Ontology and ontologies.
Theoretical, political, and methodological debates

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Abstract—The investigation of the self, of what exists, and of the ontological properties of the cosmos is nothing new in the history of anthropology. In the last two decades, however, the discipline has undertaken an "ontological turn." This perspective focuses on how different societies define the entities that inhabit the world and the relationships between them. The ontological turn is built upon the critiques of the Great Divide (nature/culture), and on Western naturalism as the modern dominant ontology. It is also a reaction to the linguistic turn that began to dominate in the 1980s. In this paper we present the most salient traditions of the ontological turn (the English, French, and North American), highlighting differences and similarities between them. — *Ontological turn, political ontology, recursive anthropology, nature/culture*.

Abstract—La investigación sobre el yo, acerca de lo que existe y sobre las propiedades ontológicas del cosmos no es algo nuevo en la historia de la antropología. Sin embargo, en las últimas dos décadas, la disciplina ha emprendido lo que ha venido a llamarse como "giro ontológico". Esta perspectiva se centra en cómo las diferentes sociedades definen las entidades que habitan el mundo y las relaciones entre ellas. El giro ontológico se basa en las críticas a la Gran División (naturaleza/cultura) y al naturalismo occidental como ontología moderna dominante. También es una reacción al giro lingüístico que comenzó a dominar en la década de 1980. En este documento presentamos las tradiciones más destacadas del giro ontológico (la inglesa, la francesa y la norteamericana), destacando las diferencias y similitudes entre ellas. — *Giro ontológico, ontología política, antropología recursiva, naturaleza/cultura*.

INTRODUCTION

Although the concern for the self, for what exists, and for the ontological qualities of the cosmos is nothing new in the history of anthropology, in the last two decades the so-called "ontological turn" has taken place. This new approach no longer aims to study cultural representations or cultures, but to analyze the ways in which each society defines existing entities and how they relate to each other. As we will state later on, anthropology of ontologies tends to avoid terms such as "representation" given its close connection with a certain type of anthropology produced especially in the 1980s. According to this one, cultural representations constitute a system that is superimposed on a reality that exists on the outside and it is universal and objective. Against this, defenders of the ontological turn argue that the study of ontologies does not presuppose the existence of a single nature and multiple cultures. As a matter of fact, questioning the universality of the opposition between nature and culture that is characteristic of Western ontology and history, the ontological turn argues that a great part of non-European societies did not need to distinguish the exclusive domain of humans

from another one populated by non-human beings (Descola 1986, 2005; Ingold 2000[1]; Latour 1991, 2004b, Law and Lien 2018). Ethnographies developed in non-Western societies were of much relevance to rethink the Great Divide and to show other ways of composing the world (Descola 1986; Strathern 1988; Viveiros de Castro 1992; Wagner 1972).

The ontological turn reacts against the ecological crisis and the Anthropocene, and maintains that it is pertinent to question the nature/culture opposition in order to analyze not only modern societies, but also the new hybrids that emerge from transformed environments (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2012; Latour 2015). The "new politics of nature" (Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish 2017: 9) that the ontological turn proposes is not merely the intellectual interest of some researchers concerned with the reformulation of categories such as nature or culture. Neither is it a theoretical project developed against the background of the environmental crisis. On the contrary, rethinking the nature/culture opposition presupposes a revision of the ontological principles that guide "the material and political organization of modernity" (Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish 2017: 8).

This turn also represents an answer to the linguistic turn of the 1980s in which anthropology was considered the science that interprets cultures, conceived as texts.[2] In the last decades, in an attempt to distinguish ontology from culture, different authors have pointed out the difficulties faced by an anthropology that tries to interpret artificial constructions of reality. For an ontological anthropology, this approach entails the idea that a universal objective reality exists and that each culture provides a particular vision or worldview of this reality (that is, one nature/several cultures). Against this notion, the authors of the ontological turn prefer to think in terms of multi-

ple worlds "partially connected" (Strathern 2004). This assertion requires accepting that there are different ways to compose the world, and that these compositions are not just different ways of representing it. These compositions imply, in fact, different ontologies.

An ontological perspective states that, when anthropologists face ethnographic data and situations that they cannot easily understand, they should not consider them as representations, metaphors, or symbols of the reality out there. Instead, they have to *take them seriously* and try to unravel what those situations imply for indigenous interlocutors.

