Stefania Consigliere (ed.)
Mondi Multipli, vol. 1 - Oltre la grande partizione [*Multiple Worlds - vol.
1 - Beyond the great divide*], Napoli, Kajak, 2014, pp. 220
Mondi Multipli, vol. 11 - Lo splendore dei mondi [*Multiple Worlds - vol. 11
- The splendour of the worlds*], Napoli, Kajak, 2014, pp. 255

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This collection of works is one of the first attempts to provide Italian
readers with a panoramic overview of the so-called "ontological turn"
(OT) in social and cultural anthropology.

The two volumes of *Mondi multipli*—fifteen articles in total, of which
thirteen in translation—present a wide range of authors and topics, deal-
ing with the methodological, philosophical, and political implications of
the use of ethnographic concepts in order to dismantle the modern idea
of a unified nature of the world. While the first volume, *Oltre la grande
partizione*, focuses on general theoretical issues concerning the OT, the
second volume *Lo splendore dei mondi* is more ethnographically oriented
and approaches the problems raised in the first volume by offering exam-
ples and case studies from specific field sites.

Moved by the question "What happens when one takes indigenous
thought seriously […] verifying the effects it can produce in our own
thought?" (De Castro 2014, 194), the authors try to trace a different car-
tography of human and nonhuman collectives, following not only the pro-
liferation of different cultures, but also of different ontological realities
emerging with them. While the idea of variable "ontologies" has circulat-
ed in STS for more than two decades (Latour 1993; Mol 2002), and might
be considered – along with the concept of "nonhuman agency" (Latour
2005) – as the specific contribution of STS to anthropology (de la Cadena
et al. 2015), the OT in anthropology characterises itself through four spe-
cific features: multinaturalism, antirepresentationism, induction, and self-
determination.

The first one, multinaturalism, is based on the idea of multiplying the
natural reality, often presented in Western societies as a singular material
entity. This theoretical move, which introduces an inversion of the one
nature/many cultures approach that has characterised social and natural
sciences, is heavily indebted to ethnographic research conducted in Am-
erindian societies over the last three decades, notably within the work of
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola (two of the authors
translated in the collection).

They both show that for Amerindians what distinguishes humans
from nonhumans is not a different interiority – a soul –, as animals and
supernatural entities may also have the same kind of soul according to na-

tive animistic conceptions, but their exteriority – the physical body itself.

In the seminal article "Cosmological pronouns and Amerindian perspectivism"— translated in the vol. II of this collection — Viveiros de Castro delves into this interiority/exteriority issue. He then underlines that if animals and spirits, like humans, have the same interiority or soul, they do also have similar *cultural* institutions, customs, ceremonies and their own kinship relations, akin to humans ones. However, he also brings attention to the fact that each group (humans, jaguars, peccaries, spirits, etc.) perceives the other as non-human, because they present a different natural exteriority. What we see as blood, to the jaguar is maize beer, what we perceive as a waterhole in the ground, is ceremonial house to peccaries; jaguars see themselves as humans and perceive us as game animals to hunt, while peccaries, who see themselves as persons, consider both humans and predators as spirits who chase them. Amerindian therefore only have one animistic model of humanity and culture, distributed across different species, and several natural worlds, one for each point of view. Wherever the perspective changes, "culture" will always be marked by the pronoun *us*, while "nature" will be marked by *them*.

The second feature, emerged in association with multinaturalism, is the antirepresentationism, which is also shared by STS (Woolgar and Lezaun 2013). This feature marks a strong shift from epistemology to ontology, i.e. from an idea of multiple worldviews as cultural representations of a single natural world, to the emergence of different native ontologies that people inhabit. This goes against a divide or partition — extensively discussed by both Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers in their articles in vol. I — set by Western modern societies between a supposedly inert material reality, only grasped by Western science, and the transient mental representations through which non-Western people imagine such a reality. The rejection of the concept of representation is thus linked to the refusal to reduce non-Western people's real worlds to mental artefacts subordinated to Western knowledge.

A third feature characterising the anthropological trend presented in this collection is instead the concept of recursivity – which seems to us more adequate to call "induction"[1]. One of the major proponents of this concept, together with Viveiros De Castro, is undoubtedly Martin Holbraad, whose article is included in vol. II. According to Holbraad (2012, 276), the term "recursivity" refers to "operations whose formal properties are modified by the contents on which they operate". In other words, anthropological theory and methods may be affected by the concepts expressed by the people ethnographers are working with. This idea led exponents of the OT to formulate an inductive methodology, consist-

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[1] The term "recursivity" in fact, in mathematics, linguistics and semiotics, refers to the indefinite application of the same rule to products of preceding operations.

ing in the adoption of ethnographic concepts emerging from the field, into the theoretical apparatus of the anthropologists themselves. Concepts like the animistic perspectivism outlined above, would thus become part of our theoretical framework, with the precise effect of shaking common Eurocentric conventions and assumptions.

