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Debating animism, perspectivism and the construction of ontologies

The contributions to this dossier provide a discussion of new animism, perspectivism and multinaturalism. In the last twenty years these concepts have emerged as central theoretical innovations of classical structuralist assumptions¹ in Lowland South American anthropology (Århem 1996, Descola 1992, 1996, 2005, Stolze Lima 1999, Viveiros de Castro 1998). They reformulated outdated evolutionist notions of animism,² such as the “deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings” (Tylor 1871: 384) “which so forcibly conduces to personification” and “can give consistent individual life to phenomena that our utmost stretch of fancy only avails to personify in conscious metaphor” (Tylor 1871: 260). These new theoretical concepts³ have created a specific and powerful paradigm in South American anthropological scholarship (Costa & Fausto 2010). By proclaiming a shared relational frame of interaction between humans and non-humans, they decentre the Western nature/culture distinction and associated notions of universalism and relativism. These reflections have thus opened up fresh perspectives on personhood, sociality, and human-animal relations. In recent years these axioms have been broadened to a general discussion of different ontologies (Descola 2005) and have formed part of a so-called ontological turn in the social sciences. These axioms have also been applied to other regional settings and cross-fertilized with ethnographic work and theoretical positions developed in North America (Ingold 2000), Siberia (Willerslev 2007, Pedersen 2001), India (Bird-David 1999) and Papua New Guinea (Strathern 1988, Wagner 1991, 2001). Moreover, they entered into a fruitful dialog with disciplines like science and technology studies (Latour 1993, 2004), archaeology (Alberti & Bray 2009, Holbraad 2009, Witmore 2007) and the study of religions (Harvey 2002, 2006). Finally, they generated a renewed discussion of the comparative method and what has recently been called comparative relativism (see the special issue of *Common Knowledge* 17(1)).

1 For a critical examination see Turner (2009).

2 Tylor borrowed this term from the German proto-vitalist chemist, physicist and physician Georg Ernst Stahl (1708). See the critical discussion of Stahl’s work provided by Lemoine (1864).

3 Hallowell’s paper on Ojibwa ontology (1960) played an important role in the development of these concepts.

The anthropological debate on these terms also moved out of academia into public exhibitions and art events, such as “La fabriques des images” at the Musée du quai Branly (Descola 2010; see also Karadimas in this volume). In this exhibition, figurative strategies and forms of representation based on Descola’s four ontologies (2005) were illustrated, including European landscape painting (naturalism), aboriginal painting (totemism), animic masks and depictions of human interiority (animism), and Chimeras composed of various elements connecting microcosms and macrocosms (analogism). Other examples include the discourse surrounding the avant-garde music theatre, “Amazonas: Music theatre in three parts”, composed for the 2010 Munich Biennale (see Kapfhammer in this volume), and the “Animism” art exhibitions curated by Anselm Franke in Antwerp, Berne, Vienna, Berlin and New York between 2010 and 2012. However, the latter project focused on and criticized a rather traditional notion of animism in the sense of Tylor and Freud’s primitive narcissism without creatively using the pluralistic ontological potential of the current anthropological debate.⁴

Perspectivist ideas were originally developed by philosophers such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Friedrich Nietzsche. The impulse for early perspectivist formulations was the spread of the city in the early eighteenth century. Leibniz wrote in 1714:

And as one and the same town viewed from different sides looks altogether different, and is, as it were, perspectively multiplied, it similarly happens that, through the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are however only the perspectives of a single one, according to the different points of view of the monads (Leibniz 1714: Section 57; translation by Rescher 1992).

This idea was reframed as the multiple perspectives of animals, spirits and humans in Amerindian perspectivism. Leibniz’s perspectivism was labelled an “objective” one, in that it assumed that, despite the seeming multiplicity of perspectives, there was still only one overarching perspective or universe which was identical to God’s total perspective. Nietzsche, for whom as we know God was dead, in contrast argued for a more subjective and biologically grounded position. In place of “epistemology”, he called for “a perspective theory of affects” (Nietzsche 1968: 255).⁵

4 The accompanying publication by Albers & Franke (2012) provides the German translations of papers by Bird-David (1999), Hornborg (2006), Latour (2009) and Viveiros de Castro (2004). However, these contributions remain quite unrelated to the rest of the book and most of the art exhibitions.

5 Resulting in a perspectivism grounded in a “biology of the drive of knowledge” (*Biologie des Erkenntnistriebes*) as the editors of “The power to will” called it in a subheading (Nietzsche 1968: 272).