Classical anthropologists would probably argue that corporal fluids may be studied as representations or symbols of domination and power (always instances that the Other cannot glimpse). Perhaps they would also consider that other people just imagine the body in a different way (accepting that there is something that can be objectively identified as a body). On the contrary, anthropologist interested in ontologies recommend to make the effort to understand how other people conceptualize what our societies usually call "fluid" or "body".

. Most of these ideas were inspired by the "method of controlled equivocation" postulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004). As this Brazilian anthropologist claims, homonymous terms do not necessarily denote identical realities. According to his approach, the aim of all research should not be to explain or to contextualize the ethnographic data, but to allow it to transform the categories that anthropologists usually apply to their analysis, showing that these categories are limited. Doing so, anthropologists move from an interpretative anthropology to another one wherein the goal is to conceptualize from the ethnographic data.

Although this ontological turn does not constitute a homogenous tradition in which all anthropologists adopt the same definition of ontology, or agree about the aim of the discipline, they do all share the post-humanist concern to incorporate more-than-human, non-humans, hybrids, and transpecies into the analysis (Kohn 2012). Within Europe, France and England are the main countries where scholars have begun to make ontologies a theoretical preoccupation and an anthropological methodology.

In France, Philippe Descola (2014b) in an exercise of "structural ontology" elaborated a theory with universal range. He systematized and conceptualized four different ways of identification or ontologies. In dialogue with his arguments, Bruno Latour (1991) showed the properly Euro-American way of distinguishing between

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[1] Although Tim Ingold shares with the other authors included in this article the theoretical interest of rethinking the division between humanity and the environment, his research is strongly influenced by phenomenology, which makes it different from the rest of works analyzed here. In general terms, authors of the ontological turn agree in considering that ontologies are stabilized in speeches and practices shared by a social group. On the contrary, Ingold states that ontologies are "mere philosophies" (in Descola and Ingold 2014: 20). The anthropological preoccupation should be, according to this scholar, the ontogenesis or, in other terms, the ways in which every human and non-human being becomes themself in the always unfinished process of life development.

[2] See Willerslev (2016), Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish (2017: 4-8) and Salmon (2017) in order to understand how the anthropology of ontologies and the postmodern anthropology conceive culture.

objects and subjects, non-humans and humans. Interested in the modern ontological constitution, Latour proposed a new constitution that may reunite what the Great Divide had separated. On the other hand, in England, anthropologists influenced by the proposals of Wagner, Strathern, and Viveiros de Castro, have been promoting a methodological change in the discipline, focusing on ontological questions instead of epistemological ones. Finally, in the United States and Canada, investigations in ecology, political economy, and decolonial thought were added to these European debates. This gave place to a branch of the ontological turn that recognizes ontological plurality and its conflicts, and works towards the constitution of what these thinkers call the "pluriverse."

In this article we intend to expose the most salient traditions of the ontological turn, highlighting differences and similarities between them. In order to do so, first we present the English branch, then we characterize the French version of this interest in ontologies and, finally, we set out the particularities of the North American ontological anthropology.

We do not ignore, however, that many of the ideas that this turn has incorporated into and articulated with other subjects of the discipline were somehow born in Latin America. In fact, it is in Brazil where the notion of Amerindian perspectivism as an ontology was first proposed (Viveiros de Castro and Stolze Lima). Besides, several Latin American authors, some of them currently living in central countries, have also reflected on issues such as ontological conflicts, posthumanism, and ontological predation (Blaser, de la Cadena, Kohn, Vilaça, among others). These initial debates of the 1990s made such a refreshing change in Americanist anthropology that, at present, most contemporary South American anthropological production still acknowledges the legacy of those theories, concepts, and methodologies, and takes them as a basis for new developments. In spite of this, as we have stated before, we organize our exposition following the theoretical production of central countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and the United States.

Three considerations must be taken into account regarding our selection criteria. On the one hand, we do not deny that there are plenty of scholars working in other universities and countries who are fully engaged in these debates. On the other hand, we are aware of the importance of international exchanges such as conferences, lectures, and congresses whose results are clearly shown in the organization of meetings or in the release of books edited and compiled by colleagues from

different countries (for example, Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish 2017; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). We also understand that big differences exist even between scholars working together in the same department, university, or country. In fact, Latour's work shares more common ground with Viveiros de Castro than with Descola, even though both are part of a French tradition. The same applies to Holbraad, Pedersen, Willerslev, and Candea (although none of them is English, they all studied in Cambridge 20 years ago).

