groups only create the illusion of exploiting natural difference." (Ibid. : 124).

In this view, totemic groups are under an illusion precisely because their model of diversity is nature – which ultimately imposes its unity – and not culture – which is the true means for humans to differentiate. Were a multi-natural possibility considered the asymmetry between castes and totemic groups would disappear: both would be equally under real illusions. Lévi-Strauss continues:

“Introducing (socially) instituted diversity into a single natural species, the human species, is not therefore the same as projecting the diversity (naturally) existing between animal and plant species on to the social plane. Societies with totemic groups and exogamous sections in vain believe that they manage to play the same game with species which are different, and women who are identical. *They do not notice that since women are identical, it falls to the social will to make them different, while species being different, no one can make them identical, in the sense of all subjects in the same way to human will. Men produce other men, they do not produce ostriches.*” (Ibid. : 127, emphasis added).

Here he contrasts the difference between given (nature) and artificial (culture). Once again, were the possibility of a given culture and an artificial nature conceivable, Lévi-Strauss would have certainly taken this argument elsewhere. Finally, it is the truth of the artificialness of culture and the innateness of nature that underpins this closing comment:

“castes naturalize a true culture falsely [this is what we now know as ‘essentialism’: the unwarranted substitution of the artificial for the innate], totemic groups culturalize a false nature truly [this is the impossibility of multi-naturalism where the artificial takes the place of the innate].” (Ibid.)

Before continuing let me make clear that the point of this discussion has been to explore the ways in which Lévi-Strauss conceived of transformations of totemism. We must keep in mind that issues singled out here are overcome in other parts of Lévi-Strauss’s work. In the same ‘fully relativistic’ spirit of the CFM, for example, he notes at the end of *The Naked Man* how the changing structure within a group of myths is inseparable from a correlative movement from one semantic register to another. These transformations, he says as if spelling out the CFM, are like images turned from left to right, up side down, and from positive to negative. In short, figure-ground reversals “similar to the mechanism of the pun which, when properly used, causes a word of a sentence to display, as if in the manner of a negative, *the other meaning* that the same word or sentence might take on, if transposed into a different logical context.” (1990 [1971] : 650, emphasis in the original). The resemblance between this way of envisioning structural transformation and Wagner’s obviational process is clear, as it is, for

that matter, with Crook's (2007) description of Bolivip (Papua New Guinea) elder's "turning their words around": metaphor and pun are thus the "basis of all semiology" (Lévi-Strauss, *ibid.* cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2008b: 10).

One final comparison deserves our attention before we close this discussion on transformations of totemism: according to Viveiros de Castro (2009), MP is a CFM-type transformation of multiculturalism.

"The notion of multinaturalism reveals itself useful here because of its paradoxical character: our macro-concept of 'nature' cannot really be put in the plural. This immediately leads us to realize the ontological [solecisme] in the idea of '(many) natures', and hence to realize the corrective displacement it imposes. To paraphrase Deleuze's formula about relativism (1988:30), we shall say then that Amazonian multinaturalism does not so much affirm a variety of natures but rather the naturalness of variation, variation as nature. The inversion of the Western formula of multiculturalism does not apply only to the terms (nature and culture) in their respective determination of function (unity and diversity), but it also applies to the values themselves of 'term' and 'function'. Anthropological readers will here recognize Lévi-Strauss's canonical formula (1958/1955: 252-53): multinatural perspectivism is a double twist transformation of Western multiculturalism." (42, my translation).

