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UNCONSCIOUS STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL ORDER: REEXPLORING THE LÉVI-STRAUSSIAN STRUCTURALIST PROJECT IN CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY

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Rezumat

Structuri inconștiente și ordine culturală: reexplorarea proiectului structuralist al lui Lévi-Strauss în antropologia contemporană

Acest articol examinează contribuția lui Claude Lévi-Strauss la antropologie, concentrându-se pe proiectul său structuralist și pe încercarea de a descifra structurile inconștiente care stau la baza practicilor culturale. Prin explorarea moștenirii sale, lucrarea propune o revenire la o abordare teoretică holistică care transcende limitările postmodernității, inspirată de reflecțiile lui Eduardo Viveiros de Castro asupra dualității natură-cultură. Cercetarea este susținută de o analiză cuprinzătoare a textelor structuraliste fundamentale, comparând și contrastând ideile lui Lévi-Strauss cu cele ale altor gânditori relevanți, precum Durkheim, Mauss și Viveiros de Castro. Această abordare permite o înțelegere profundă a structurilor elementare ale gândirii umane și a manifestării lor în diferite contexte culturale. Documentul relevă relevanța teoriilor structuraliste pentru înțelegerea complexității practicilor culturale contemporane. În plus, analiza evidențiază importanța luării în considerare a perspectivelor popoarelor indigene pentru a contesta diviziunile ontologice tradiționale și pentru a contesta o înțelegere mai integrativă a culturii și naturii. În cele din urmă, subliniază necesitatea de a revedea și revitaliza cadrele teoretice holistice în antropologie pentru a răspunde provocărilor contemporaneității. Opera lui Lévi-Strauss, împreună cu inovațiile teoretice ale lui Viveiros de Castro, oferă instrumente valoroase pentru a regândi critic concepțiile noastre despre cultură, tehnologie și mediu, propunând o antropologie mai incluzivă care să reflecte rolul său în lumea modernă.

Cuvinte-cheie: structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss, antropologie contemporană, natură-cultură, mit, rudenie, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

Резюме

Бессознательные структуры и культурный порядок: переосмысление структуралистского проекта Леви-Стросса в современной антропологии

Данная статья рассматривает вклад Клода Леви-Стросса в антропологию, сосредотачиваясь на его структуралистском проекте и попытке расшифровать бессознательные структуры, лежащие в основе культурных практик. Через исследование его наследия предлагается возвращение к холистическому теоретическому подходу, выходящему за рамки постмодернизма, и который вдохновлен размышлениями

Эдуардо Вивейроса де Кастро о дуальности природы и культуры. Исследование основано на всестороннем анализе основных структуралистских текстов, в которых идеи Леви-Стросса сравниваются и противопоставляются с идеями других значимых мыслителей, таких как Дюркгейм, Мосс и Вивейрос де Кастро. Такой подход позволяет глубже понять элементарные структуры человеческого мышления и их проявления в различных культурных контекстах. Документ подчеркивает актуальность структуралистских теорий для понимания сложности современных культурных практик. Кроме того, анализ подчеркивает важность учета взглядов коренных народов для пересмотра традиционных онтологических разделений и продвижения более интегративного понимания культуры и природы. Наконец, отмечается необходимость пересмотра и возрождения холистических теоретических рамок в антропологии для решения вызовов современности. Работа Леви-Стросса вместе с теоретическими новшествами Вивейроса де Кастро предлагает ценные инструменты для критического переосмысления наших представлений о культуре, технологиях и окружающей среде, предлагая более инклюзивную антропологию, отражающую ее роль в современном мире.

Ключевые слова: структурализм, Клод Леви-Стросс, современная антропология, природа-культура, миф, родство, Эдуардо Вивейрос де Кастро.