These considerations notwithstanding, we still argue that the anthropological tradition and history of the central countries greatly affect the theoretical and methodological choices of the majority of the most innovative contemporary anthropological research. Such is the case of French anthropology, which recognizes its structuralist inheritance and concentrates mainly on modeling and generalization by means of a hypothetical deductive method. The same happens with the exponents of the ontological turn formed in the United Kingdom, who are strongly influenced by the strathernian preoccupations about concepts. Or with the anthropologists interested in ontologies in North America, who link these questions with decolonial theories, tracing a continuity, in one way or another, with the traditional American focus on agency and conflicts.

To sum up, although we understand that there are anthropologists working on ontologies in other countries (this being our case, as argentinian anthropologists), we continue to believe that distinguishing these three branches is useful in expository terms. It is not a question of perpetuating colonialist logics in science, but of recognizing that, despite the great efforts of plenty of anthropologists working from their own countries and regions, the circulation of ideas is still marked by some consolidated traditions.

PERSPECTIVIZING THE DISCIPLINE: EXERCISES OF RECURSIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

In England, the interest toward ontologies started in 1998 when Viveiros de Castro was invited by the Department of Social Anthropology of the University of Cambridge to give some lectures on multinaturalism and Amazonian perspectivism (2015: 189-324). Those lessons were programmatic for a group of students and professors—Including Martin Holbraad, Morten Pedersen, Matei Candea, and Rane Willerslev—who elaborated a critique that goes beyond the Amazonian context and seeks to rethink general ideas of the discipline (see Holbraad and Pedersen 2017).

Their attempt at "perspectivizing" anthropology—an attempt that has been described as "reverse ethnocentrism" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014: 53)—supposes the adoption of the basic premises of this Amazonian ontology as a method (Holbraad 2013: 469).[3] Amerindian multinaturalism (Viveiros de Castro 1996) postulates that the world is composed by a set of elements whose nature varies according to the identity of the subject that perceives them. There are not variable representations of a single world, but multiple worlds *per se*; all the existing beings perceive in the same way—through the same categories and values—but the objective correlate seen by them varies.[4]

To take these Amazonian ideas as a method allows us to approach alterity as the expression of plural points of view on worlds that are also plural. If "powder is power," as the practitioners of the Ifá divinatory cult argue (Holbraad 2007), or if "twins are birds," from the Nuer's point of view, what we should do is describe the particular worlds where those concepts of "powder," "power," "twins," and "birds" are possible. In short, the fundamental contribution of these authors is to have noticed that "anthropologists may accept either that their ethnographic subjects think differently about things or that they have entirely different things to think about" (Fowles 2011: 906, in Alberti *et al.* 2011), and that the anthropological project should be to reformulate the strategies of writing and describing.

As part of wider discussions about the scope of theoretical constructions in anthropology, the interest for ontologies in British scholarship focuses on concepts. What is the relationship between fieldwork and the categories that the researcher uses to grasp it? What ontological assumptions underlie ethnographic realities and anthropological concepts? Comparison as a method plays a central role in these researches. As Marilyn Strathern had already argued (1988), concepts have always a concrete place of origin from which we cannot get rid of. In order to use those concepts in other contexts, it is necessary to put them in relation to the concepts that were originated there, compare them and then essay a possi-

ble translation. See for example, Pickering (2017) who studies the way of proceeding in certain sciences and in Taoism, Zen and Shamanism as conceived by Davi Kopenawa. This researcher proposes comparative transitions between those different worlds in order to take them all seriously.

Anthropology appears here to be a methodological intervention whose goal is to rethink the ethnographic data through its own concepts (and not under categories forged for other realities or regions).[5] The British ontological turn proposes to make an inversion between *empiria* and concepts: instead of treating data as the object of analytical procedures, anthropologists should treat them as sources of transformation for their conceptual repertoires, in order to produce descriptions that do not reduce data to mere explanatory or interpretative schemes developed under Western ontological history. If our concepts are not able to make ethnographic realities intelligible, then they should be replaced.