Whilst Viveiros de Castro indicates that:

(1) CFM (multi-culturalism) = MP

We seem to have run into a contradiction for we have shown above that:

(2) CFM (totemism) = MP

These two formulas can and cannot be true at the same time. Let me treat these possibilities in turn. If they are true, this means that totemism = multiculturalism, which seems bizarre. But we have just spent considerable effort showing that Lévi-Strauss's totemism has in common with multiculturalism the given-ness and unity of nature and the conviction that real diversity is only possible in constructed cultures. In this respect the totemism = multiculturalism equivalence

holds. If the two formulas are now considered not simultaneously true, is one of them correct and the other not? I think not, for I think the equivalence established in each turns on different aspects of the nature-culture configuration. (1) devolves on the unity/diversity variable of culture and nature; (2) relates the human/non-human pair with the nature/culture pair. In (1) ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ are absent, we know nothing of exactly who are the subjects or objects of nature and culture. Contrastingly, in (2) the issue of diversity and unity is not addressed, we only have dyads in human or non-human ‘spaces’. The two transformations are thus complementary. The contrast with totemism and multiculturalism simply renders different aspects of MP visible. But what is more interesting, however, is that we can now propose that MP, Naturalism and Totemism constitute a transformation group of our Nature and Culture under the CFM. If so, these different ontologies may be said to be puns of each other, their difference being at once subtle and ‘making all the difference in the world’ (is Lévi-Strauss’s caste-totemic group relation, the one naturalizing a true culture falsely the other culturalizing a false nature truly, not a pun?)

### **PART III: MP and the CFM**

At the end of Part I, I suggested that there was a function called “structural transformation” that converts totemism into MP as follows:

$$F_{\text{structural transformation}}(\text{totemism}) = \text{MP}$$

After a brief excursion into other transformations of totemism, I now return to this statement focusing on the intrinsic relation between MP and structural transformation itself, that is, between MP and the CFM. The inspiration for this part of my argument comes from Wagner’s comment that a perspectivist statement like the one I will now analyze is “the essence of perspectivism. The ‘double comparative analogy’, like Lévi-Strauss’s Canonic formula for myth” (Wagner, 2010).

It is noteworthy that Stépanoff (2009), who is critical of MP as a theory of an ontology and its congruence with Siberian ethnographic materials,<sup>5</sup> actually uses the expression ‘canonical formula’ in relation to MP:

<sup>5</sup> See Pederson (2001) and Inner Asia’s special 2007 volume on the subject.

“Amerindian perspectivism, in its canonical formula expressed by Viveiros de Castro (1998: 470), is strongly connected to hunting:

Humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans (...)

A more abstract formula of perspectivism, according to Pedersen, would be that ‘the Other will see itself as human, and thus humans as Others’.” (Ibid.:285-6)

Further on, talking about Siberian narratives he offers the following explanation:

“Chukchi narratives rather constitute a reflection about relations, namely relations of relations, which a classical structural formula suffices to note:

[man : seal] :: [ke’le : man]

Which means: the relation between man and seal is comparable to the relation between spirit [ke’le] and man. Likewise, if we take a famous Amazonian ‘perspectivist’ exemplum:

[man : beer] :: [jaguar : blood]

The relation between jaguar and blood is comparable to the relation between man and beer. A general formulation of these perspectivist stories would be:

[man : man’s prey] :: [man’s predator : man] (Ibid.:289-90)”

I think Stépanoff is misled by choosing the image of a static structuralist dualism to state his point, for he dismisses the ternary character of many such dualisms, which I shall attempt to show is also of the essence of MP statements. Let us recall how many structural dualisms are in truth a triad, where one term of the pair encloses a ‘bundled’ pair itself. This is particularly evident in the cascade transformations baptized in *The History of Lynx* as ‘perpetual disequilibrium’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1991: chap. xix) and in Lévi-Strauss’s

topological approach to dual organizations, in particular his discussion of diametric and concentric dualism (Ibid. [1958] 2005: 176-7). Another crucial point overlooked by Stépanoff is that both MP and the CFM say something other than ‘is comparable to’ when crossing the human / non-human divide. In both MP and CFM, it is the nature of these ‘:’ and “::” relations that are at issue and that, in a way, subvert the meaning they have in the classic structural double comparisons of the (x : y :: a : b) type.

My contention is that we are better lead in thinking about MP by the CFM. In order to make this point let us now take a classic MP situation and put it in the terms of the CFM.