Summary

Unconscious Structures and Cultural Order: Reexploring The Lévi-Straussian Structuralist Project in Contemporary Anthropology

This article examines Claude Lévi-Strauss's contribution to anthropology, focusing on his structuralist project and his attempt to decipher the unconscious structures underlying cultural practices. Through the exploration of his legacy, the paper proposes a return to a holistic theoretical approach that transcends the limitations of postmodernity, inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's reflections on the nature-culture duality. The research is supported by a comprehensive analysis of fundamental structuralist texts, comparing and contrasting Lévi-Strauss's ideas with those of other relevant thinkers such as Durkheim, Mauss, and Viveiros de Castro. This approach allows for a deep understanding of the elementary structures of human thought and their manifestation in different cultural contexts. The document reveals the relevance of structuralist theories for understanding the complexity of contemporary

cultural practices. Additionally, the analysis highlights the importance of considering indigenous peoples' perspectives to question traditional ontological divisions and promote a more integrative understanding of culture and nature. Finally, it underscores the need to revisit and revitalize holistic theoretical frameworks in anthropology to address the challenges of contemporaneity. Lévi-Strauss's work, along with the theoretical innovations of Viveiros de Castro, offers valuable tools for critically rethinking our conceptions of culture, technology, and the environment, proposing a more inclusive anthropology and reflective of its role in today's world.

Key words: Structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Contemporary Anthropology, Nature-Culture, Myth, Kinship, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

Introduction

With the passing of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a cycle of enormous importance for anthropological science, and for the social sciences in general, comes to an end. The commitment to uncovering that unconscious element which structures our concrete world was the intellectual purpose of the brilliant French ethnologist's life. Despite the emergence of the new "postmodern" anthropology and the theoretical revolution sparked by the presence of poststructuralism as the philosophical paradigm of the latter part of the 20th century (Badcock 2015), he maintained his core academic convictions with a life and intellectual output never before seen in Anthropology until the day of his departure.

In the following lines, we will attempt to broadly describe the structuralist project, both in its philosophical postulates referring to an immanent and unconscious content inherent to the human condition, and in its methodological principles, which respond to an entire positivist heritage that seeks to provide theory with a procedure that makes any cultural product intelligible, identifying them as an epiphenomenon of the elementary structures of thought.

Furthermore, we will refer to the key choice for synchrony within structural analysis and the reasons for opting for such an option. Lastly, we will point out the relevance of betting on a new project in anthropology that highlights the incompleteness of the postmodern experience and that this leads us to the need to find a new center of analysis to have a holistic theoretical vision of what we call culture, an intertextual proposal that transcends the fragmentation of contemporary anthropological labor. In this sense, we will highlight the importance that the theoretical proposal of the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has acquired today, which

emphasizes a frontal critique of Western dualist ontology from the cultural traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

The Nature of Structure and the Method to Unveil It

Structuralism in Anthropology, as proposed by Lévi-Strauss, is rooted in the French theoretical tradition of the early last century, inaugurated by the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who pointed out that language is structured following a relational and differential model: a sign acquires identity in its contrast with others. Thus, in the words of Saussure:

"in language there are only differences. <...> Whether we consider the signifier or the signified, language does not include ideas or sounds that pre-exist the linguistic system, but only conceptual differences and phonetic differences resulting from that system" (Saussure 1945: 144).

And in this relational procedure inherent to language, one can primordially observe how the human mind functions: the production of meanings from the establishment of distinction relationships between them allows Lévi-Strauss to understand culture as a system ordered under binary-differential oppositions (Glucksmann 2015a).

Such binary-differential oppositions, as they are inherent to the human mind, are universal: the univocal substantiality of man lies in his mental structure, in the systemic order of his way of thinking about the external world. Again, linguistics illustrates this assertion through language: translatability between languages is possible because the human linguistic structure (and, therefore, its capacity for symbolization) is univocal (Darnell 2014). The same occurs with culture: the anthropologist, in conducting fieldwork, is essentially performing a task of "translation" (at least at the ethnographic level); in this sense, analyzing another's culture can also be understood as "translating" the life forms of the human groups that are the subject of anthropology into our cultural codes. And, as Lévi-Strauss points out, doing this is possible because the human mind is one, "despite the cultural differences that exist among the various factions of humanity, the human mind is everywhere one and the same, with the same capabilities" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 40).