Inadequacy is, in fact, a cornerstone in these anthropological projects. This term is related to Viveiros de Castro's proposals concerning controlled equivocation as a method (2004) and to the idea of "a new anthropology of the concept" (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 43). This one consists of the incrimination of "oneself in the effort to forge an anthropological theory of the conceptual imagination, one attuned to the creativity and reflexivity of every collective, human or otherwise" (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 43). In the reappropriation done by Holbraad, these proposals become an *ontographic method* (2012: 255-259) that follows some clearly identifiable steps. First of all, it is necessary to have an exhaustive description of the ethnographic material in order to track logical contradictions. Then, we should find in our ethnographies those elements which seem irrational to us. By doing so, we confront ourselves with alterity and it becomes possible to make explicit the conceptual conflicts.

Suggestive as it may seem, since it inverts the objective of the anthropological project that confers to fieldwork a great weight, this method is not free from difficulties. Although it is worthy to emphasize "taking seriously" native ideas and praxis, and the reluctance of reducing them to concepts coming from our ontology (Venkatesan 2010: 154), the recursive character of this method has been object of severe criticism. Vigh and Sausdal, for example, consider that to take the field

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[3] The idea of elevating certain way of thinking to "[...] a critical instrument of the totality of western cosmology" (Descola 2014: 49, in Descola and Ingold 2014) presupposes that ontologies are something that people adopt or discard intentionally. On the contrary, for Descola each ontology is associated to the historical circumstances that gave rise to it.

[4] Viveiros de Castro's attempt of moving "[...] from 'worldviews' to 'worlds of vision'" (Vigh and Sausdal 2014: 53) implies that "'visions' are not beliefs, not consensual views, but rather worlds seen objectively [...]" (Viveiros de Castro 2015: 80).

[5] An antecedent of this way of working in anthropology is the already classic text by Seeger, da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro (1979) for the Amazonian indigenous societies.

seriously seems to be a mere "conceptual trampoline" (2014: 62) to generate new theories, in a procedure that does not necessarily produce useful proposals for the people that are involved in the research. Assuming the risk of being narcissistic, the extreme version of ontography dictates that anthropologists have to go beyond the limits of their own thought and force themselves to work outside them. As Holbraad expresses in reference to the famous postulate by Tim Ingold,[6] anthropology is philosophy without the people in, since the axis is not in the people, but rather in their ideas and the way those ideas interact with ours. We observe here that the meaning of the term ontology is slightly different: it is about the assumptions postulated by anthropologists with analytical aims; an exercise of conceptual creativity that does not necessarily involve the people. (Holbraad 2010: 185)

There are other critics associated with the previous one. In repeated occasions, it has been argued that the underlying assumption of the existence of a "radical alterity" (Povinelli 2001) reduces the complexity of the interconnected worlds by considering them transparent, internally homogenous, and externally incommensurable (Bessire and Bond 2014; Harris and Robb 2012; Vigh and Sausdal 2014). For the detractors of the ontological turn, the invitation to take the ideas and preoccupations of the Other seriously seems to lose great part of the revolutionary ethical and political component it supposedly has. In privileging fieldwork moments of radical alterity, anthropologists are contributing to the ontologization and exotization of the Other. Therefore, when these authors talk about the "ontological self-determination of the other" (Viveiros de Castro 2009), they do not consider how and who defines "people" and "ontology," nor do they notice the way these definitions entail practices of power. (Vigh and Sausdal 2014: 63)

As we will see, all these aspects are more strongly problematized by some anthropologists of Canada and the United States. However, Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro (2014) respond indirectly to these critics. They declare that ontology is not associated to essential and stable things and, therefore, opposed to politics and agency. The ontological project has deep political concerns, because by presenting other alternatives to the assumptions about what exists and conferring them ontological weight, these other alternatives become possible. In their terms: "[t]his is an anthropology that is constitutively anti-authoritarian, making it its

business to generate alternative vantages from which established forms of thinking are put under relentless pressure by alterity itself, and perhaps changed. One could even call this intellectual endeavor revolutionary" (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014: w/p). As they notice, this ontologically-oriented anthropology is internally constituted by and morally overlapped in the political aspects of the life of those people with whom we work. To decolonize thought and to recognize that our ideas are always related to others is to involve ourselves in the process of returning ontology to people.