“A jaguar sees a human being as prey, as a peccary for example, just as peccaries, seeing themselves as humans, see a human being as a predator, as a jaguar for example.”

Here we have three terms or positions: human, jaguar and peccary. We also have two relations that define these three positions: a relation of reflexivity that defines one position, that of humanity, and a relation of predation, which is two sided, for one can predate or be predated. This is why it defines two positions: predator and prey. At this point the reader may jump back a bit and read Stépanoff’s rendering of MP statements and realize that the reflexive position is missing, which is why he (and Pederson, as cited in Stépanoff, for that matter) ends with a locked double pairing that only considers the predator-prey relation.

We can now rewrite the CFM as follows:

$$F_x(a):F_y(b)::F_x(b):F_{a-1}(y)$$

$$F_{\text{predation}}(\text{jaguar}) : F_{\text{reflexivity}}(\text{human}) :: F_{\text{predation}}(\text{human}) : F_{\text{jaguar-1}}(\text{reflexivity})$$

The left side of the equation expresses an ethnographically verifiable fact: that the jaguar is the canonical Amazonian predator in myth and life, and that humanity as MP shows, is the form of the reflexive position, the enunciated “I”. Some ‘is to’ relation (the ‘:’ sign) remains to be figured out when exploring the other side of the equation. On the right side of the equation we read that humans as predators have some kind of relation with a “jaguar-1” function, that is a ‘peccary’ (the canonical prey) function, of reflexivity.

How to interpret all this?

The right hand part of the CFM spells out all that must be obviated in the left side of the equation to establish the analogy there evoked – the ‘is to’ relation. In this case, it spells out which relations must be overlooked and which must be simultaneously highlighted in their place in order for us to establish ‘humanity’ as the reflexive position and ‘jaguar-ness’ as the ideal form of predation.

What the right side evokes is that:

a) humans also predate, and hence are in some contexts – most importantly hunting – jaguars. Humans become-jaguar. This is the point of view of peccaries that was not apparent in the left side of the equation because here we only ‘see’ humans as standing for the reflexive position.

b) ‘prey-ness’ is the correlate of the reflexive position. This is the point of view of the jaguar that was not apparent in the left side of the equation. This says what all Indians know, that they might see themselves as humans but that they are prey (like peccaries then) of the jaguar, or any other agent like spirits or other monsters that take human lives. Humans also become-peccary then.

Another way of seeing this becomes clear if we set organize the CFM as follows:<sup>6</sup>

$$F_{\text{predation}}(\text{jaguar}) : F_{\text{reflexivity}}(\text{human})$$

::

$$F_{\text{predation}}(\text{human}) : F_{\text{jaguar-1}}(\text{reflexivity})$$

In this way we can say that Jaguar and Human are ‘congruent’ when the predator function is considered, leaving the third – still not present term – implicit: animal (peccary) is “the form of the Other as object”. Similarly Humanity as the reflexive position is ‘congruent’ with the prey function of Reflexivity, that is “the form of the Self as object” of another regard – also only present implicitly: animal (jaguar or divinity, human’s predator) as “the form of Other as subject”.

Note that the left hand part of the perspectivist CFM above, represents the point of view of human-ness (as opposed to human beings), whilst the right hand reminds us of the perspective of the Other, which is decomposed in two points of view: that of the jaguar

<sup>6</sup> This layout and argumentation follows Almeida (2008:167).

( $F_{\text{jaguar-1}}$ (Reflexivity)) and that of the peccary ( $F_{\text{predation}}$ (human)). The consideration of all these views reveals ‘humanity’ in all its positional configurations: not just the form of the reflexive position, the enunciated ‘I’, but also, the possibility of being predator and prey, of objectifying the other by becoming-jaguar and being objectified by becoming-peccary (i.e. Someone else’s becoming-jaguar).