A key characteristic of this elemental structure is its unconscious nature: the human mind subjects its environment to normative criteria, to ordering rules, and this action operates without the participation of consciousness (Silverman 2012). In this sense, the unconscious mental structure refers to the very way in which the human being makes sense of what surrounds him; consequently, order pre-exists

and conditions human knowledge (Kurzweil 2017). Man, according to Lévi-Strauss, cannot access the concrete world in any other way; order is inherent to the world's meaning, only through it can we understand and, above all, transmit it, as he himself states:

"In my opinion, it is absolutely impossible to conceive of meaning without order <...>. To talk about rules and to talk about meanings is to talk about the same thing; and if we look at the achievements of humanity following the records available around the world, we will always verify that the common denominator is the introduction of some kind of order" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 30-31).

However, great care must be taken with this statement, as it could convey a different meaning than what Lévi-Strauss himself intends, which is to understand structuralism as a kind of phenomenology insofar as order emanates from the mind and not from the concrete reality it organizes (Glucksmann 2015b; Goetze 2016). The fact that the mind represents the world through form (even Lévi-Strauss moves towards mathematics by endowing these structures with algebraic codes¹) does not mean that chaos characterizes the world, but rather that the order present in it is so evident that the mind cannot help but understand it:

"If the fact [that human thought operates under the direction of meaning] represents a basic need for order in the realm of the human mind, and as the human mind ultimately becomes a part of the universe, then perhaps the need exists because there is some kind of order in the universe; the universe is not chaos" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 31).

Moreover, the notion of mental structure proposed by Lévi-Strauss is more complex than what would be presupposed if one were to follow the positivist paradigm exclusively, which asserts that scientific knowledge, as an objective description of the world, is possible because there is an underlying order to reality². This complexity is better expressed in what Lévi-Strauss himself says about "form" (the unconscious mental structure that enables human knowledge) and "content" (the concrete, the external world-object of knowledge): both find their legitimacy (their status of "reality") in their mutual reference (Robcis 2013). In this sense, for the French ethnologist, the concrete becomes intelligible because it is a reflection of mental forms, and these are nothing more than the abstract result of the content, or in the words of Lévi-Strauss:

"For structuralism <...> there is not, on one hand, the abstract and on the other, the concrete. Form and content are of the same nature and deserve the same analysis. The content derives its reality from

its structure, and what is called form is the 'structuring' of the local structures that constitute the content" (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 136).

In this sense, the very clear barriers between the order inherent to the world and the mind that unravels this order proposed by positivism transform in structuralism into a relational closeness that affirms the impossibility of thinking about one without the other. The world contains within it a pre-established order, but this does not have the character of reality without the human mind that formalizes it; in turn, the human mind establishes a binary-differential ordering of the world, but without the material or content, the structure does not manage to "structure" itself³. Thus, while the structuralist proposal does not completely break its ties with positivism by maintaining that the task of science would lie in unraveling the apparent chaos of the world (Geoghegan 2012) and discovering its underlying sense (Badcock 2015; Salmon 2013), this position places greater emphasis on the fact that the condition of possibility for this act of intellection is sustained on the ordered and systematic nature of the human mind.

However, we would like to focus on the theoretical closeness between positivism and the structuralism proposed by Lévi-Strauss, and for this, we refer to the connection between the French thinker and the two key figures of positivist thought at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century: Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. In this sense, it is important to highlight the almost genealogical relationship between Lévi-Strauss's magnum opus (1985), *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, with Durkheim's classic book (2012), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, and the analytical closeness between the former and Mauss's *Essay on the Gift* (2009). Thus, the French positivist tradition of the late 19th century still finds its foothold within the social sciences in structuralism, as Harris points out:

"Lévi-Strauss's magnum opus, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, reveals in its title the influence of Mauss and Durkheim, while also recalling Durkheim's search for the elementary forms of religion. But Lévi-Strauss himself has stated that the strongest inspiration came from Mauss" (Harris 1978: 419).

What does that inspiration consist of? In the notion of reciprocity as the unconscious foundation of human social life. When analyzed comparatively, the chaos inherent in all kinship systems would only be the mask that covers an entire mental universe ordered under a univocal binary-differential system, a structure of thought that could only be reached if we construct a scientific method that legitimizes such

unveiling (Asch 2014). This method, in the opinion of Lévi-Strauss, would be found in the advances coming from Linguistics and, in particular, in the theoretical proposal of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, who argued that the infinity of sounds characterizing languages could be categorized into a system of binary oppositions; in this sense, the wide range of phonological contrasts would be reduced to a minuscule number of differential systems (Jakobson 1976). It is in this discovery, where the deep structure beneath the apparent and superficial chaos of sounds was reached, that Lévi-Strauss would find his methodological model to analyze kinship systems and the inherent structure of myths (Doniger 2009).