Inspired by Stolze Lima's work (1999) on Juruna wild boar hunting and ethnographies like those of Baer (1994), perspectivism became the basis of an indigenous Amazonian theory in the writings of Viveiros de Castro (1998). His perspectivism is a perspective theory of physical affects, called "multinaturalism" and contrasted with "monoculturalism", which indicates a common human culture shared by humans and animals based on a generalized notion of predation as the overarching and unifying principle of Amazonian sociality.⁶ Viveiros de Castro writes that perspectivism is

[...] an indigenous theory according to which the way humans perceive animals and other subjectivities that inhabit the world – gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, plants, occasionally even objects and artefacts – differs profoundly from the way in which these beings see humans and see themselves (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 470).

While these beings see themselves as people, they perceive humans as animals or spirits (prey or predator). Descola agrees that animals see themselves as humans in animic ontologies; however, it is the particular claim of perspectivism, and not a general aspect of animism, that animals see humans as animals or spirits (Descola 2005: 197f.; see also Latour 2009 for different notions of perspectivism).

Nowadays the concept of perspectivism seems to be everywhere in Lowland South American anthropology, and at some conferences, talk about the "epidemic of perspectivism" may be heard. Thus, it may be time to inquire about possible limitations of current paradigms in the light of new ethnographic research and comparative analysis of Amerindian and Lowland South American anthropological cases. What is the current status and potential of approaches focusing on ontology and animism? How may classical positions be refined, revisited and reassessed? What may we learn by focusing on the animacy of material objects and plants, by conceptualising means of communication with non-human beings, by specifying the axioms underlying the "construction" of ontologies and by considering possible alternatives? These questions were raised by Laura Rival in her keynote lecture at the September 2010 meeting of German-speaking South Americanists and Caribbeanists in Marburg, Germany, and subsequently discussed in a workshop I organized entitled "Debating Animism, Perspectivism, and the Construction of Ontologies". Initial versions of the papers published here were presented on this occasion.

As a whole, these papers seek to expand the focus of current approaches. They make use of ethnographic data from Amerindian groups such as the Huaorani (Rival), Miraña (Karadimas), Pemon (Lewy), Sateré-Mawé (Kapfhammer), Shipibo (Brabec

⁶ For alternative conceptions see for example Overing (2000), Hill & Santos-Granero (2002), Santos-Granero & Mentore (2006) or Santos-Granero (2009).

de Mori) and Yukpa (Halbmayer) and refer to comparative research across the continent (Karadimas) or within the Carib language family (Halbmayer) to develop novel theoretical considerations. All the contributions demonstrate that Lowland Amerindian concepts and ways of perception are in significant ways more complex than generally assumed. This issue of complexity refers to the conceptualisation of beings and animals as well as to the idea of environment, life or the world in Amerindian cosmologies. The issue of complexity also refers to the question of perspective, perception and one's "point of view" and its theoretical implications. In addition, the papers refer to the differences and differentiation of various ontologies such as Western naturalism, animism, totemism and analogism in the terms of Descola (2005). While the authors agree that these are central topics about which further theoretical development and empirical research is most promising and needed, the theoretical positions from which the authors approach these problems and the solutions they propose differ and sometimes contradict each other in significant ways.

The conception of beings, life and the world

In current theories animism is understood as relational ontology including other-than-human persons. The central focus is thereby mostly on relationships with specific animals, seldom on those with plants and (their master) spirits and hardly ever with "things" like stars, the sun and the moon, the wind, rain or rainbows. Recently the focus on human-made material objects (Santos-Granero 2009), masks (Taylor 2010; Goulard & Karadimas 2011) and wind instruments (Hill & Chaumeil 2011) and their forms of animacy or "occult" life was renewed and a specifically ontological approach to things was developed (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2006).

Animist theories generally assume that animals are considered to be humans or that animals consider themselves to be humans. Humans and animals form part of a shared relational frame of interaction.⁷ Thus in animic ontologies relations and interactions with these persons are maintained through communication, mutual understanding and the possibility of transforming into and becoming the Other. According to both Viveiros de Castro and Descola, animism inverts the Western nature/culture dichotomy (see Halbmayer, this volume), whereby culture (soul or interiority) is common to potentially all beings, who differ only in terms of nature (body or physicality). From this perspective, animism is therefore characterized by a mono-culture and multi-naturalism.

⁷ And of being in the world in terms of Ingold's phenomenological position.