The right hand side of a perspectivist CFM (henceforth CFM/MP) doubly obviates the left hand side, by contrasting the possibilities of becoming with the conventional perspective of humanity. If “obviation is the process by which the realm of human responsibility must forever be created out of the innate, and the realm of the innate must be constituted out of that of the artificial” (Wagner, 1978:31) then we can see how the human and Other-derived perspectives play each other’s ‘innate’ (conventional) and ‘artificial’ (becoming) to each other.

Let us now consider another example to illustrate a variation of this exercise. I here return to the Makuna auto-ethnography presented above Århem, et al (2004).

“Animals, in and of themselves, are people in their own world...

[when a hunt is needed for ritual festivals] the kûmu [shaman] negotiates with the master of the house of animals... If, for example, there is to be an exchange with peccaries, the shaman speaks with his thoughts with Wümi bükü, who after reaching an agreement with the shaman, will speak to Kãmükükü, the master of peccaries requesting him to send a certain amount of baskets of a given fruit starch, according to the agreement just made. This master [of the specific species, the peccaries] will ask what he will receive in exchange and Wümi bükü will give him a gourd of coca that the shaman has previously given him... Then Wümi bükü tells Kãmükükü to go to a certain part of the forest to deliver what has been requested.

People go out to hunt and take dogs, blowguns or bows and arrows, as soon as the peccaries perceive the group of people that are there to receive the requested baskets, they drop the fruit starch baskets on the ground; when the people strike with their arrows, they take the baskets and the animals themselves that accompany their master Kãmükükü leave running. If the person that goes to pick up the baskets of fruit starch is a bad

hunter and hits none [of the animals], these return to their house and say they have delivered the baskets, but that no one wanted to receive them; in this case, the master says: “ah ok, they didn’t want anything” and the negotiation must be repeated.” (370-373, my translation).

The seamless passages from talking about animals to fruit starch baskets and from hunting to exchange reveal the unfolding of two parallel events that may be summed up as:<sup>7</sup>

Humans are hunting peccaries

Humans are exchanges fruit starch for coca

In this case we write the CFM as follows:

$$F_{\text{exchange}}(\text{animal}) : F_{\text{hunt}}(\text{human}) :: F_{\text{exchange}}(\text{human}) : F_{\text{Animal-1}}(\text{hunt})$$

In this case the two relations are those of predation (hunt) and exchange, and the three positions are those of humans, animals and fruit starch.

The left side of the equation expresses that there is some ‘is to’ relation between human hunting and animal exchange that remains to be figured out when exploring the other side of the equation. On the right side of the equation we read that human exchange has some kind of relation with a “Animal-1” function, that is a ‘fruit starch’ (the canonical form of food in this Makuna context) function, of hunting. As with our last case examined let me suggest how can we read this.

The right hand part of the CFM spells out all that must be obviated in the left side of the equation to establish the analogy there evoked – the ‘is to’ relation. In this case, it spells out which relations must be overlooked and which must be simultaneously highlighted in their place in order for us to establish that human hunting corresponds with animal exchange.

What the right side evokes is that:

a) it is humans who exchange, this is the perspective animals have of themselves, they become-human. This was not apparent in the left

<sup>7</sup> This interpretation of the Makuna hunt involving parallel and implicated events comes directly from Lima’s (1996) own analysis of Juruna peccary hunts. In that case instead of a hunt/exchange parallelism it is a hunt/war raid one.

hand side of the equation because here we only ‘see’ animals as standing for exchange, and for that to be true, the humanity of animals must be made explicit. Exchange is a thing of humans.

b) ‘Animal-1’, that is ‘fruit starch’, is the correlate of hunting. This is again the point of view of the animal master that was not apparent in the left side of the equation. This says what the Makuna knows, that the animals they hunt and eat are in truth fruit starch, this is what the whole negotiation between the shaman and the animal master is about. We know from other parts of the Makuna texts that animals must become-fruit starch so that their tobacco and coca constitution does not cause the Makuna to fall ill (Århem et al, 2004).

