

# Dualism in Corporeality: The Meaning-Making in I-I and I-Other Relationships<sup>[\*]</sup>

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## Abstract

Departing from the notion of the *body as an agency*, as proposed by Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian perspectivism, the aim of this presentation is to articulate the notion of *agentive corporeality* with the notions of *belongingness and otherness* as discussed in the frame of the semiotic-cultural constructivism in psychology (Simão, 2005; 2008). Among the possibilities for this articulation, we will take here the aspect of the expression of meanings in corporeal inscriptions. According to Amerindian perspectivism, the *body as an agentive substance* dwells images which are inscribed in it. This process of body inscription allows the objectification of cultural meanings about the roles, rights and duties, expectations and possibilities of a subject in his/her relationships with his/her others. In sum, inscriptions can be viewed as indicatives of the subject's action potential (Boesch, 1991). They emerge from cognitive-emotional elaborations of the individual's collective experiences and are constraining, in their expression, by them. For instance, in the Amerindian context, the newborn is formerly taken as a stranger, as someone who nobody knows, until his body receives some inscriptions by specific older others. It is through this cultural construction in the newborn body that she/he becomes a «relative of his/her relatives» (Viveiros de Castro, 2002). From then on, some of his/her actions will receive group validation, while others will be prevented. In other words, at the birth, the body is something «generic», considered as not completely provided with the group signals (Taylor, 1984/1996). In such an extent, the personal development is marked by the transformative symbolic action (Boesch, 1991) of others on the subject's formerly unmarked body. The kind of I-Other relationship here illustrated, according to the theoretical frames here put in dialogue, can lead us to deepen our discussion about the *path of becoming* as coordinated by *structural and processual* levels in human development.

[\*] Sponsored by The State of São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) & The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil (CNPq)

The objective of the present work is situated in the context of the interdisciplinary dialogue among contemporary approaches in Psychology, Anthropology and Ethnography. Precisely, the research from which this work makes part concerns a dialogue between the Semiotic-Cultural Constructivism, in Psychology (cf. Simão, 2003, 2005, 2007), and the Amerindian Perspectivism, in Anthropology (cf. Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1998, 2002/2006). At present, we will discuss the notion of corporeality and a dualism that it implies when it is explored from I-I and I-other relationships.

Semiotic-Cultural Constructivism, in Psychology, «focuses especially on the process of individual development, in which I-other interactions unfolding from, as well as forming, the cultural space have a prime role» (Simão, 2003). In this process, the interlocutor's quest for mutual understanding and sharing of their experiential meanings brings about a movement of decentration, from which some novelties can emerge in their comprehension. Comprehension is here understood in its two intertwined aspects, about the subject of the ongoing conversation, as well as about the relative position of each interlocutor in the conversation. This process happens, in a great extent, thanks to the symbolic action that occurs in the dynamics of the interlocutors' cultural field of action (Boesch, 1991).

Amerindian Perspectivism, by its side, is a label given to a contemporary approach that has emerged as a theoretical-methodological answer to a challenge faced by Ethnography, that is, the failure in comprehension brought forth by cross-cultural comparisons among tribal groups in America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Aiming to understand the American ethnic groups in their distinctive particularities, the Amerindian Perspectivism proposes to carry on an experiment of «sembling the native» (cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2002). In such a kind of theoretical - methodological purpose, the researcher tries to think «as if» he or she was someone who belongs to the studied group. This way of acting implies not just take into account the native as subject, but to think what can be a subject according to his or her point of view. As a consequence, a set of interrelated autochthonous ideas and practices could be proposed about Amerindian's worlds views.

## 1. «DISCOVERING» AMERICA AND MEETING OTHERNESS

The roots of anthropological questioning on how autochthon people from America construct knowledge about themselves, about otherness and the environment are connected with the meeting between Europeans and Americans in the beginning of colonization (16<sup>th</sup> century). When Europeans started to deal with Amerindians, they weren't sure about their subjective condition. The main question for the Europeans was whether the indigenous people had — or did not have — a soul. Besides, Amerindians tried to verify the supernaturality of white people through a long time observation if their bodies would decompose after die, as described Lévi-Strauss

In the Greater Antilles, a few years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards were sending out Commissions of investigation to discover whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter spent their time drowning white prisoners in order to ascertain, by long observation, whether or not their bodies would decompose (Lévi-Strauss, 1952: 12).