Another fundamental element of Lévi-Strauss's method for reaching the unconscious structures of thought is the Hegelian dialectic: in the very emergence of an unconscious cultural sense as a paradigm that orders the apparent chaos of human existence, the genesis of its own contradiction is present. How to understand this? A fundamental indication of the operation of such a method is found in Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth. The deep interest that mythology aroused in the French ethnologist is not gratuitous: in the symbolic system expressed in the myth, Lévi-Strauss finds the means to access that unconscious structure of thought (Liebenberg 2016); thus, the myth serves as the means of social interaction and communication with the greatest force within early human groups (Razavi 2018). And, returning to the method, in the myth we find that dialectical foundation of social life: it expresses the contradictory nature of reality, or in other words, the omnipresence of the binary mental structure and, therefore, of social life. In this sense, Douglas points out:

"the structure of the myth is a dialectical structure in which opposing logical positions are stated, the oppositions are reconciled by a new statement that also, upon clarifying its internal structure, gives rise to another type of opposition which is in turn reconciled or resolved and so on" (Douglas 1970: 84).

Thus, the myth would be the way in which humans declare the unspeakable: that social life is subject to the fall of meaning, which is always threatened by fragmentation and dissolution (Nejadmohammad 2022; Santucci et al. 2020). The myth, in such case, shows the cultural tendency towards the preservation of the ideal, moreover, within it lies the promise of disintegration, meaning, the myth becomes the place of the denial of the ideal that in turn supports it; an immanent structure that upholds order, impossible as imperative consistency (Goetze 2016).

If the elementary structure of the symbolic order is strictly dialectical, it is simply because totality is an

object elusive to myth: the non-literate man (Lévi-Strauss prefers this term to the pejorative "primitive man"), through mythical narratives, claims an absolute understanding of the cosmos, the subjection of the world known to him through oral traditions that manage (for the man completely convinced of the "truth" expressed by the myth) to explain all the whys that arise from the concrete reality itself (Tombul, Pembecioğlu 2023). As Lévi-Strauss expresses: "[The] purpose [of mythical thought] lies in achieving, by the most minimal and economical means, a general understanding of the universe – and not just a general understanding, but a total one" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 37).

This claim, again, ends up being an illusion, and it is unmasked with the emergence of variations in the mythic structure, with the discrepancies in the myth's narration, and how it transforms until it becomes almost unrecognizable compared to its original form (Santucci, Capocchi 2020; Fuglestedt 2019). In this sense, we are talking about the cultural variations that arise within a culture, which can no longer contain the explosion of meanings inherent in it; this end is just the demonstration that every totalizing pretension as a naturalized meaning (what better description of culture as a normalizing paradigm of social life) is ultimately betrayed by the very universe it seeks to objectify. This dialectical structure would already be in the absolute fluid of the world; and man, as a particle subject to cosmic ordering (McGrady 2017), is therefore a microscopic reflection of such norm.

Moreover, it is pertinent at this moment to make a statement: envisioning the dialectical nature of the symbolic world should not be taken as the fundamental objective of structuralist analysis. In reality, the vital reason for Lévi-Strauss's theoretical project is the search for the elementary structures (Javari, Rezai 2016) not the visualization and explanation of the process by which they are modified. However, what we call modification is a reordering of the elements within the binary-differential structure: in this sense, what we perceive as a total change, which might motivate us to announce the destruction of the structure, is merely a variation or avatar of the structure itself, intact and permanent. Each culture, and its concrete referents, are, in the words of Scheffler: "only variable expressions of structure, which also constitute, <...> the 'logic' or 'code' through which the human mind operates" (Scheffler 1969: 13).

What will make possible the unveiling of the elementary structures will be the formalization of all those cultural variables into a reduced binary-differential code; turning structural analysis into a cate-

gorization of the variations of the structure, both within it (its materialization in partial structures that order specific sectors of the social, such as the economy, kinship, or religion), and outside of it (in the comparative analysis or "cultural translation", an essentially anthropological task). In this sense, structural analysis "will not discover anything new about the structure itself, but about the ways in which it can be expressed" (Scheffler 1969: 13).