THE FRENCH ONTOLOGICAL TURN: THE GREAT DIVIDE AS THE ENGINE OF THINKING

In its French branch, the ontological turn has three central exponents: Philippe Descola, Bruno Latour, and Isabelle Stengers.[7] There are also philosophers, such as Patrice Maniglier (2015), who take the main proposals of Viveiros de Castro to rethink Western philosophy. Finally, in the book symposium "Beyond Nature and Culture (Philippe Descola) published in 2014 (HAU Journal 4(3): 363-443), several anthropologists, many of them French, debate Descola's ideas, especially the concept of ontology and its uses in anthropology.

In general terms, for Descola (2014b: 113, 117) the aim of anthropology is to elaborate models of intelligibility for the diverse uses of the world and the different ways of composing and inhabiting it. In its French variation, ontologies are conceived not as a methodological tool nor as a political device, but as a model that does not seek to describe any particular society, but to resolve problems of the general anthropological order (Descola 2014b: 223). In this sense, its objective is not to study culture, but to make models that would make possible the rethinking of concepts that social scientists use. As Descola himself says, these concepts are the product of a singular social and cultural history (2014b: 242).

This project of "conceptual hygiene" (Descola 2014b: 240) was nourished by Descola's fieldwork among the Achuar people, and also by a profound ethnological research that guided him from the Amazon to the north up to central Asia and Siberia. *Par-delà nature et culture* (2005) is still severely critiqued because of its ambition for global knowledge and synthesis. Nevertheless, as Descola remarks, his aim is not to universalize, but to make different ontologies symmetrical (2014b:

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6   "Anthropology is philosophy with the people in" (1992: 696).

7   For a revision of the anthropology of ontologies in its French variant, see Salmon and Charbonnier (2014), Keck, Regehr and Walentowits (2015) and Kohn (2015).

252): he aspires to put in a plane of conceptual equality anthropologists and those with whom we work.

This French scholar defines ontology as "a concrete expression of how a particular world is composed, of what kind of furniture it is made of, according to the general layout specified by a mode of identification" (2014a: 437) that people establish between themselves and others. Two aspects are central in his theory: the role of schemas, and the contrast between *interiority* and *physicality*. On the one hand, ontologies are defined as types of integrating schemas. If ethnography allows us to describe processes and events, the "way in which those processes are going to become stabilized in systems of interaction" (Descola 2013: 503) escapes the fieldwork. On the other hand, the identification is conceived as a general schema acquired during primary socialization that allows humans to establish differences and similarities between them and others, based on physical appearance and internal states. As we may see, ontologies are strongly anchored in the experience of subjects that perceive, compose a world, and act on it. Worlding is, therefore, the process by which qualities, phenomena, and relations are perceived, selected, and grouped according to "ontological filters" (Descola 2014c: 273).

Descola's model is, in fact, the hypothetical-deductive expression of the possible combination between physicality and interiority based on continuities or discontinuities existing between the world and the perceptual agent.[8] Having reduced all the possibilities to a chart of four options, Descola has been severely criticised because of his apparently ahistorical approach that supposes a total absence of political and ethical commitment towards indigenous people (Bessire and Bond 2014; Harris and Robb 2012). Nevertheless, many of these reviews arise from partial or tendentious interpretations of his work, as long as he himself indicates that none of the possible combinations of the "hypothetical invariant" is preeminent (2014b: 235), and that there is not an evolutionarily relationship between them. On the contrary, we can see throughout history progressive transitions between ontologies and even hybridizations resulting from diverse factors of historical or structural order.

Showing that modernity is a particular ontological formation and that there are other possible ways of updating sensory properties is a project that recognizes the political character of anthropology. The ontological turn states that it is necessary to rethink the categories that Europe forged in its neo-colonial project of absorbing within Western ontology people who had "to translate their ways of life into our own way of life and be grateful to us for providing them the tools to do so" (Descola 2014a: 436). As we have seen, Descola proposes, on the contrary, not to extend mechanically the European categories to the study of non-European realities.

His study of the dimensions that precede the worlding process and his interest in ontologies conceived as an elementary analytical level not dependent on cultural variations entails a political commitment not always recognized as such, i.e. to put on stage all those entities that are a fundamental part of the world, history, and common life. They had remained in the shadow due to our difficulty to accept that we compose different worlds, and now they question "the imperialistic universalism of naturalists" (Latour 2011: 175).