In Viveiros de Castro's somatic perspectivism, different physicalities create different points of view and perspectives. While their common interiority unites beings across inter-species borders, their physicality and affects divide them. In contrast, Descola states that physical difference in animism is not one of substance but of form, since substances circulate across the world and between beings.⁸ Karadimas (this volume) similarly argues that definitions of species are made according to their shape, which is based on neither the "physicality" nor the "interiority" of beings. And Halbmayer argues that "substance" among Carib-speaking groups is more or less material, ranging from physical liquids or food items to notions of energy, sunlight and spiritual or soul matter. One may therefore find among Carib-speaking groups spiritual, form-logical and humoral-pathological idioms of transformation.

Several of the contributions raise doubts about Viveiros de Castro's assumption that, in contrast to naturalism, where humans are ex-animals, in perspectivism animals are ex-humans and that humanity is the shared original condition out of which animals differentiated. Rival (this volume) argues that "[...] for the Huaorani, the initial beings from which both contemporary humans and animal species derive were not human; only contemporary Huaorani are humans". Halbmayer likewise argues that, among the Yukpa, animals were *like* the Yukpa but not Yukpa. He claims that there are other-than-human persons which are human-like to varying degrees, but not necessarily humans. Generally there are proto-humans who once fabricated or manufactured the first human beings, ex-humans (e.g., animals who were once like humans), and non-humans, mostly monstrous, "anti"-human beings who may nevertheless appear in human shape.

Brabec's research also challenges the view of Viveiros de Castro. He found that the Shibipo (*jonikon* – real people) differentiate beings according to their consciousness, their form of agency and power. A humanoid or human-like physicality is common to conscious beings, "in contrast to human physicality as proposed by

8 This discussion and also the depiction of the manifest form of humans as envelope or clothing that conceals an internal human form relates to ideas about "the motif of the envelope and the principle of form" originally formulated by Fritz Krause (1929, 1931). In contrast to the contemporary uses of the term "animism" he associated this idea with a non-animistic conception of the world. However, his original contribution has not been discussed and evaluated in detail in the recent discussion. According to Krause, in animism, the soul is constitutive for the being independently from its physical form while in non-animistic conceptions the form is constitutive for the being. In animism, transformations occur by being touched or possessed by the soul of another being independent of its visible form. In contrast in the non-animistic world view, life and being are associated with the body. Bodily changes imply transformations and transformations occur through changes in the bodily form. For Krause the form is connected to and inseparable from the substance (*Stoff*). A transformation relies on a change of form and substance (1931: 363).

‘orthodox’ perspectivism” (Brabec, this volume). There are other beings addressed as *jonibo* (persons) who have human consciousness and obvious bodily differences. They lack adequate competence of perception and action and are considered less powerful than real people. Other animals are as powerful as the Shipibo and are considered to be true Shipibo males and Shipibo’s *pares*. There are also very powerful beings such as anacondas, jaguars, and dolphins. Finally, Brabec mentions the technologically advanced *Inka*, “considered ‘legendary’ but definitely real people” (this volume). Brabec shows different forms of mimesis and transformation in relation to these different classes of beings ranging from joking to avoidance, and including voice masking, concealment strategies and multiple positionalities a healer assumes in relation to his audience and to the spiritual beings.

Rival, Halbmayer and Brabec agree that agency is not just humanized and personalized, but also non-personalized. Rival focuses on the notion of biological life independent of social intelligence and argues that the Huaorani celebrate “the inherent power that biological organisms have to grow themselves and be alive”. Halbmayer mentions stones that contain forms of agency and power and that, although not personalized, attract animals and garden products. In contrast, Brabec shows that rocks may be viewed as personalized among the Shipibo. However, for the Shipibo non-humans are “mostly plants”, as well as (rather surprisingly) “fish, who are not regarded as persons (*jonibo*)” and to which “no consciousness is ascribed” (Brabec, this volume). Consequently, a full understanding of Amerindian cosmologies has to include these non-personalized forms of life and agency. Rather than a simple expansion of humanness to non-human realms, we seem confronted with a gradual system ranging from fully personalized to the non-personalized along dimensions of animacy, agentivity, consciousness, the ability to communicate and forms of physicality. In other words, physicality or multiple natures are not the only aspects of being that function as differentiators in animic ontologies. And there are aspects of the environment which are not or only partly anthropomorphized and personalized.