Again the left hand part of the perspectivist CFM above represents the point of view of humans, which includes the acknowledgment of animal exchange. This is particularly present in the shaman’s understanding. We could say that the point of view of humans is internally divided between that of the hunters and that of the shaman, and the latter is in a way ‘allied’ with that of the animals. This division is signaled by the Makuna narrator’s comments about the how the shaman works “with his thoughts”; about how his knowledge is “complicated” and “hard to understand”; about him talking of things and relations that exist “only in the imagination”. The right hand side reminds us of the perspective of the Other, which itself includes two aspects that appear to be shared by both animals and the animal master:  $F_{\text{exchange}}(\text{Humans})$ , says the animals see a transaction, they leave the baskets in the forest as part of an exchange; and  $F_{\text{Animal-1}}(\text{Hunt})$ , which states that, particularly in the animal master’s regard, he is not giving away animals in animal form (the hunt is not hunt after all) but rather as fruit starch. In fact, the coca he receives in exchange is the guarantee of animal reproduction.<sup>8</sup> In this sense the animal master’s perspective, that substitutes hunt/predation for exchange/fruit starch, is linked to that of the human shaman with whom the negotiation takes place.

<sup>8</sup> “Exchange relations with game animals are very complex and they occur in different ways. The general idea is that of an exchange of life in which the kúmu negotiates game animals as prey for coca; the master of animals sends the prey converted/transformed into fruit starch whilst the shaman sends coca that represents the life of humans. That coca is not a payment for the animals but a way of giving life and fertility to the house of animals.” (Århem, *et al*, 2004: 368, my translation).

### ***The MP and CFM congruence: a few insights***

If the above arguments and examples are correct, we may draw some interesting insights and lines of enquiry:

a) A CFM/MP statement yields a holographic ‘view from everywhere’; perspectives and their shadows, so-to-speak, become apparent. This stance may be acknowledged by people but cannot be experienced by an agent – with the exception of shamans. At any given moment, an actor must ‘mask’ (Wagner, 1981) some such relations to be effective in imposing his/her point of view against the probable presence of an Other perspective. Although not evident in the Makuna texts, we must presume that during the hunt itself, Makuna hunters must concentrate on their excursion being a hunt. A disjunction between hunters’ (predatory) and shamans’ (exchange) views and actions is of the essence in Arara hunting (Texeira-Pinto, 2011). A good example of this necessary masking comes from Lima’s (1996) description of the Juruna hunt. The Juruna hunt actually consists of two simultaneous events: the Juruna are hunting peccaries whilst the peccaries, seeing themselves human, are engaged in a raid against enemy potential affines (the Juruna hunters). During the hunt, it is of utmost importance for the hunter to retain the enunciator position: he must not be afraid, he must not mention or joke with his peccary preys lest he ‘give voice’ to the peccaries – a fatal move that ends with death (the peccaries capture an enemy).

“This hunt is seen as a dangerous enterprise; peccaries are very violent and they dare to confront the hunter... If the hunter shouts, his soul can leave to live with the peccaries. The same destiny will come upon he who feels fear in the face of the frightening peccaries: afraid, his soul flees and is captured by the peccaries.” (1996:22, my translation).<sup>9</sup>

In other words, however real, during the hunt the humanity of peccaries must not be evoked, it can only be present subdued, in the silence it enforces, just like the shadows of the ‘is to’ relation in one side of the CFM can only be apparent in the other side. This also amounts to saying that the peccary’s humanity and animality must stand in an avoidance relation: related by separation and mediated by a third

<sup>9</sup> According to Lima (Ibid.) the same masking operation must hold between the two implicated lifelines of the Juruna person and his/her soul, who must remain ignorant of each other’s doings.