In *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (1991), Latour also approaches the question of the entities that inhabit the world and how they relate to each other. His intellectual trajectory is, however, different: just as anthropology has shown that in non-modern societies myths, ecological aspects, rites, politics and economy coexist, and must be studied as an ensemble, philosophy of science argues that in the modern world everything is also, and at the same time, real, narrated, and social. Nevertheless, because of the constitution that governs us (one that has distinguished by purification non-humans from humans and, in parallel, has created science as the proper way to represent non-humans and politics as the exclusive sphere of humans), we have not been able to conceive of nature-cultures as not dissociated. Latour's research was very important in the development of Science and Technology Studies that reformulates politics, conceived now as the construction of a cosmos in which we all could live or, in other words, a "common world" (Latour 2007: 811-812). Research developed in laboratories has shown that it is necessary to extend the set of humans and non-humans that we recognize as existing and to accept that politics exists even outside the traditional political characters, the usual spaces of political work, and the pas-

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8 Possible combinations are: a. humans and non-humans share the same interiority but their physicalities are different (animism), b. humans and non-humans have the same physicality and differ in their interiority (naturalism), c. interiority and physicality are shared among a group of humans and non-humans that differ from another groups that are constituted by the same logic (totemism) or d. humans and non-humans differ in their interiorities and physicalities and, therefore, each element is a singular entity that establishes with others relations of analogy, giving place to groups organized by systems of correspondences (Descola 2014b: 214).

sions typically associated to politicians. (Latour 2007: 811-812)

In a similar way, Stengers (2005) argues that, reframing notions as "agency," "entity," or "ensemble," and questioning the idea of mononaturalism, science allows us to rethink who can speak, who can be the spokesman of what, and who can represent whom. Nevertheless, for her science is still unable to put aside political categories that were exclusively produced by Western modern tradition. Against it, Stengers invites us to doubt the "common world": how can we imagine political scenes that go beyond "the fiction that 'humans of good will decide in the name of the general interest'"? (2005: 1002). How to encourage us to take into account those other agents that have been traditionally disqualified because they do not have anything to propose? Latour shares most of Stengers' concerns (2004a: 455). He argues against Kant's and the Stoics' cosmopolitanism that proposes that, even if part of a nation-state, we are citizens of the cosmos and we all share humanity and differ only in our variable ways of representing what exists. Denying the idea that we have to develop a common character in order to gain tolerance or construct peace, Latour maintains that we are in a perpetual war in which the central question is what there is of common in the common world that we want to build. As we will show in the following section, this perspective was critically adopted by other scholars (Blaser 2016, 2019; de la Cadena 2010) who state that the common thing is not something we recognize in spite of superficial differences, but rather something that we need to construct through diplomatic relations that involve not only humans but also non-human beings.

FROM ONTOLOGY TO POLITICAL ONTOLOGY: PLURIVERSE AND ONTOLOGICAL CONFLICTS

The interest for ontologies in the United States and Canada, especially in the universities of North Carolina, California and Memorial is strongly related to studies of modernity and colonialism and to fields like political economy, cultural studies, and political ecology. In "an attempt to carve out a space for thinking other thoughts, seeing other things, writing in other languages" (Escobar 1997: 504), Escobar gets back on the challenge expressed by the Subcommander Marcos, spokesman of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, of "a world where many worlds fit." Along with Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, Escobar proposes a line of research called "Studies of the Pluriverse" (Escobar 2014: 141). The starting point of these studies is the existence of multiple forms of knowledge and the idea that all of them are sustained in different ontological commitments and particular ways of "world-making." If this is the case, the Western universalist narrative and the dichotomies associated to it are no longer appropriate. Unlike other traditions of the ontological turn, in which the political aspect is not so crucial, these authors focus on it in order to develop an approach that they call "political ontologies" (Blaser 2013, Escobar 2014). On the one hand, this field emphasizes the idea that every ontology supposes a particular form of conceptualizing and doing politics. On the other hand, they consider that political conflicts are usually a product of disagreement regarding the existing entities and the way in which they are related to each other.