This leads us to a topic of transcendental importance in the theoretical project of structuralism, which is the relationship it has with history and, therefore, the analytical decision between diachronic and synchronic procedures (Monin et al. 2019).

Synchrony and the "History" of Non-Literate Peoples

To partly explain the theoretical decision for synchrony within the structuralist project, I would like to refer to the dual dimension of the analysis of the myth structure proposed by Lévi-Strauss: a factual-discursive referent, which pertains to the content of the myth itself and its unique meanings, and a general foundation visualized in the particular myth (Douglas 1970; Scarso 2009; Tremlett 2011). The key here is to differentiate the centrality of the second analysis over the first, and the best way to formalize such a proposition is to mathematically reduce the structure, proceeding algebraically, as Edmund Leach pointed out (Chlup 2011); in this sense, a common core would be found, seeking to reduce the myth to only formal elements thereby trying to strip it of its cultural meaning.

From this, we can extract a fundamental principle: referring to a cultural context would only divert us from the search for the elementary structures; in this sense, the permanencies in culture, the similarities that are extracted in the comparative analysis are central to the structuralist method (Doniger 2009). This can also be seen in Lévi-Strauss's assertion about treating the various versions of the myth as if they were true and relevant: acting like art antiquarians, who legitimize the authenticity of a painting or sculpture, would not allow us to conduct a fully scientific task (Segovia 2019). It is more than clear that all this discussion about the relevance or not of such or such an object of analysis refers us to the discussion about the nature of the relationship between culture and history in the structuralist methodology: synchrony is valued over diachronic analysis; culture itself (and the myths that are in dialectical relation with it) is analyzed as permanencies and not processes (Geoghegan 2011; Razavi 2018).

To position ourselves in the purely theoretical field of anthropological analysis, we must explain

what Evon Vogt has pointed out as the two cross-sectional methodological proposals of the social sciences: the structural, which rescues permanencies on the assumption that culture tends to maintain its own existence, thus change is only a failure in the forces that ensure prevailing cultural life, and the processual, which highlights the importance of change, of flow as a central element of the nature of culture (Vogt 1969). Lévi-Strauss would be found in the first perspective mentioned, the one that privileges long duration⁴ as fundamental in anthropological analysis.

In this sense, for Lévi-Strauss, synchrony is the way in which anthropology dispenses with history: the important thing in the analysis of the structure is not to place it in a determined time, nor that a cultural product like the myth finds its explanation in history, but rather that the context lends legitimacy to the myth (Glucksmann 2015; Scarso 2009). Lévi-Strauss himself, when analyzing the work on folk tales by the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (1981), notes that he is trapped in historicist explanations, even more so in a field where history cannot be carried out: "<...> it is evident that there is history in tales, but it is practically inaccessible history, since we know very little about the pre-historic civilizations in which they were born" (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 135). He offers a similar opinion about the treatment of myth and the difficulty of conducting a historical analysis:

"History, as we write it, is almost entirely – and in its totality – based on written documents, whereas in the case of these two stories [referring to two mythical narratives about the origin of the Tsimshian people of North America] there are no written documents, or if there are, they are very scarce" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 60).

For Lévi-Strauss, having history is what differentiates Western civilization from non-literate peoples. But one must not misinterpret the notion of history that the French ethnologist vindicates: it is a means of preserving the past through the written word; in this sense, to say that non-literate peoples do not have history is not the same as asserting the non-existence of their own past, but rather to point out that the means they use to preserve their past belong to an order different from the Western one (Remotti 2011). It is for this reason that the French ethnologist deems those attempts to make history in populations that lack documentation to validate such an approach as ethnocentric pretensions. The myth, as conceived by structuralism, is a narrative that transcends historical time, and therefore, there is no need to refer to it to explain the mythic discourse.