Despite both people were ignorant about the other and both considered themselves «humans» (ethnocentrism), each group created different hypothesis about the other, from which they developed different procedures for knowledge construction. It expresses a human capacity for apprehending the reality, either giving objectivity or giving subjectivity to it (Boesch, 1991). In other words, this excerpt shows that while the whites took the objectivity of otherness as a data, questioning if it has or not subjectivity, Amerindians took the subjectivity as a data, and concern about the characteristics of the body, for them, corporeality was the characteristic that could guarantee the humanity of otherness as similar to their.

Therefore, the correlative objective for what is humanity was different for each people in the meeting: for the whites, to be human was to have a soul, for the Indians, to be human was to have an appropriated body. Amerindian perspectivism remarks a general ethnographic evidence that according to native comprehensions the world is inhabited by many species of beings endowed with conscience and culture. Besides, the way as human beings see them is radically different from the way as these beings see the human and as they see themselves (cf. Ingold, 2000; Lagrou, 2007; Lima, 1996, 2005; Pissolato, 2007; Stutzman, 2005; Vilaça, 2006; Viveiros de Castro, 1998, 2002, 2002/2006 etc.). So, the possibility of occupying a perspective can be conferred to beings that are from different species since western sight, that is, for them, *human* is a quality related to the situation of things in the world as they are seen by a perspective. Therefore, some non-humans actualize the potential of being humans in a more evident manner than others; some of them — from Amerindian viewpoint — can do it in a more intense way than beings from our specie. It means that these supposed non-humans can take the place of being more *person* than a common person.

### 1.1. Bodies and their objective correlatives

According to Amerindian Perspectivism, whether to be human is to have an appropriated body, the way as the other sees a body determines its humanity since its specific perspective. Besides, the possibility of escaping a point of view is not allowed, since each organism is situated in its environment. It means that the «objective world», in which the «other» lives, is different from the world the «I» live, because they cannot transcend their position (cf. Lima, 1996). About the perspective of the other someone can just imagine how reality is. So, Amerindian

[...] cosmology imagines a universe peopled by different types of subjective agencies, human as well as non-human, each endowed with the same generic type of soul, i.e. the same set of cognitive and volitional capacities.

The possession of a similar soul implies the possession of similar concepts, which determine that all subjects see things in the same way; in particular, individuals of the same species see each other (and each other only) as humans see themselves; that is, as beings endowed with human shape and habits, seeing their bodily and behavioral aspects in the form of human culture. What changes when passing from one species of subject to another is the 'objective correlative' the referent of these concepts: what jaguars see as 'manioc beer' (the proper drink of people), humans see as 'blood,' where we see a muddy salt-lick on a river bank, tapirs see their big ceremonial house, and so on. (cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2004: s. n.)

The sharing of a specific ground of existence is supposed among a group of relatives or a community, but it cannot be possible between two distinct groups or even persons. Corporal similarities of some beings are understood as consequence of a shared belongingness. Recognizing the other in a subjective position gives complexity to the I-world relation because the perspective of the other is related to a shared world that he/she has constructed among their partners. In other words, each community or person lives in a world that is objectively constructed among their participants.

At the moment more than one point of view interact, takes place different orientation systems that configures the universe of each being. It is not supposed to be, only, a relation between subjective oriented fields but is the properly world, the definition of what is real that is confronted with the interaction among perspectives.

Each subject [...] has its own viewpoint as «sensible reality», and considers the viewpoint of the Other as a supra-sensible dimension or «supernatural» of its own experience. From this, the happening that for each subject is exclusively and truthful, is considered by him from a double viewpoint, its own and of the Other (Lima, 1996: 37).

Lima (1996) conceived an important duplicity — the perceived and its partners — that is unfolded (multiplied) in the consideration of the others and their own perspectives. It articulates sensible experiences with virtual identity (Lima, 1996) in the sense that the objective reality is relational, «individual substances or substantial patterns are not the last reality» (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 385). As a consequence, sharing in the core of a community entails social investments on body construction.

