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the gift and the given

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THE RELATIVE NATIVE

ESSAYS ON INDIGENOUS CONCEPTUAL WORLDS

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CHAPTER SIX

The Gift and the Given
Three Nano-Essays on Kinship and Magic

This paper attempts to relate three anthropological arguments about kinship. Each concerns the thorny problem of how to bypass our all-enveloping cosmology of nature and culture when describing the very province of human experience on which this dualism is supposed to be ultimately grounded. In the modem Western tradition, as we know, kinship is the primal arena for the confrontation of biological nature and cultural nurture, animal instincts and human institutions, bodily substances and spiritual relations, real facts and legal fictions, and so on. Indeed, this has been so, supposedly, ever since humans became what they are, for this divisive predicament is precisely, we are asked to believe, what makes humans *into* what they are: *Homo sapiens* (Linnæus) is *Homo duplex* (Durkheim). It is certainly no accident therefore that the most momentous anthropological reflection on nature and culture took kinship as its defining problem (Lévi-Strauss 1969), just as some of the most enlightening ethnographic accounts of this opposition in modern Euro-American settings turned to the same object (e.g., Schneider 1968; Strathern 1992a). Neither is it any coincidence that many, perhaps all, of the foundational dichotomies of the anthropology of kinship are simply particular refractions of the nature/culture schema: matriarchy and patriarchy, descriptive and classificatory, affect and right, domestic and public, filiation and descent, genealogy and category, consanguinity and alliance, and so forth. Likewise, the recent sea-changes in the

Western reflexive economy of nature and culture (Serres 1990; Latour 1991), some of them directly engaging human procreation,[1] could not fail to have profound repercussions upon anthropological discourses concerning kinship. In sum, insofar as anthropology remains essentially a disquisition on nature and culture, one is tempted to quip that it is forced to choose between studying kinship and studying nothing.

Of the three arguments that follow, the first concerns the possibility of imagining a relation between kinship and bodiliness irreducible to "biological" categories, ethno- or otherwise. The second addresses the complementary problem of how to devise a non-jural conception of kinship relatedness. Combined, the two arguments amount to a sort of "no nature, no culture" (Strathern 1980) approach to the subject. Finally and conversely, the third argument advocates a partial reclaiming of this much-maligned opposition for heuristic and comparative purposes.

FOREIGN BODIES

A few years ago, I received an e-mail from Peter Gow reporting an incident he had witnessed during a recent visit to the Piro of Peruvian Amazonia:

> A mission schoolteacher in [the village of] Santa Clara was trying to convince a Piro woman to prepare food for her young child with boiled water. The woman replied, "If we drink boiled water, we get diarrhoea." The schoolteacher scoffed, and said that the common infantile diarrhoea was caused by drinking unboiled water. Unmoved, the Piro woman replied, "Perhaps for people from Lima this is true. But for us native people from here, boiled water gives us diarrhoea. Our bodies are different to your bodies." (Peter Gow, pers. comm.)

Gow sent me this anecdote as direct evidence for my perspectival account of indigenous ontologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998a), which proposed rethinking the frequently reported Amerindian "relativism" as a natural or ontological relativism rather than a cultural or epistemological one: different kinds of persons, human as well as non-human, are distinguished by their bodies or "natures," not their spirit or "culture" (which is one and the same across the whole multiverse

1. See, for example, Strathern 1992c; Franklin and Ragoné 1998; Edwards et al. 1999.

of persons). A multinaturalism, then, instead of the multiculturalism propounded by modernism.

However, rather than expressing a peculiarly Amerindian ontological tenet, the Piro woman's reply might be construed as an apt illustration of Robin Horton's general thesis (1993: 379ff) concerning the cognitive style of traditional societies, which argues that all such peoples are afflicted with "world-view parochialism." Devoid of the imperative of universalization intrinsic to the rationalized cosmologies of Western modernity, traditional world-views seem to manifest a spirit of all-pervasive tolerance which, truth be known, is nothing more than a deep indifference towards other, discrepant world-views. The "relativism" of the Piro would simply suggest that they could not care less how things are elsewhere. The woman from Gow's anecdote would seem to find a natural soul mate in the person of the Zande man who Evans-Pritchard overheard saying of Europeans: "perhaps in their country people are not murdered by witches, but here they are" ([1937] 1976: 540).