That is exactly the chief argument of Laura Rival, who most clearly moves beyond current theories of animism and generalized humanness. She discusses the theoretical positions of Bennet’s post-human “vital materialism” and Ingold’s phenomenological approach of being the world, as well as Descola’s and Viveiros de Castro’s ontological animism. She rejects the separation of animism from biological and scientific knowledge and does not share the assumption of Ingold, Descola and Viveiros de Castro, who, “despite real differences in their theoretical approaches”, all agree that animism is antithetical to modern scientific knowledge. Rival further proposes a conception of biological life autonomous from social intelligence and socially determined intentions in Amazonian anthropology. By focusing on processes

of maturation, growth and self-regeneration, she argues that, even when conceptualized as a “cosmic force that causes plants and animal and human bodies to grow [...] life is neither singularised nor anthropomorphised” (Rival, this volume). For the Huaorani, according to Rival, the forest’s natural bounty results “from the interlocking of animal, plant and human life cycles” and respecting “the continuity of autonomous reproduction of social others, both human and non-human” (Rival, this volume).

Rival focuses on the inclusion of multiple forms of environmental knowledge and communication derived from observations and communications about the “objective properties of the world” and the “people’s cultural heritage and history” inscribed into the environment. She argues for an ecological approach in which human and natural history as well as symbolic, historical and political ecology merge, including the use of signs that are internal to biological dynamics such as indexical and iconic forms of communication (as demonstrated by Kohn (2007)). As a result she criticizes the limited interpretations of myths proposed by current theories of perspectivism and animism as systematically excluding the ecological dimension and perpetuating human exceptionalism.

Karadimas starts from myth and iconographic depictions, interpreting them not merely as indicators of supernatural or mythological worlds, but rather as specific depictions of reality that have to be understood and deciphered. He thereby seeks to objectify myth. He discusses Viveiros de Castro’s notion of “point of view” and the resulting subjective and relational definition of beings and their identity. While Viveiros de Castro has argued that animals see themselves as humans and view humans as predatory enemies, Karadimas argues that the main problem with this approach is that there “is no absolute way of gaining access to the interiority of other beings: it is always an imputation of identities that occurs”. Anthropology does not therefore address the point of view of non-human beings or animals but the “ways in which cultures construct this imputation of interiority”. For Karadimas, Viveiros de Castro confuses “the object with the category and thinks that categories create the world although they just give a specific account of it” (Karadimas, this volume).

Karadimas follows the transformations and depictions of relationships starting from a Miraña myth to iconic representations across the continent. The iconic representations are understood as an objectification of the human and not the animals’ perspective. His focus is on the analogical transfer of relations between beings. If Amerindians say that “jaguars see humans as peccary, they mean that humans are sometimes eaten by jaguars as if they were peccaries (thus [...] ‘they are sometimes the ‘peccaries’ of the jaguar’ [...])” (Karadimas, this volume). From such a relational definition, the Amerindians transform the position of humans into that of peccaries

but their identity remains human. It is the relation, not the identity, that becomes anthropomorphized. “Perspectivist” theory as Karadimas understands it therefore depicts an imputation of human behaviour to something that is not human. In other words, it is an expression of anthropomorphism which Karadimas considers an anthropological invariant (in accordance with Descola (2005)).

Halbmayer’s concern is to generalize some insights of a comparative study of how Carib-speaking groups tend to differentiate the world (Halbmayer 2010). His question does not concern the relationship between myth and nature; rather, he focuses on socio-cosmological notions of the person and the world. He argues that if there are different ontologies, it is likely that there are also different mereologies or relationships between parts and wholes and between multiplicity and singularity. It is therefore itself an ontological decision if other ontologies are on higher classificatory level ordered according to a nature/culture or physicality/interiority distinction. Halbmayer therefore asks for alternatives to the inversion of the nature/culture relationship that underlies Viveiros de Castro’s and Descola’s theories of perspectivism and animism. Referring to different Carib-speaking groups, he shows the indigenous conceptualizations of humans and the universe are multiply constituted, establishing a multiverse of co-existing worlds and multividuals that are related to and partially encompass different aspects of the multiverse. This multiplicity may be expressed by the circulation of spiritual substance and by different “spiritual aspects” of the person located inside and outside the body, as well as in body parts associated with different aspects of the multiverse. Hence, human persons usually do not rely on a nature/culture (body/soul) duality, often transforming into different beings with distinct eschatological destinies after death.