## **2.2. Constructing the «truly» human body**

Amerindian perspectivism states that the social difference is something presupposed, it is a given, some similarity can be constructed through an effort of conviviality in the core of the communitarian life (Viveiros de Castro, 2002/2006). Social relation is characterized by approximations and distancing of persons and groups, leading to a reversible process of turning alterity into identity that implies emergence of novelties. New substantial bodies are originated from social relations. It can be concretely understood in terms of consubstantiation or kinship construction since the child, a possible product of kinship relationships, is never an exact copy of their parents. In certain sense, after born, the child needs to be made a fellowship, «it is a strange, a guest to be transformed in a consubstantial» (p. 447).

Another instance, from ethnographical experience, shows that for the indigenous, any knowledge just makes sense to someone who is going to participate in the social life

[...] I've discovered that many of collected information in interviews, before I attend to the ritual, were contradicted by the performance (when everything started to fit). The same can be said about other field experiences. More than once I listened to the elders claim: «Why she wants to know this if she is not going to live here?» or «Why wants to know? Does not understand!» (Lagrou, 2007: 310).

The community channelizes the process of growing — an open-ended personal development — oriented to the future, «human existence depends on the control of the boundaries of phenomenon and states of being in order to produce equilibrium between fixture and fluidity, stability and transformation» (Lagrou, 2007, pp. 29-30). For the indigenous, development happens from the articulation of images that can be «embodied» or «disembodied», producing novel outcomes:

Is on the battle by the shape control that is based Kaxinawa socio-Cosmo-politic. Because of them, shape, attention and cognition are embraced and irreducible. Transformations suffered by the shapes acquire inestimable ontological importance. The shape of a being gives access to its agentive intentions and Kaxinawa's world, as the Amerindian in general, is characterized by the central place occupied by the possibility of transformation of beings in other beings (Lagrou, 2007: 28).

The intense meaningful use of body by Amerindian peoples is part of their personal identity construction and social values circulation, «bodies are created by the relation, and not the relations by the body, saying better, bodies are vestiges in the world when relations are consumed, actualized» (Viveiros de Castro, 2002/2006, p. 447). Also, memory and knowledge are inscribed in the body, constructed from perceptive experiences (Albert, 2002). Amerindian way of dealing with the body is oriented to specific investments in the personal formation, emphasizing continuous methods of body fabrication. The meaningful use of body takes part in a process of objectivation that the subject conducts upon itself (Viveiros de Castro, 1996, p. 131), inscribing its culture into the body, making it singular.

In sum, Amerindian perspectivism brings ethnological matter that allows the researcher to think that according to the indigenous cultural understanding, control of boundaries and shapes of human body are emphasized in order to reach stability in an intense changeable environment; bodies are never only biological, a baby is the result of social embodied interactions between a couple (Taylor, 1993; Viveiros de Castro, 2002/2006); memory and knowledge are inscribed in the body through graphic signs, shared food, smells and mutual touching; through conviviality people construct the possibility of sharing similar objective correlatives in the environment.

## **2. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SEMIOTIC-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

For Amerindian perspectivism, the notion of body is not strictly linked with anatomic or physiological frames. It is being considered as a conjunction of affections and manners that composes a habit, the usual way of a being perceives diary occurrences, dwells the world (Viveiros de Castro, 2002/2006). Personal singularization happens among otherness developments through the creation and inclusion of new relationships that are projected on the bodies of whom relate (cf. Lima, 2007). It is permeated by an inevitable process of growing and self-debilitation (Lagrou, 2007). In such fluid environment, human condition is characterized by its solid embodied shape, where transformational processes can be controlled.

Amerindians assertions are concerned with the limitations of purely verbal knowledge construction. Action and perspective are intricate once the action organizes the same world that structures it. The belongingness in a determined society is not linked to the sharing of abstract representations, but agreements can be constructed from intersubjective experiences, through dealing with new contexts and the mutual effort for coordination, turning strangeness into comfortable, familiarized experiences. From a semiotic-cultural approach, is by exploring the world with its body that the subject gets used with others places. The process of familiarization entails changes (cf. Boesch, 1991). Meaning construction is made as an effort for organization of novelties integrating it in the previous open-ended configured system (cf. Valsiner, 2001, 2007). This organization is linked to the sensible level of body, excitation and inhibition that entails a feeling tone, from which further generalizations can develop. Even so, constructed generalized symbolic cultural meanings act recursively on the body, also affecting its feeling capacities.