Well "perhaps" they are—I mean, perhaps the Piro woman and the Zande man were expressing the same parochialism. But perhaps not. Indeed, I think there are cogent reasons for rejecting a theory such as Horton's: the fact, for instance, that the relativistic outlook of many traditional societies—and this is certainly the case in indigenous Amazonia—is not merely inter-cultural, as he intimates, but also intra-cultural, and sometimes thoroughly reflexive. In the final analysis, such an outlook may prove totally indifferent to the alternative of either indifference (the Piro mother) or intolerance (the mission schoolteacher): indeed, I am persuaded that Amerindian ideas are refractory to any notion of culture as a system of "beliefs"—culture as a religious system, if you will[2]—and hence cannot be reliably described through the use of theologico-political concepts.

This said, the main reason for rejecting a Hortonian interpretation of the Piro dialogue is not so much the mildly ethnocentric notion of parochialism, but the very ethnocentric one of world-view. For such a notion assumes a "one nature, many cultures" ontology—a multiculturalism—which happens to be the self-same ontology implied in the schoolteacher's position. And this way the debate is over before it has even started. As Gow observed in the same e-mail:

> It would be tempting to see the positions of the schoolteacher and the Piro woman as representing two distinct cosmologies, multiculturalism and multinaturalism

2. See: Tooker 1992; Viveiros de Castro 1993b; Ingold 2009.

> respectively, and to imagine the conversation to be a clash of cosmologies or cultures. This would, I think, be a mistake. . . . [T]his formulation translates the conversation into the general terms of one of its parts, multiculturalism. The co-ordinates of the multinaturalist position of the Piro woman are systematically violated by the analysis. This is not, of course, to say that I believe that infants should be fed with unboiled water. It is, however, to say that ethnographic analysis cannot proceed if it is already decided what the general meaning of the encounter could be.

Like the schoolteacher, we (Gow, myself, and very likely the reader) do not believe that Piro infants should be given unboiled water. We know that human beings are made of the same stuff, over and above cultural differences; for there may be many world views, but there is only one world viewed—a world in which all human children must drink boiled water, should they happen to live in a place where infantile diarrhoea is a health hazard. The Piro may deny this fact, but their cultural "view" cannot change one iota the way things are.

Well, perhaps we know this to be the case. What we do *not* know, however, as Gow points out, are the ontological presuppositions of the Piro mother's reply. Perhaps this is another instance of Roy Wagner's paradox ([1975] 1981: 27): imagining a culture for people who do not imagine it for themselves. Be that as it may, it is certainly the case that, to continue to paraphrase Wagner (ibid.: 20), the schoolteacher's misunderstanding of the Piro mother was not the same as the Piro mother's misunderstanding of the schoolteacher.

Let me venture another reading of this incident. The argument of bodily difference invites us to determine the possible world expressed in the Piro woman's reply. In order to determine this possible world, there is no need for us to contrive an imaginary science-fictional universe endowed with another physics and another biology. Instead, what we must locate is the real problem that makes possible the world implied in the Piro woman's riposte. For there undoubtedly *is* a problem; and this problem has nothing to do with the quality of Santa Clara's water supply, and everything to do with the relation, both bodily and political, between the mother, the schoolteacher, and the child.

At a certain point in *Art and agency*, Alfred Gell remarks that the Frazerian theory of magic is wrong not because it invokes the notion of causality, but, rather, because it "impose[s] a pseudo-scientific notion of physical cause and effect . . . on practices which depend on intentionality and purpose, which is

precisely what is missing from scientific determinism" (Gell 1998: 101). He concludes by saying that:

> Frazer's mistake was, so to speak, to imagine that magicians had some non-standard physical theory, whereas the truth is that 'magic' is what you have when you *do without* a physical theory on the grounds of its redundancy, relying on the idea . . . that the explanation of any given event . . . is that it is caused intentionally. (ibid.)

Gell's point can be transposed analogically to "kinship." In other words, we can say that the problem with kinship is like the problem with magic: classical anthropological renditions of non-Western forms of kinship are wrong not because they invoke the causal notion of reproduction, but, rather, because they presuppose a pseudo-scientific notion of biological causality. The mistake we have to avoid here is imagining that Amazonian peoples (for example) entertain some non-standard biological theory, like, say, Lamarckian inheritance or homuncular preformation, whereas the truth is that Amazonian kinship ideas are tantamount to a non-biological theory of life. Kinship here is what you have when you "do without" a biological theory of relationality.