Another fundamental distinction between written history and mythology that claims a common past is the relationship both have with the present (Edelstein 2003): whereas in the Western world the historical past describes processes of change, the volatility embodied in the significant events that historians seek to preserve for future generations, in non-literate societies, the relevance of a past is to reaffirm the established order in the present; in this sense, permanence, the eternalization of the cosmos' meaning finds its reflection in the synchronous updating of that meaning, or as Lévi-Strauss himself says: "[in non-literate societies] it is as if on the screen of the present a diachronic succession of events is simultaneously projected to reconstitute, piece by piece, a synchronous order that exists" (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 61).

Thus, diachrony succumbs in the timeless immediate appreciation of structuralist analysis. Moreover, this has a purely logical basis derived from the initial statement about the structural method: culture tends towards permanence; therefore, what we see in social life is the struggle for culture itself, for tradition (Asch 2014). In this sense, understanding history in primitive peoples as an intense flow lacks consistency, because the cultural context in which the myth is appreciated has probably remained without considerable changes if we go back to its origin, as Lévi-Strauss mentions in the analysis of myths: "the problem of history is not posed, or is only exceptionally posed, since the external references, indispensable for the interpretation of oral tradition, are currently, with equal right to it" (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 135).

An explanation for this neglect of historical explanation by structuralism can be found in Lévi-Strauss's own statements about the distinction between Western civilization and the "primitive" world. Both, Lévi-Strauss (1990) notes, have enhanced specific areas of intellect, developing to the fullest those necessary and atrophying others that are not important in their life as a society; in this sense, historical rigor in particular is closely related to writing, and since so-called primitive peoples did not possess such knowledge, such rigor was not necessary for the preservation of the past. History today must then be understood as Western assumptions, and they have competence only in the cultural spectrum of the West (Clarfield 2021).

Breaking with this ethnocentric historical universe is a fundamental task that requires the confluence of various social sciences, such as anthropological, historical, and archaeological sciences: demonstrating the veracity of a mythical narrative

would respond to a sum of interdisciplinary forces that will seek to establish correspondences between the discourse and the concrete. In this sense, Lévi-Strauss states:

"Despite the wall that exists to a certain extent in our minds between mythology and history, it may begin to open through the study of stories no longer conceived separately from mythology, but as a continuation of it" (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 65).

Although this appropriation of interdisciplinary scientific rigor to provide a totalizing background to the past of non-literate peoples does not go in only one direction: Lévi-Strauss (1990) points out that history is the mythology of the West, and therefore, the elements of analysis implemented for the analysis of myth should be extrapolated and added to historical rigor. History, in this sense, is a fragmentary way of remembering the past and, therefore, very close to mythology, which is why it is necessary for both to abandon their respective distances and then place themselves in a position accessible to the researcher (Glucksmann 2015b; Goetze 2016).

Conclusion: For the Return of Theory

As a closing, we have decided to offer a brief reflection on the current state of theoretical production in the social and human sciences, and how this reflects the general crisis of the so-called metanarratives, a concept used by Lyotard (1987) to describe a specific type of narrative whose goal is to explain human nature in a holistic and universal manner and to legitimize other, less extensive elucidations. In this sense, in the second half of the 20th century, we have witnessed the weakening of the rational Enlightenment project – the metanarrative of Western modernity – and the expansion of a global mood that has valued cultural diversity and epistemic decolonization. This new context has been called postmodernity, and with it has emerged a new social hermeneutics that promotes criticism of totalizing explanations.

In this vein, postmodernism in anthropological analysis has proposed the dismantling of holistic theoretical projects and has placed thick description as the methodological model for an analysis that is increasingly disconnected from the totalizing ambitions of the social sciences (Ingham 2007). This has led to the proliferation of atomized analyses of culture and the consequent accusation of authoritarianism that has been leveled against totalizing theoretical frameworks; it seems that the liberating act of postmodernity has brought with it the trap of denouncing old theoretical proposals as Procrustean beds⁵, in which ethnographic content is forced to fit the theoretical postulates marked by the "grand theory".