The articulation between processual and structural levels of psychological - cultural experiences can be comprehended in terms of migration (cf. Valsiner, 2007): if we are all migrants towards otherness (at least towards an unknown future), is also true that we are always going back home, because life organized around a center — the body — source of actions, root of identity in constant interaction with the culture. Children start to explore the world with its body placed on the protected field of a woman body, its mother. After, the protected field of the house takes place. It offers references to embodied habits and ways of interact with others, expressed by the caregivers. The early universe of sensations becomes to make sense through relations with caregivers — whom offers bounded symbolically mediated reality to the child.

As the culture allows multiple loci for human development, intersubjective relations are produce mistakes. And because knowledge construction implies interaction, its outcome is always unknown: someone can be totally absorbed by the point of view of the other and lose the possibility of asserting its own perspective — in the Amerindian understanding it is usually identified with the phenomena of death. For Amerindians, the body is remarked by the history of relations along its existence, becoming a complex interwoven of agentive images which needs to be regulated in order to promote development according to social values. In this process takes place complex ritualized care on the body, inscribing meanings that identify to the subject and to the others particular viewpoints. Thus, the perspective of otherness is usually in a supra-sensible dimension: since bodies are different, affection and otherness perceived world are different. It implies the inevitability of plural objective realities to be constituted in the core of immanent field of inter-corporeal experiences.

### **3. SHARING THE QUEST FOR SHARING**

Semiotic-Cultural Constructivism and Amerindian Perspectivism are both concerned with understanding the point of view of the other in the quest for new and deep comprehensions in their respective frameworks. The quest for sharing is discussed from the psychological approach as a hermeneutical task that involves four aspects described below:

**First**, in I – other communication, the search for sharing experiential meanings demands an effort for adjusting different perspectives in order to fit different positions in the dialogue («who is who in the dialogue»), as well as about the subject matter they are talking about (what, why, when, where «we are talking about»). Rommetveit (1992) uses the notion of tuning to refer to this process. **Second**, each person, entering in a dialogue, will enter, unavoidably, with his / her presuppositions (cf. Taylor, 2002); the issue, then, is not to get rid of his / her own presuppositions, but to take into account that the other will have his / her own, which will probably enter in some disagreement with our own. **Third**, as a consequence of the second process, entering in a dialogue with the aim of conversation and argumentation, instead of exclusively persuading the other, requires to be opened to the other's voice (perspectives), letting them to talk, even if this voice will be a counter-voice concerning our pre-conceptions (cf. the notion of desire in Lévinas, 1980); **Fourth**, in this process, some pre-conceptions of each participant can be transformed, as well as some co-constructed conceptions about the subject can emerge; in few words, that is the process that Gadamer calls «fusion of horizons».

### 3.1 Dialogical Methodology

For the exploration of the present semiotic question, focusing the corporeality as an agency in the boundary of the tensional meeting of different perspectives — of the I and of the other — we used a dialogical methodology, that consists, precisely, in take into consideration that subject and object of research comes to existence together as the relation between figure and ground, in such a way that in composes a tensional boundary between both (Herbst, 1995). It leads to a transformation of the object of investigation, through the semiotic/symbolic mediation, as a way of reducing the tension emerged by the relation.

In the present case, dialogic methodology was used to understand all the levels of analysis and its consequences in the production or modification of symbolic resources around the selected frameworks. The notion of symbolic resource was defined by Zittoun et al. (2003) as the used symbolic element by an agent «in order to achieve something in a particular social, cultural and temporal context [...] it enables the agent to make a transition from one socio-cultural formation to another» (p. 416). Figure 01 illustrates which are the levels of analysis designed for the present research and which symbolic resource is on the focus of transformation in each moment of remarked interaction. It is structured according to two axes that compose the researcher — represented by the letter X — intrasubjective and intersubjective positions and its elaborations (symbolic resources) in order to fulfill gaps emerged from divergences in these axes, or lines. The intersubjective line is oriented to the reign of perception in which the researcher deals with the impact of the contact with the authors of the selected theories in analysis. The intrasubjective line is oriented to the reign of imagination, that is, as Sartre (1996) pointed out, «an act of the conscience in order to make appear the though object, the desired thing in such a way that we can apprehend it» (p. 165). Imagination and perception are usually divergent; nevertheless, through the human action upon the world they can reach some convergence.