Returning to the Piro argument to the effect that their bodies are different, we may observe, then, that it should be taken neither as the expression of an outlandish biological view (an "ethno-biology"); nor—should I add "of course"?—as an accurate description of an objective fact; namely, the anomalous biological makeup of Indian bodies. What the argument expresses is *another* objective fact: the fact that the Piro and Western concepts of "body" are different, not their respective "biologies." The Piro position derives not from a discrepant "view" of the same human body, but from *concepts* of bodiliness and humanness which differ from our own, and whose divergence both in extension and intension from their "homonymous" counterparts in our conceptual language is precisely the problem. For the problem is not that Amazonians and Euro-Americans give different names to (have different representations of) the same things; the problem is that we and they are not talking about the same things. What they call "body" is not what we call "body." The words may translate easily enough—perhaps—but the concepts they convey do not. Thus, to give a recursive example, the Piro concept of body, differently from ours, is more than likely not to be found within the "mind" as a mental representation of a material body without the mind; it

may be, quite to the contrary, inscribed in the body itself as a world-defining perspective, just as any other Amerindian concept (Viveiros de Castro 1998a).

Peter Gow saw the anecdote as an apt illustration of my hypothesis about corporeality being the dimension Amazonians privilege when explaining the differences among kinds of people, whether those that distinguish living species (animals and plants are people in their own sphere), those that set human "ethnic groups" apart, or those that isolate bodies of kin within a larger social body.[3] If this hypothesis is correct, then the Piro mother's reply, rather than expressing a weird biological theory, encapsulates a kinship theory which is fairly characteristic of Amazonians. Bringing my correspondent's ethnography (Gow 1991) to bear upon this particular incident, we may construe the Piro woman's reply as meaning: our bodies are different from your bodies *because you are not our kin*—so do not mess with my child! And since you are not our kin, you are not human. "Perhaps" you are human to yourselves, when in Lima, say, just as we are human to ourselves here; but it is clear we are not human to each other, as our disagreement over children's bodies testifies. On the other hand, if you become our kin, you will become human, for the difference between our bodies is not a ("biological") difference which would prevent or otherwise advise against our becoming related—quite the opposite, in fact: bodily differences are necessary for the creation of kinship, because the creation of kinship is the creation of bodily difference. As Gow argues (1997a), to be human and to be kin are the same thing to the Piro—to be a person is to be a relative and vice-versa. But this is not a simple equation: the production of relatives (consanguines) requires the intervention of non-relatives (potential affines), and this can only mean the counter-invention of some relatives as non-relatives ("cutting the analogical flow" as Wagner would say), and therefore as non-human to a certain critical extent, since what distinguishes consanguines from affines are their bodily differences. If the body is the site of difference, then a difference is required in order to make bodies by means of other bodies.

Hence, Amazonian kinship is not a way of speaking "about" bodiliness, that is, about biology, ethno- or otherwise, but the other way around: the body is a way of speaking about kinship. Perhaps biology is what we get when we start believing too much in our own ways of speaking.[4]

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3. No metaphor intended in these two phrases, "bodies of kin" and "social body"; I mean them literally (Viveiros de Castro 2001; see also this volume, Chapter 5).

4. See Schneider 1968: 115 and Wagner 1972b: 607-8.

Note that the Piro woman did not say that her people and the Limeños had different "views" of the same human body; she appealed to the different dispositional constitution of their respective bodies, not to different representational contents of their minds or souls. As it happens, the soul idiom cannot be used in Amazonia to express differences or recognize contrasts. The world is peopled by diverse types of subjective agencies, human and non-human, all endowed with the same general 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 (that is, a similar culture), and this makes all subjects see things in the same way, that is, experience the same basic percepts. What changes is the "objective correlative," the reference of these concepts for each species of subject: what jaguars see as "manioc beer" (the proper drink of people, jaguar-kind or otherwise), humans see as "blood"; where we see a muddy salt-lick in the forest, tapirs see their big ceremonial house, and so on. Such difference of perspective—not a plurality of views of a single world, mind you, but a single view of different worlds—cannot derive from the soul, since the latter is the common original ground of being; the difference is located in the body, for the body is the site and instrument of ontological differentiation. (Accordingly, Amazonian myths mostly deal with the causes and consequences of the species-specific embodiment of different pre-cosmological subjects, all of them conceived as originally similar to "spirits," purely intensive beings in which human and non-human aspects are indiscernibly mixed.)

The meaning of kinship derives from this same predicament. The soul is the universal condition against which humans must work in order to produce both their own species identity and their various intraspecific kinship identities. A person's body indexes her constitutive relation to bodies similar to hers and different from other kinds of bodies, while her soul is a token of the ultimate commonality of all beings, human and non-human alike: the primal analogical flow of relatedness (Wagner 1977a) is a flow of spirit. That means that the body must be produced *out* of the soul but also *against* it, and this is what Amazonian kinship is "all about": becoming a human body through the differential bodily engagement of and/or with other bodies, human as well as non-human. Needless to say, such a process is neither performable nor describable by the "genealogical method."