Lewy focuses on Pemón ritual and music. His position is (like that of Brabec below) less cognitively oriented, concentrating more on Pemón *orekotón* (*areruya*, *cho’chiman*) specialists and their expressions of transformations in ritual agency. He asks what happens during potentially transformative ritual sequences: “‘How do spirits or non-human beings hear?’ or to say it more reflexively: ‘How do Pemón think non-humans hear?’” (Lewy, this volume). He analyzes how these rituals and accompanying experiences and perceptions are acoustically and verbally enacted and communicated, especially through music and singing. Myths and sound recordings from Koch-Grünberg and his own recent field research are used to answer this question. Like Brabec, Lewy is sceptical with regard to perspectivism’s inherently visual focus and argues that hearing, singing and soundscapes are at least if not more important for understanding communication with non-human Others and for determining the perspective of “acting humans”.

Lewy demonstrates that seeing among the Pemón is associated with the differentiation of beings and species, while hearing, singing and music establish a common mutual inter-species recognition and communicative understanding across different kinds of beings. While spirits “see” the world differently than humans, what they “hear” of the world is the same. To illustrate his claim, Lewy focuses on sound symbols and intonation practices used in a formalized style to attract a supernatural agent. Among the Pemón, a shaman’s performances are consequently a “radio play” in which hearing and sound symbols are used to communicate and interact with other beings. Such an interaction becomes impossible and turns into predation as soon as these other beings are seen. Therefore descriptions focusing on the visual turn out to be in Lewy’s understanding just one side of the coin, lacking the opportunities for communicative understanding across species acoustically expressed and perceived.

Of all the authors presented in this volume, Brabec’s position is the most closely aligned with Viveiros de Castro’s multiple perspectives, despite also having significant differences. He especially focuses on the phenomenological experience of Shipibo *médicos* and argues that “all senses and modes of expression [...] must be considered when intending to understand indigenous ontology” (Brabec, this volume). Brabec underscores Karadimas’ point that there is no way of gaining access to the interiority of other beings when he writes that he does not “intend to speculate about e.g., a jaguar’s perceptions of its body and its surroundings”. Rather, he wants “to show how perceptions by *Real People who experience what it is like being e.g. a jaguar*”, usually obtained during *ayawaska*-induced visions, “differ from perceptions obtained during their everyday states” (Brabec, this volume). For Brabec, experiencing what it is like to be an Other is a basic human capacity. Among specialized Shipibo *médicos* this capacity relies on singing during altered states of consciousness induced by fasting and hallucinogenic substances. Becoming an Other from this phenomenological perspective is not an imputation of human interiority to the non-human realm but a firsthand experience associated with solid evidence among the Shipibo. Such an experience is not “compatible with third-person observation, as long as we stay within the Western scientific paradigm” (Brabec, this volume). He describes in detail how Shipibo *médicos* communicate their experiences to their audience, using strategies such as voice masking and song lyrics to conceal their own positionality. In doing so, he goes beyond Viveiros de Castro’s somatic perspectivism and argues for a sonic perspectivism encompassing the whole of “nature” and not just the nature of the (human or non-human) body: “Focusing on the visual, it is impossible to understand the agency of *médicos* (or ‘shamans’)

affecting the *environment*". The Shipibo concepts of *kano* (the frameworks that are manipulated through song, extending audibly but also synaesthetically visible from the singer to the world) and *niwe* (the specific environment or "atmosphere" around any being) are in this instance of central importance.

Thus, while Karadimas objectivises myth, Brabec focuses on the personalised experience of shamans being an Other. This difference comes close to Viveiros de Castro's argument cited by Rival: "[F]or Amerindian shamans to know is to personify, moderns need to objectify - or desubjectify - in order to know". The frames of interpretation of these two papers are based on both objectivised third-person observation and on shamanic firsthand experience of being an Other. Whereas the first position supposes a naturalistic discontinuity of "interiorities" without any means of access to the interiority of non-humans (Karadimas, this volume), for the shamanic position "other minds" do not pose a problem (Brabec, this volume). We are thus confronted not just with different ontologies but with different epistemic logics that create notions of evidence and truth in quite distinctive ways. Obviously such different positions are reproduced and contested within anthropology. We are facing not a distinction between emic and etic approaches but are confronted with different ontology-specific epistemic logics.