(human) party.

b) The ‘is to’ relations in the CFM should then be read as the double obviation that must exist for the relation of any of its subject-predicate terms to hold true. For instance,  $F_{\text{reflexivity}}(\text{Human})$ , that humanity represents the reflexive position, only holds true if we obviate the perspective of Jaguar (human as prey) and that of Peccary (human as predator). Equally  $F_{\text{hunt}}(\text{Human})$  obviates the perspective of animals (and the Makuna shaman) where there is no hunt but exchange and predation doesn’t involve game and meat but rather fruit starch. Taking one step back in the CFM, it is only with this double obviation, with the stabilization as-it-were of each term, that the analogic (‘is to’) relations between the terms on the same side of CFM can hold true. It is also only with this holding still of an image that we can consider that one side in our CFM/MP corresponds to a human/conventional perspective and the other to an Other-derived perspective which signals the possibilities of becoming. As we can see, there is a lot more to ‘is to’ relations in the CFM than the standard ‘is comparable to’ reading suggests. The CFM is all about the obviation behind the possibility of comparison. Viveiros de Castro writes above “Becoming is a double twist” surely not only with the CFM, but also MP, in mind. And if Wagner (1986: 131) suggests that “obviation is the opposite of structuralism” in may be said, and for the same reasons, that “the CFM is opposite of structuralism”. So much is evident when we contrast the CFM/MP with its ternary dualism and double obviation – the fundamental structural transformation in Viveiros de Castro’s words – with the static structuralist double analogies or oppositions. “Becoming” and “obviation” are the problematization of the ‘is to’ analogies – the ‘:’ and ‘::’ signs. Analogies or metaphors are always partial, which is why they are not just classificatory devices, but infectious, corrupting, counter-classifying or dissolving devices too. The CFM works against itself revealing the reciprocal constitution of symbol and reality, of self and other, as does MP. In a way, and allowing myself the pun, the CFM put meaning into perspective (Lévi-Strauss tells us at the end of *The Raw and the Cooked* that myths signify signification itself) whilst MP put perspective into meaning.

c) Lévi-Strauss’s use of the CFM renders visible the twisted connections between myths. In this sense the CFM transforms myths into one another. But this is always done crossing a cultural divide, involving distinct peoples. MP statements, on their part, express

transformations of perspectives across the human/non-human fields yet within the purview of a single cultural group. This contrast reminds us of one of the conundrums that led to the description of MP: Amerindian's simultaneous generosity and stinginess regarding the status of humanity, the former related to animism and the latter to ethnocentrism (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). It is well known that inter-ethnic and human/non-human relations are, in Amerindian socio-cosmology, intertwined, with foreigners typically considered less-than-human and non-humans often treated as neighboring ethnic groups. In this light the congruence between MP statements and CFM is less surprising; the transformation operated is the same, what varies from case to case is the objects of transformation.<sup>10</sup> We could then begin thinking of different perspectival arrangements across cultural groups as being related by the CFM (Viveiros de Castro has engaged in such experiments pers. comm.). Furthermore, we could think about CFM relations between myths as perspectival arrangements or turn this last exercise inside-out and see perspectival events within a given myth as an instances of the CFM. Would this contravene Lévi-Strauss's stress on the CFM needing to cross ethnological, geographical or historical frontiers? Do not the non-humans of any given culture, who live in a world all of their own as the Makuna narrators say, fulfill these requirements?

### **Inconclusion**

Instead of a wrapping up of my arguments, I end this paper with an additional experiment upon an already experimental set of ideas, a final operation the meaning of which escapes me. At best I offer an inconclusion.

The operation is the doubling of the CFM/MP on itself. Let us return to the first CFM/MP presented:

CFM/MP (1):

$$F_{\text{predation}}(\text{jaguar}) : F_{\text{reflexivity}}(\text{human})$$

<sup>10</sup> I was at first tempted to think that MP and CFM differ as a matter of scale. Yet note that it can be argued with equal validity that a) MP, dealing with the human/non-human divide is more inclusive than the CFM and in that sense an up-scaled version of the latter, or b) that the CFM crossing cultural divides is the more inclusive, and hence MP is a miniaturization of the former. Both size and containment are here undecidable.