This does not mean, though, that the soul has only negative kinship determinations. A consideration of soul matters brings us back to magic. Gell's remarks on magical intentionality suggest that we can do more than analogically

transpose anthropology's problems *with* magic to its problems *with* kinship. Perhaps the problem *of* magic is the problem *of* kinship; perhaps both are complementary solutions to the same problem: the problem of intentionality and influence, the mysterious effectiveness of relationality. In any case, it seems useful to ask ourselves whether magic and kinship have a deeper connection than that usually acknowledged in contemporary anthropological theorizing. This would help explain why it is precisely these two themes which lie at the root of our disciplinary genealogical tree: the "animism" and "magic" of Tylor and Frazer on the one hand, the "classificatory kinship" and "exogamy" of Morgan and Rivers on the other (Fortes 1969: l0ff). The reader will recall the hypothesis expounded by Edmund Leach in *Rethinking anthropology*, according to which:

> in any system of kinship and marriage, there is a fundamental ideological opposition between the relations which endow the individual with membership of a "we group" of some kind (relations of incorporation), and those other relations which link "our group"'to other groups of like kind (relations of alliance), and that, in this dichotomy, relations of incorporation are distinguished symbolically as relations of common substance, while relations of alliance are viewed as metaphysical influence. (Leach [1951] 1961: 20, emphasis removed)

In sum: consanguinity and physics on one hand, affinity and metaphysics on the other.[5] Note that what Leach calls metaphysical or mystical influence need not exclude bonds of "substance"; on the contrary, it may be exerted precisely through such links (the maternally transmitted flesh-and-blood of the Kachin, for example). Or take Wagner's famous analysis of Daribi kinship: it is *because* mother's brother and sister's son share bodily substance that the former exerts a permanent influence of a "mystical" nature over the latter.[6] Note that Leach's hypothesis is not invalidated by the Daribi; according to them, fathers and sons also share bodily substance, but this does not involve any spiritual power of the former over the latter. So the correlation between bonds of alliance and magical influence does seem to obtain among the Daribi, since the mother brother's is

5. Here I am disregarding Leach's additional distinction between "uncontrolled mystical influence" and "controlled supernatural attack."

6. See Wagner (1967: 63–66). The author defines influence as "any relationship of dominance or control among souls" (ibid.: 46–47), but remarks (ibid.: 61) that the notion covers "natural," "social," and "supernatural" agencies (see also, ibid.: 218: "the notion of 'influence' is applicable both to social structure and religion").

a consubstantial of the sister's son, but also an affine of the latter's father, who must pay his wife's brother to counter the latter's influence over the sister's son.

In short, it is not so much "bodily substance" and "spiritual influence" as such that seem to be opposed, but what Leach defined as "relations of incorporation" and "alliance," or, as I would prefer to envisage them, relations based on similarity and relations based on difference.[7] In Amazonian kinship, the first defines a quality I will call, for comparative purposes, "consanguinity," and the second the quality of "affinity." And I think Leach's correlation is perfectly valid for Amazonia, as long as we rephrase it by saying that the body is the consanguineal component of the person and the soul is the affinal component. What we have here, then, is not so much a case of a person's affines exerting a spiritual influence over her, but, rather, of the spiritual dimension of the person herself having affinal connotations, i.e., *being* such an influence rather than suffering it. Hence this is not the same as saying that Amazonian consanguinity involves shared "physical substance" while affinity involves some *other* type of substance—a spiritual one, say—or a kind of immaterial influence of mental-intentional rather than causal-mechanical type. In fact, the distinction between a world of physical objects and a world of mental states is meaningless in Amazonian and similar ontologies (Townsley 1993). Instead there is a single analogic field of influence, to use Wagner's terms; a continuous field of magical forces that continually convert bodies into souls, substances into relations, physics into semantics, "social structure" into "religion"—and back again. In brief, a single world but a double movement.