A last and fourth feature is what I termed self-determination. Although not shared by all the proponents of the OT (see Holbraad and De Castro 2016), it is incisively presented in the last article of vol. I by Viveiros De Castro, and concerns a more "engaged" side of this trend (also discussed in Latour's article in the same volume). This element has been particularly emphasised by the editor Consigliere in her article (vol. I), and can be considered as a political implication of the theoretical move suggested by the other three elements. It refers to a possible reconception (Nelson Goodman) of anthropology as "the science of the ontological self-determination of the world's people" (De Castro in vol. I, 203). The "new mission" of anthropology should in fact consist in giving voice to local ontologies through a "theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought" (De Castro 2014, 40). Such position, which may slightly sound as a manifesto for indigenous rights, is actually part of a wider theoretical trend, partly shared by STS, which tries to decentre the modern Western idea of human subject by opening the range of ontological possibilities to also include nonhuman actors. The idea of self-determination implies both the denial of the intellectual superiority of the modern West, and the destabilisation of its political authority over the right of indigenous cosmologies to exist as real ontologies.

The four features I listed may be useful to provide an overview of the OT in anthropology as it also emerges from the two *Mondi Multipli* volumes. These features, however, are far from covering the complexity of each position and author, as well as the various issues addressed by this collection. Some of these authors are already well known within STS (Ingold, Latour, Stengers, and Strathern), other are more specifically related to social anthropology (Descola, De Castro, Santos-Granero, McCallum, and Holbraad), having worked on topics not directly connected to STS. This collection also includes scholars who would hardly be associated with the OT in international debates like Jean and John Comaroff, advocates of "historical anthropology", or like Piero Coppo and Mike Singleton. The inclusion of these last two authors in the collection resulted from collaborations with the editor in the field of ethnopsychiatry, a discipline which already has deep connections with STS *via* the work of Nathan with Stengers, reconsidered by Latour in term of factishes. Coppo and Singleton seek to further explore ethnopsychiatry by presenting their respective ethnographic experiences in Africa.

While the collection is valuable for the range of scholars and ideas presented, the way the different authors are portrayed might not reflect current anthropological discussion at the international level. Indeed, in

her article and prefaces to the two volumes, the editor never tries to clarify and problematize the great diversity of opinions and positions found within the OT, between, e.g. Latour, Descola, De Castro, and Ingold, and thus hardly engages with the current debate.

Also, the way the editor connects the OT to a possible Italian antecedent is quite questionable. Consigliere finds in the figure of Ernesto de Martino a possible forerunner for this trend (vol. I, p. 19). She seems to be implicitly driven by De Martino's idea of *crisis of presence*, thinking about it as possible explanatory model for the emergence of the Turn. While such application of an explanatory model of "crisis" related to a "social context" in Consigliere's article may sound highly suspicious to STS readers (cfr. Latour 2005), we should also keep in mind that de Martino's historicism stems from a Hegelian idealistic tradition diametrically opposed to the structuralist and post-structuralist movement from which the OT emerged (de Castro 2014). De Martino (1982) on the contrary sees history as active and pure human presence, where individuals affirm themselves against a backdrop of nature from which they forcefully emerge. This strong idea of subjectivity, where history is only defined in terms of "human society," or "a mode of collective organisation for the technical domination of nature" (De Martino 2012, 442), considerably diverges from STS concerns for the social role of nonhumans, as well as from the Amerindian reversal of the nature/culture relationship. In Amerindian myths the original condition of both humans and animals is in fact humanity and not animality (De Castro in vol. II), so that nature progressively emerged from culture and not vice versa.

This underlying identification of themes from the OT and the Italian historicism seems rather puzzling, all the more when the editor contrasts a supposedly Western "ontological monism" stemming from Greek and Christian thought, with the plurality of non-Western metaphysics. This position actually runs against Latour's idea of ontological monism as related, conversely, to the network-like complex interconnection between humans and nonhumans in non-Western cosmologies, whereas Western cosmology would instead be characterised by a dualism between nature and society, which radically spread with modernity (Latour 1993).

Despite such shortcomings, the two volumes can result relevant for the Italian STS community at least in two ways. On the one hand, they make available interesting ethnographic results coming from fieldwork in non-Euro-American societies, analysing radically different ways of thinking and living the relation with the environment. On the other hand, some of the translated articles make visible how some threads in the anthropological OT are at odds with STS's approaches and findings. For instance, in certain cases, anthropological OT is not able to go beyond the same modern dichotomies they are trying to question (e.g. Holbraad in vol. II) or it tends to project back onto "the West" old assumptions which STS scholars have been busy dismantling for at least the two last decades.

One example is Descola's quadripartite division of world ontologies into animism, naturalism, totemism and analogism (vol. I). In the same way as STS have demonstrated that one specific ontology does not refer to a whole collective of people, but people within the same collective emerge from different and often contrasting ontologies, general ontologies postulated by our informants in either Americas or Europe "in theory," are often subverted by local ontologies produced by the same informants "in practice" (Woolgar and Lezaun 2013). It remains thus highly questionable whether a general theory, either perspectivism or mononaturalism, would be heuristically useful to describe what "Amerindians" or "Europeans" do in practice in their lives.

To conclude, apart from the shortcomings of the Italian editorial operation, and a few questionable assumptions made by some of the authors about a monolithic "West" and the applicability of general ontologies, I would recommend this collection for the breadth of its themes, the quality of the articles translated, and the specific ethnographic contribution, which should appeal to STS scholars.

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