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$$F_{\text{predation}}(\text{human}) : F_{\text{jaguar-1}}(\text{reflexivity})$$

Recall that the left hand side of the above CFM stood for the conventional view of humanity and that the right hand side of the equation revealed Other-derived perspectives, constituting also the possibilities of becoming (becoming-jaguar and becoming-peccary). Keeping this in mind, let us make terms 1 and 2 of CFM/MP (1) the first term of a new CFM/MP (2). Let us also make terms 3 and 4 of CFM/MP (1) the second term of a CFM/MP (2). Once the left hand side of the equation is set, the right hand side is given by the formula itself. CFM (2) reads as follows:

CFM/MP (2):

$$F_{\text{conv}}(\text{human}) : F_{\text{becoming}}(\text{non-human/Other})$$

::

$$F_{\text{conv}}(\text{non-human/Other}) : F_{\text{human-1}}(\text{becoming})$$

Maintaining the interpretative conventions used previously, the right hand side of CF/MP (2) reveals what the left hand obscures: that non-humans also have conventions, that is, that humans and non-humans are ‘congruent’ when considering the ‘convention’ function. But the relation between terms 2 and 4 becomes reciprocal or tautological: it says that the ‘human-1’ (non-human) function of becoming is congruent with the ‘becoming’ function of non-humans. In other words, on the left hand side non-humans ‘mean’ becoming and on the right hand side it is becoming that ‘means’ non-humanity. With the doubling of the CFM/MP upon itself, a second order CFM/MP, something closes on itself: it is an involution (a function that is equal to its inverse) because when terms are permutated with functions the total effect is null. Whereas in CFM/MP (1) the term Other had two possible values – animal predator (jaguar) and animal prey (peccary), in CFM/MP (2), the term Other is univocal. With the identity between terms 2 and 4 in CFM (2), it becomes a mirror function stating that the relation of human to animals (left hand side) is analogous to the relation of animals to humans (right hand side). This continues to be a basic MP formulation: “humans see themselves as humans and see animals as animals; animals see themselves as humans and see humans as animals.” Or rather, humanity and conventions as well as becoming

are properties of both humans and animals.

Now what could this second order CFM/MP mean?

Note that the doubling up of the CFM/MP upon itself, this second order CFM/MP, is tantamount to the building of a CFM/MP with two previous ones. The bundling of terms 1 + 2 and 3 + 4, is equivalent to the following construction:

CFM/MP (a) :: CFM/MP (b).

The tautological character of CFM/MP (2) could perhaps be understood as the equivalence of all CFM/MP formulations among themselves. All together, all MP statements have the symmetry of perspectives and the canonical division between human and non-human as a given of the Amerindian socio-cosmological regimes. Taken individually, however, any CFM/MP will introduce something other than ‘perceptions’ – as in ‘animals see themselves as human and humans as animals’. As our examples show, any CFM/MP involves specific relations of reflexivity, predation, exchange, and specific terms like humans (like hunters and shamans) and non-humans (like jaguars, peccaries, animal masters and fruit starch). CFM/MP (2) also seems to obviate obviation itself, presenting a locked symmetrical arrangement of perspectives that appears tautological. If so, the passage from CFM/MP (2) to any given CFM/MP, where specific relations come into play is tantamount, to use Almeida’s apt phrasing to ‘disorienting a judgment’; it is a symmetry-breaking transition, a topological break:

“In mythic thought, to tear an oriented judgment and reconnect it through a discontinuous leap, abolishing the link between predicate and subject and inverting terms, is like passing from a cylinder, an oriented surface, to a Moebius strip, a non-orientable surface where front and back have no separate existence.” (Almeida, 2008: 168, my translation).

This passage, I can only guess, is where contingency and motivation come into play, and to pay tribute to Roy Wagner, is *The Place of Invention*.

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