Accordingly, while the Amazonian process of kinship essentially concerns the fabrication and destruction of bodies, individual souls are never made, but

7. We cannot oppose relations of group incorporation (or "unit definition," per Wagner) to relations of intergroup alliance ("unit relation") in Amazonia, since this region abounds in alliance-based collectives, where the definition of group "units" is based on the marriage alliance relations *internal* to these units. As Overing (1975) has classically demonstrated for Amazonia, group endogamy is in no way incompatible with two-section terminologies, affinal alliance, prescriptive marriage and other appurtenances of "elementary structures." Besides, it is crucial to distinguish, in Amazonia and other similar contexts, between consanguinity as a substantial condition (the fact of being cognatically related through ties mediated by procreative acts) and consanguinity as a relational determination (the fact of being a terminologically parallel or non-affinal relative). In all endogamous systems, elementary or not, one marries "consanguines," i.e., cognates (the mother's brother' daughter, say); in no elementary system, endogamous or otherwise, does one marry consanguines, i.e., non-affines (the father's brother's daughter, say).

always given: either absolutely during conception, or transmitted along with names and other pre-constituted principles, or captured ready-made from the outside. A living person is a composite of body and soul, internally constituted by a self/other, consanguine/affine polarity (Kelly 2001, Taylor 2000). This dividual entity is decomposed by death, which separates a principle of "affinal" otherness, the soul, from one of "consanguineal" sameness, the dead body. Unalloyed consanguinity can only be attained in death: it is the final result of the life-process of kinship, just as pure affinity is the cosmological precondition of the latter. At the same time, death releases the tension between affinity and consanguinity that impels the construction of kinship, and completes the process of consanguinization, i.e., de-affinization, which such a process effectively comprises (Viveiros de Castro 2001).

Just as with the "body"of the Piro anecdote, it is quite clear that Amazonian consanguinity and affinity must mean something very different to our homonymous notions. This was precisely the reason I decided to establish such a homonymy—to create a relation between the Amazonian and the Western heterogenic conceptual fields, a relation based on their difference not their similarity. Note, then, that this relation is reciprocal but oriented, since it is within Amazonian and "similar" symbolic economies (like the Melanesian one recently described by James Leach [2003]), as opposed to what might be called our own folk modernist ontology, that difference can be a positive principle of relationality, meaning both disjunction and connection (Strathern 1995b: 165), rather than a merely negative want of similarity.

GIFT ECONOMIES AND ANIMIST ONTOLOGIES

Let us tackle more directly the question of the possible co-implication of the two founding problematics of anthropology, kinship and magic. Could there be a hidden affinity between, say, prescriptive marriage and magical causation? Are the two Tylorean neologisms required by primitive (i.e., paleologic) cultures, "animism" and "cross-cousin," expressing ideas, which are, in some obscure way, germane? Put simply, does one have to practice magic to believe in mother's brother's daughter's marriage? In order to sketch the positive answers I obviously intend for these rhetorical questions, I believe we need an additional, mediatory concept in order to determine this relation more clearly. Such a concept is that of the gift.

Let us start with Chris Gregory's definition: "Gift exchange is an exchange of inalienable things between persons who are in a state of reciprocal dependence" (1982: 19). You will appreciate that this is as good a definition of gift exchange as of kinship pure and simple—taken in its affinal dimension, obviously, but also in its filiative one. For while the prototype of gift exchange in this definition is marriage exchange ("the supreme gift," etc.), procreation or generational substitution can also be conceived as a process of transmitting inalienable things—body parts and substances, classically, but also memories, narratives, connections to land (see Bamford 2009)—which create persons who thereby belong in a state of reciprocal dependence.

Marriage exchange is conceptually prototypical because all gift exchange is an exchange of persons—a personification process: "Things and people assume the social form of objects in a commodity economy while they assume the social form of persons in a gift economy" (Gregory 1982: 41). If the first definition of gift exchange made it synonymous with kinship, this one makes the concept of gift economy virtually indistinguishable from the notion of animism (Descola 1992)—the label traditionally applied to those ontological regimes in which, precisely, things and people assume the social form of persons. Perhaps, then, gift exchange, kinship and animism are merely different names for the same personification process: the economic, political and religious faces of a single generalized symbolic economy, as it were. Just as commodity production, the State and the "scientific revolution" form the pillars of our own modernist symbolic economy.

The connection between gift economy and animism is acknowledged in *Gifts and commodities*, albeit somewhat in passing. After mentioning Mauss and alluding to the "anthropomorphic quality" of gifts (1982: 20, 45), Gregory summarizes the theoretical rationale for such anthropomorphization as follows:

> [T]he social organisation of reproduction of things—gifts is governed by the methods of reproduction of people. The latter is a personification process which gives things-gifts a soul and a gender classification; thus the reproduction of things-gifts must be organized as if they were people. (ibid.: 93)

This passage rounds off a paragraph about the importance of magic for the material production (i.e., productive consumption) process in gift economies (ibid.: 92). Animism, then, would be the cosmological corollary of the gift, and magic the technology of such a cosmology. If the reproduction of gifts supposes they

are people, or human-like agents, then magic is the proper way to produce them, for magic, as Gell noted, is the technology of intentionality.