In this sense, the researcher can produce a project (symbolic resource 01) in order to develop a thesis (for instance, or a paper and presentations — symbolic resource 2) which put in relation its objects of questioning. The relation between theoretical constructions on the field

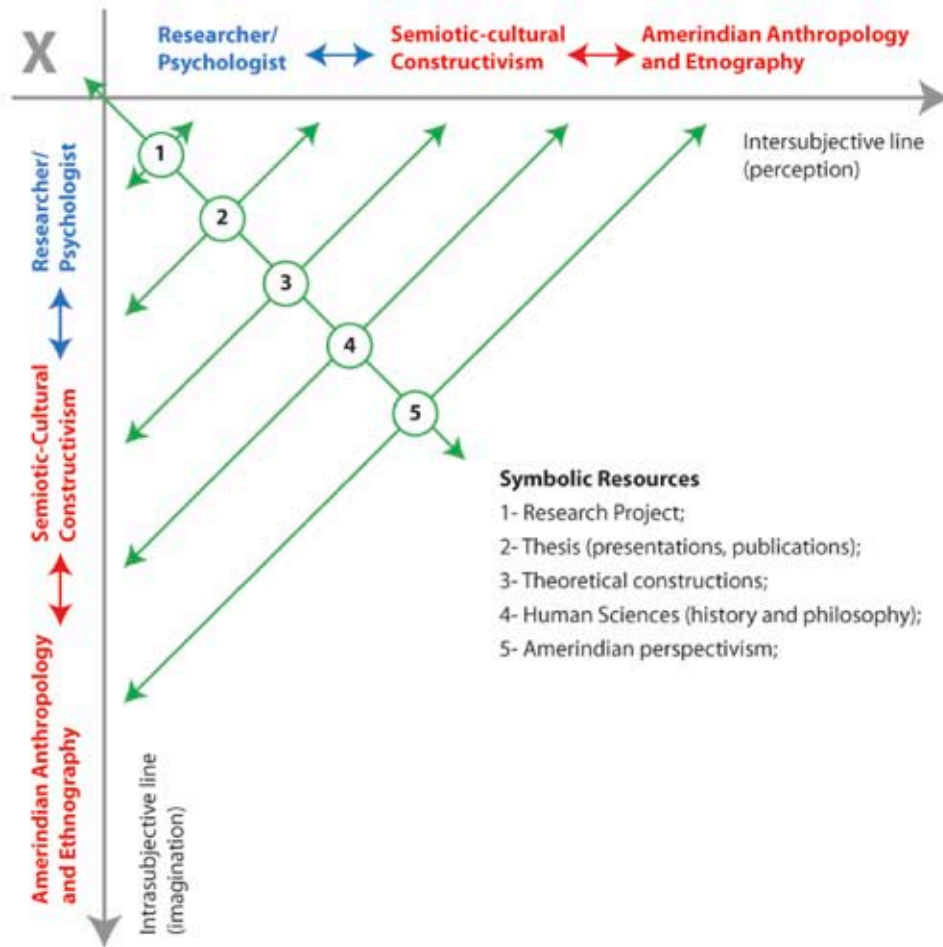


FIGURE 01: I-I AND I-OTHER RELATIONSHIP IN THE FIELD OF DIALOGIC INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SEMIOTIC-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN PSYCHOLOGY AND AMERINDIAN PERSPECTIVISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY

of semiotic cultural-constructivism (symbolic resource 3) and theoretical constructions on the field of Amerindian perspectivism (symbolic resource 5) is possible because relations among psychology and anthropology have an important role in the background of Human Sciences history and philosophy (symbolic resource 4). In this sense, the objective of the research is to understand the process of transformation in the core dialogic cultural relations. We presented, for instance, the history of a meeting between different people, having the body as a central aspect on the meaning construction.

Indigenous discourse addresses cultural psychology to the study of body. Moreover, the role of body can be described in different societies and for different people. Bringing the body — its perceptions and feelings — to the center of attention in psychological practices and studies can be insightful to the understanding of human activity and decision making.



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