In his paper, Kapfhammer stresses not only the different perceptions and projections of the West and indigenous Amazonians, but also tracks Western animism as an "alternative occidental philosophical tradition contesting the much maligned Baconian and Cartesian dominance" (Kapfhammer, this volume). He further focuses on the co-existence of different environmental perceptions among the Sateré-Mawé and the historicity of their emergence in the course of confrontation with the Western world. He highlights the importance of ontological transformations and the historicity of Amerindian ontologies by focusing on the historical experience of extractivism among the Sateré. The transformative potential of the rubber boom and slavery reflected in Miraña myth is also mentioned by Karadimas. Lewy also deals with the appropriation of Christian influences and western songs into Pemon performance practices and interprets them in terms of a continuity underlying the transformation of healing and hunting rituals into contemporary *orekotón*-rituals.

By taking up Glenn Albrecht's neologism "solastalgia", referring to the pain one experiences "if the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault", Kapfhammer argues that many indigenous peoples "suffer from 'solastalgia' given the fact that large portions of the Amazon region already have fallen victim to Western environmental pathology", while "from a Western perspective the Amazon is still presumed to be an edenic landscape [...] based on 'sound' relationships

between what we call ‘humans’ and what we call ‘nature’” (Kapfhammer, this volume). He rightly asks if thinking about the cosmologies of marginalized cultures in order to “animate” or “re-animate” hegemonic Western cosmology is not just another abuse of indigenous cultures.

Ontological differences and their relationship

Standard theories of animism and perspectivism strove to differentiate dissimilar ontologies that were generally viewed as internally homogenous. The papers in this collection argue for a more nuanced view and question the assumption that animism is strictly antithetical to modern scientific knowledge or naturalism. Karadimas stresses the existence of analogical and animic classifications in naturalism and of analogical ones in animism. Moreover, Halbmayr states that cosmologies are able to integrate different ontological positions, at least at their peripheries. Even if the core of Lowland Amerindian cosmologies is based on animic assumptions, there are areas of non-personalized “nature” in animic ontologies. The cosmologies of Carib-speaking groups, although generally understood as animic, establish elaborated partial – analogical and fractal – similarities across different scales of the multiverse.

Kapfhammer focuses on the relationship between different ontologies in a far-reaching manner by tracing animism within Western art, opera, environmental psychology and everyday life. Karadimas likewise locates animism in modern graphic art and in concealed form in the use of Latin in the scientific classification of species. Furthermore, Halbmayr mentions animism as a feature of modern esoteric religions. After rejecting the idea that animism is antithetical to scientific knowledge, Rival argues in the opposite direction and claims that current theories of animism exclude biological life and the existence of non-humanised agency among indigenous groups which should form part of an ecological perspective.

In sum, while the aforementioned authors oppose a strict separation of ontologies, how they conceive their connections differs. Although not referring to ontological distinctions, Rival points out that indigenous ways of interacting with, trekking through and talking about the environment do not just express animic personifications but also detailed historical, biological and environmental knowledge which has to be taken seriously. This knowledge is an expression of natural and human history shaped not only by predation but also by natural abundance. She writes, “It is in the nature of trees and other plants of the forest to give continuously to humans without asking anything in return” (Rival, this volume).

Kapfhammer focuses on the co-existence of what he calls different “environmental ethics” among the Sateré-Mawé and their historicity. Relying on concepts developed outside Amazonia (Bird-David 1998; Peterson 1993), he argues against

the common focus on predation. According to him, the Sateré-Mawé have more than just a notion of a toxic, poisonous or predatory environment; rather, they saw the environment, as mediated between shamans and animal masters, also as a giving one. Shamans could exert a pressure for generosity on animal masters to provide meat unconditionally in a non-reciprocal relationship with hardly any moral obligations. The relationship to the wider environment, the Western world and consumer culture is based on the same attitudes. The

‘demand-sharing’ mode of human-nature-relationships carries over from the relation between shaman and animal mother to the relation between *tuxaua* and river traders, from recent political leaders tapping the funds of government agencies or international NGOs to common people as beneficiaries of social benefits (Kapfhammer, this volume).

Both Rival’s and Kapfhammer’s statements indicate that there may be more to say about environmental relations than the current focus in Amazonian anthropology on predation and balanced reciprocity suggests.

By debating animism, perspectivism and the construction of ontologies, the papers of this dossier pose a series of questions for further research concerning the “many different universes” and how we can understand them and make them comprehensible. The solutions proposed range from a universal anthropomorphization of relations (Karadimas) to different visual and acoustic versions of the world (Lewy), to a sonic perspectivism (Brabec). They further comprise the logic of partial encompassment in a differentiated multiverse of co-existing worlds (Halbmayer), the ecological interlocking of animal, plant and human life beyond personification (Rival) and the co-existence of different environmental ethics and their historicity (Kapfhammer).

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