But instead of taking animism as the ideology of the gift economy, as Gregory may be construed as saying, I prefer to turn the formula back-to-front: the gift is the form things take in an animist ontology. This way round—gift exchange as the political economy aspect of the semiotic regime or dispensation of animism—seems preferable to me since I believe Gregory's formulation derives in the last instance from the commodity perspective: it privileges "the economy" as the projective source of form for all human activity. Production, whether of things through productive consumption or of people through consumptive production, is the all-embracing category; human reproduction (kinship) is universally imagined as a kind of production, the better, one might say, to retroproject primitive, gift-oriented production as a kind of human reproduction. ("Material production" seems to play the same role in political economy as "biogenetic kinship" in anthropological theory.)

I believe the perspectival distortion of gift "economies" generated by apprehending them from a commodity-derived standpoint is also responsible for a conceptual slippage in Gregory's analysis between the personification process of consumptive production and the personification process involved in "giving things—gifts a soul and a gender classification." The notion of personification does not have the same meaning in the two cases—indeed, the first is a *"social form"* phenomenon, the second an *"as if"* one. Here I am intrigued by Gregory's appeal to analogical modalization when discussing magic ("the reproduction of things-gifts must be organized as if they were people"), while before, when describing the predominance of consumptive production in gift economies, he uses the concept of "social form" ("things and people assume . . . the social form of persons in a gift economy"). Now, there is surely some kind of difference between the "social form" of something and its "as if" properties; a difference of epistemological form, so to speak—or of theoretical economy. I prefer to see gift exchange, kinship and animism as different names for the same personification process, a process which is neither an "as if" phenomenon nor exactly (or exclusively) a "social form" one. The "as if" supposes an extensionist semiotics of literal and metaphorical meanings, while the notion of social form raises the question: "social" as opposed to what? To "phenomenal," assuredly (cf. Gell 1999b: 35ff); but here perhaps we come a little too close for comfort to our familiar nature/culture schema.

My interest in the relations between kinship and magic has its proximate source in a series of conversations with Marilyn Strathern, especially a

discussion we had in 1998 in Brazil about intellectual property rights (IPR). In an interview she gave to Carlos Fausto and myself (Strathern et al. 1999), I introduced the IPR theme with the somewhat imprudent suggestion that the concept of "right" is the form the relation takes in a commodity economy. In a regime where things and people assume the form of objects, relations are exteriorized, detached from persons in the form of rights. All relations must be converted into rights in order to be recognized, just as commodities must have prices to be exchanged; rights and duties define the relative value of persons, just as prices define the exchange rate of things. The question that ensued was: what would be the equivalent of the notion of "right" in a gift economy? Strathern observed that this way of phrasing the problem would imply (in order to preserve the translative inversions between gift and commodity regimes) looking for the substantial or thing-like correlation of the gift. For some (obvious?) reason, none of us found this a very promising line of inquiry, and the subject was dropped. When she picked up the topic again in a recent paper, Strathern (2004) zeroed in on the *debt* as the gift-economy correlative of *right*, in accordance with Fausto's answer to my question during our conversation of six years ago: "gift is to debt as commodity is to right." Noting that this answer had been more or less anticipated by Gregory (1982: 19): "The gift economy . . . is a debt economy," Strathern then proceeded to sketch a wonderfully illuminating contrast between the intrinsic temporalities of rights (which anticipate transactions) and debts (which presuppose them).

While fully accepting the heuristic potential of the right/debt contrast, I venture to suggest another candidate for the conceptual role of anti-right. In the passage of *Gifts and commodities* cited by Strathern, Gregory actually understands that gift is to debt as commodity is to profit:

> The gift economy, then, is a debt economy. The aim of a transactor in such an economy is to acquire as many gift-debtors as he possibly can, and not to maximize profit, as it is in a commodity economy. What a gift transactor desires is the personal relationships that the exchange of gifts creates, and not the things themselves. (Gregory 1982: 19)

If profit is the commodity correlative of debt, the gift equivalent of commodity prices would be "classificatory kinship terms" (ibid.: 16, 67–68). Gregory is referring here to the relations of prescriptive marriage exchange between certain "classificatory" kinship positions, which index whole groups as transactors.

While prices describe cardinal value relations between transacted objects, kinship terms describe ordinal rank relations between the transactors themselves.