As we have already mentioned, those who critique the ontological turn argue that the emphasis on radical alterity leads to standardize human groups and to increase the distance between the West and the rest, creating the sensation of incommensurability between worlds. In an attempt to avoid these consequences, some researchers—such as Blaser, de la Cadena, Poirier, and those who published their research in the dossier 42 of *Recherches Amérindiennes au Quebec* edited by Legoas, de la Cadena, and Wyatt—, are interested in the connections between ontologies and in the ontological pluralism that exists inside nation-states. Because of that, they study conflicts between ontologies in permanent transformation and they are not so interested in classifications or systematizations of ontologies already stabilized. For Sylvie Poirier, "relational ontologies" (2008: 77) are not entities nor metaphysical constructions, but rather the result of located practices. As ways of worlding or enacting reality (Blaser 2009), ontologies are thus the result of experiences and concrete interactions between humans and non-humans. (Poirier 2008: 77)

Such interactions, often problematic, are a *locus* of privilege in this scholarship since political ontology is conceived as a field of investigation that focuses on conflicts that emerge when two or more ontologies are in contact (Blaser 2009: 11). They consider that in their coexistence with the dominant society, indigenous people and other subaltern groups have learned to hide aspects that modern ontology considers radical alterity (Poirier 2008: 83). The immanence of ancestors, non-human's agency, and communication in dreams are some aspects that are markers of difference in modern Western states. Multiple ontologies need to be negotiated in the present.

The research of Blaser (2010), Piergiorgio Di Gi-

miniani (2013), de la Cadena (2015), Tola y Medrano (2020), among others, manifests the variety of realms where these discussions may take place, and shows that ecology is becoming the preponderant locus where ontological conflicts between indigenous people and nation-states are taking place. Different ways of enacting the world give place to conflicts, and these conflicts question the idea that everybody is modern (Blaser 2013), and that all people enact the same world. As the English branch of the ontological turn and Amerindian multinaturalism, Blaser reverses the formula "one nature/many cultures" postulating the existence of interconnected worlds.

We can distinguish other connections between these developments and the other two branches of the ontological turn that we have distinguished previously. Beyond differences, all the approaches promote the recognition of ontological pluralism and work towards the construction of a pluriverse that would break the Western ontological priority (naturalism). They also propose to introduce in the political and social scene those entities denied by naturalism (indigenous people and non-humans) and question the universality of the categories created and imposed by modernity. Examples of this are the proposals by Holbraad (2012) and Descola (2005, 2014b) that consider ontology a heuristic tool, and also their idea of rethinking analytical concepts and their connection with ethnographic data.

EPILOGUE

In this paper we have reflected on the scope and limitations of the methodological approach that the ontological turn proposes, in order to discuss the possibilities opened by this turn. The debates that emerged from the various branches of the ontological turn are valuable contributions to anthropology. The inclusion of ontology in the conceptual and methodological apparatus of the discipline enriches the discussions about the multiple worlds that humans compose, and also confronts us with the challenge of thinking these multiplicities.

We have intended to expose the differences between the authors working with ideas of the ontological turn and to show, as many other colleagues have already suggested, that this is not a homogeneous turn. As a matter of fact, for scholars such as Descola, ontological difference is something that can be found in the world and described as such, while for others like Holbraad, ontology characterizes the relationship between analytical means and objects of analysis. Even if it seems unclear how all these perspectives about ontology can be grouped un-

der a single rubric, we consider that a common spirit is shared by all these colleagues: this turn is ontological (because it focuses on the diversity of worlds denoted by concepts) as well as methodological (ontologies are considered heuristic tools) and political (since it argues that any investigation *with the people in* (*sensu* Ingold) should lead us to imagine other possible worlds). The interest in concepts includes questioning the scope of the researcher's analytical tools, but it also means searching for the concept of the Other, in an attempt to put Western conceptual imagination and that of the people with whom we work on a symmetrical plane.

Although not all anthropological research has to be ontological, it is productive for the discipline to take into account the changes of perspective that the ontological turn proposes. Rather than adhere to the totality of postulates of the ontological turn identified in this text, we have attempted to present the diversity of definitions of ontology, of proposals and trajectories which, as we have expressed, do not make this turn a coherent tradition or a doctrine. The review we have made leaves us open the following question: what world could we, as anthropologists, compose if we thought in terms of cosmopolitics rather than politics, ontology rather than culture, and ontography instead of ethnography?

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