We argue that it would be unjust to abandon reflection on holistic theories in anthropology under the argument that the conceptual and methodological rigidity that supposedly characterizes them is not conducive to analyzing postmodernity (Andrade 2019; Brzostek 2017). On the contrary, we believe it is indispensable to enhance criticism of those theoretical postulates that, given the new circumstances existing in contemporaneity, can no longer be sustained, and to undertake the task of developing new categories that allow us a more adequate reading of our culturally diverse reality.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the reformulation made by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro to one of the founding axioms of structuralism: the purported universality of the ontological distinction between nature and culture made by humans. Based on ethnographic data from the Amerindian peoples of the Amazon, Viveiros de Castro questions the assumption that human thought a priori conceives of culture as its own heritage; on the contrary, according to Amerindian worldview, culture is the collective property of all entities:

”animals are people or see themselves as persons. This conception is almost always associated with the idea that the material form of each species is a wrapping (a ‘clothing’) that hides an internal human form, normally visible only to the eyes of the own species <...>. This internal form is the animal’s spirit: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness, materializable, so to speak, in a human bodily schema, hidden under the animal mask” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 39).

Thus, the animated world would find its unity in culture, the spiritual substance that links animals and humans; on the other hand, matter would operate as a principle of individuation: each species corresponds to a specific corporeality that distinguishes it from the rest. In this way, the Amerindian worldview reverses the structuralist formulation that associated culture with human spirituality and conceived of nature as the common denominator of the world’s entities (Maniglier 2017); other animated entities are conceived as subjects that hold multiple perceptions of reality. It is fundamental, then, to understand that the structuralist defense of a transcendental division between culture (humanity) and nature (animality) only reproduces a metaphysical position established in the West since the emergence of philosophy in classical Greece, and strengthened with the appearance of Cartesian dualism (Fischer 2014).

The multiple possibilities for analyzing contemporary problems offered by this theoretical twist made by Viveiros de Castro are evident. Thus, tran-

scending the nature-culture dichotomy allows us to rethink the value we give to the environment and to reformulate the role of technology as an instrument of appropriation of resources; thereby providing possible solutions to the environmental problems that have afflicted the global community since the end of the 19th century, a period in which the second industrial revolution appeared.

It is for this reason that appealing to the return of theory as a fundamental objective in anthropological teaching and practice must be one of the main missions for the future; our efforts should be directed towards rethinking our theoretical heritage and producing proposals that promote an ever-deeper understanding of our contemporaneity. And in this lies the importance of the re-reading of great anthropological projects like structuralism: recovering the holistic character of theoretical explanation should be taken as a challenge, rather than as a display of inoperative rigor.

Notes

¹ This reference to mathematics can be found in its first version of *Mythologiques I: The Raw and the Cooked*, although Lévi-Strauss notes that the reason he uses mathematical symbols is to demonstrate his postulates more efficiently and accurately, simplifying the complex relationships that can be found in the mythical structure. Thus, in the mentioned work, the French ethnologist states: “The formulas that we write with symbols taken from mathematics, primarily for the reason that they already exist in typography, do not aim to prove anything, but rather <...> are limited to illustrating in a simplified form the ideas presented, which seemed to us to offer assistance but which some may judge superfluous and perhaps reproach for obscuring the main exposition with nothing more than adding one imprecision to another” (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 39).

² This thesis can be found in the classic text by Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, where it is specified that “the way in which facts are classified <...> depend <...> on the nature of things” (Durkheim 1986: 66).

³ In this sense, it is fitting to follow Derrida when he points out that every structure is founded upon the everlasting existence of the world, or in the words of the French philosopher: “Its matrix form would be <...> the determination of being as presence <...>. It could be shown that the names of the foundation <...> have always designated the invariant of a presence” (Derrida 1989: 385). Thus, those names with which Western metaphysics has sought to name the foundation of the structure (essence, existence, substance, God, subject) always refer to a presence, to an externality towards which the mind is directed.

⁴ This term is used by the historian Fernand Braudel to refer to a specific way of doing history that privileges the analysis of time intervals of considerable duration, in which one can appreciate structures of thought that “<...>

are endowed with such a long life that they become stable elements of countless generations: they obstruct history, hinder it, and thus, determine its course" (Braudel 1974: 70).

⁵ In Greek mythology, Procrustes was a notorious bandit who resided on the sacred road between Athens and Eleusis. Known for his cruel hospitality, he would invite passersby to spend the night in his iron bed. Procrustes claimed the bed perfectly fit anyone who lay in it, but he deceitfully made his guests fit the bed by stretching them if they were too short or cutting off their legs if they were too tall.

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