All the elements of my problem are now deployed. Kinship relations have traditionally been conceptualized by anthropology as jural relations: descent has always been a matter of rights and duties, not of natural filiation, and alliance was prescriptive, or preferential, or else a matter of choice—a whole juridical metaphysics was erected around "primitive kinship"; no need to rehearse this story.[8] Now, in a commodity economy (where things and people assume the form of objects) relations between human beings are conceived in terms of rights, which are, in a sense, prices in human form.[9] This makes the notion quite inappropriate to a gift economy, where kinship relations are not detachable from people as our rights are. By the same token, in a gift economy (where things and people assume the form of persons) relations between human beings are expressed by classificatory kinship terms—in other words, they are kinship relations. But then, relations between things must be conceived as bonds of magical influence; that is, as kinship relations in object form. The objective world of a gift "economy" is an animistic ontology of universal agency and trans-specific kinship relatedness, utterly beyond the grasp of the genealogical method—a world where yams are our lineage brothers and roam unseen at night, or where jaguars strip away their animal clothes and reveal themselves as our cannibal brothers-in-law. As Strathern once observed with pleasant irony, many non-literate people, meaning those who happen to abide by the dispensation of the gift, "appear to see persons even where the anthropologist would not . . . [a]nd kinship may be claimed for relations between entities that English-speakers conceive as frankly improbable" (1995a: 16). Indeed, it appears that when these people talk about personification processes, well—they really mean it.[10]

8. A story the reader may find in any good introduction to the anthropology of kinship, like Holy 1996.

9. The formula is merely a transformation of something Marilyn Strathern casually remarked to me, some years ago: "the individual is the object in human form."

10. See also Strathern (1999: 239): "[Melanesian] convention requires that the objects of interpretation—human or not—become understood as other persons; indeed, the very act of interpretation presupposes the personhood of what is being interpreted". Pages 12–14 of the same collection contain some decisive remarks on the role of magic in a relational ontology. For an insightful connection of IPR to magical conceptions, see Harrison 2002.

The modern language of rights is rooted in the early modem Big Split between the Hobbes world and the Boyle world—in other words, the moral-political and natural-physical domains.[11] Our commodity economy is equally grounded on this dual dispensation of social form versus natural force (exchange-value and use-value). Non-modern gift economies, however, having no truck with such dualities, must operate on the basis of a unified world of form and force; that is, a 'magical' world, 'magic' being the name we give to all those ontologies that do not recognize the need to divide the universe into moral and physical spheres—in kinship terms, into jural and biological relations.

I would vote for magic, then. Commodity is to jural right as gift is to magical might. So I *was* looking for the "substantial"or thing-like correlation of the gift, after all; only it was less a thing than a force, less like a material substance and more like a spiritual principle (a social form?). Or, to put it differently, I was merely looking for the way the debt is theoretically reified. Well, it is reified as the spirit of the gift, of course: as the *Hau*, the archetypal embodiment of that "anticipated outcome" which makes up the "aesthetic trap" of the gift economy (Strathern 1988: 219ff).[12] There is no need to recall that *The gift* is, among other things, a study on the pre-history of the notion of Right, and that the "general theory of the obligation" that Mauss ([1950] 1990) saw as the ultimate aim of his essay derived the juridical bond (*le lien juridique*) created by the transmission of a thing from the animate character of that thing. No need to remember, either, that the *hau* is a form of *mana*, or that *hau* and *mana* are "species of the same genus", as Mauss says somewhere. In this sense, the *hau* of *The gift* is just a special case of the *mana* of *Outline of a theory of magic:* the latter is taken to be the ancestor of the modem notion of natural force, just as *hau*-concepts are thought to lie at the root of our idea of contractual obligation.

Gregory notes a further contrast between commodity and gift-exchange:

> Commodity-exchange—the exchange of unlike-for-unlike—establishes a relation of *equality* between the objects exchanged. . . . [T]he problem is to find the common measure. . . . Gift-exchange—the exchange of like-for-like—establishes an unequal relation of *domination* between the transactors. . . . [The problem here is:] who is superior to whom? (1982: 47–8).

11. Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Serres 1990; Latour 1991.

12. For an interpretation of the *hau* that builds on the Strathernian notion of anticipated outcome (how to make the effect cause its own cause), see Gell 1998: 106-9.

He cautions that the "precise meaning of 'domination' is an empirical question." Indeed it may mean many different things; but I believe it means, first and foremost, what Leach and Wagner refer to as "influence"—magical influence. For influence is the general mode of action and relation in a world of immanent humanity. As their common etymology suggests, what the analogical "flow" carries is "influence." Immanence is fluid.[13]

I am afraid all the above comments on the gift, animism and kinship will have struck the reader as tiresomely obvious. Perhaps they are. My point was simply to call attention to the need to put back together what was pulled apart early in the history of our discipline, and seldom re-assembled since: magic and kinship, animism and exogamy. Introducing the notion of magic into the discussion is intended, in part at least, to temper our obsession with "biology"—whether for or against—when it comes to theorizing about kinship. We have known for quite a while that an anthropological theory of magic will not work if it starts out from the premise that magic is no more than mistaken physics. Neither is it helpful to imagine kinship as a weird biology. And likewise I believe there are strong reasons for not framing our conceptualization of kinship relations in general with the help of the notion of right. Kinship is not "primitive law," for just the same reason it is not "natural law." Kinship is magic, for magic is kinship.

AN AMAZONIAN CRITIQUE OF SOME NEW APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF KINSHIP

There is a famous passage in *The elementary structures of kinship* where Lévi-Strauss contrasts the sociological properties of the "brother" and "brother-in-law" relations. Alluding to what is arguably the primal scene of structuralism, the collective affinization of a foreign band by the Nambikwara group with whom he was staying, the author writes that although the Nambikwara may occasionally use the "brother" idiom to institute bonds with non-relatives, the "brother-in-law" idiom is far more consequential:

> [T]he whole difference between the two types of bond can also be seen, a sufficiently clear definition being that one of them expresses a mechanical

13. I am alluding here to Wagner 1967 (influence), [1975] 1981 (immanent humanity), and 1977a (analogical flow).

> solidarity, . . . while the other involves an organic solidarity. . . . Brothers are closely related to one another, but they are so in terms of their similarity, as are the posts or the reeds of the Pan-pipe. By contrast, brothers-in-law are solidary because they complement each other and have a functional efficacy for one another, whether they play the role of the opposite sex in the erotic games of childhood, or whether their masculine alliance as adults is confirmed by each providing the other with what he does not have—a wife—through their simultaneous renunciation of what they both do have—a sister. The first form of solidarity adds nothing and unites nothing; it is based upon a cultural limit, satisfied by the reproduction of a type of connection the model for which is provided by nature. The other brings about the integration of the group on a new plane. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 483–84)

In short, the brother relationship is natural while the brother-in-law one is cultural. The motif pervades *The elementary structures of kinship*: consanguinity (filiation plus siblingship) is a natural given which must be limited by constructed affinity; culture or society is instituted by the normative occupation of the spaces left unguarded by natural law (mate choice as against heredity).

Even as he devalues "blood kinship" as a model for sociality, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless reasserts the robust modern Western cosmology of consanguinity as the Given and affinity as the Constructed (see Wagner [1975] 1981)—i.e., as the "nature" and "law" aspects of kinship, respectively (Schneider 1968). Indeed, he treats the distinction between consanguinity and affinity in very much the same way Fortes and so many other anthropologists before him (Delaney 1986)—not to mention Freud—conceive the difference, internal to consanguinity, between motherhood and fatherhood: the first term of each pair is associated with naturally given immanence, the second with culturally created (and culture-creating) transcendence.[14] In the best tradition of Euro-American modernity, therefore, Lévi-Strauss restates the image of civil society as emerging from the sublimational displacement (the "enterprising up")[15] of natural solidarities.

No big difference, then, between "descent theory" and "alliance theory" (Schneider 1965, 1984)? Not exactly, for structuralism did accomplish a conceptual breakthrough. Although associating consanguinity with nature and affinity

14. See McKinnon (2001) for an inspiring comparison between Morgan and Lévi-Strauss' "origin myths" of kinship.

15. *Sensu* Strathem (1992c), as in McKinnon (2001).

with society, Lévi-Strauss' alliance theory amounts to a conception of kinship in which affinity is as much given as consanguinity. Furthermore, in the exemplary case of elementary structures, affinity is given in exactly the same way as consanguinity; that is, as a permanent, internal and constitutive interrelationship between the partners to the marriage exchange—even if this inherence is a deed (a ruse) of Culture rather than a fact (a given) of Nature.

But such a breakthrough was not really destined to take root in the discipline, for the whole anthropology of kinship was to be shaken to its foundations in the decades following the structuralist spring (or was it an autumn?). Prescriptive marriage, for instance, was theoretically exposed as an idealized cover-up ("etic" and/or "emic") for real-life strategies, calculations, and interests—these being the current conceptual upgrades of the perduring "choice" motif. Constitutive alliance has been driven back to its traditional regulative status, the pre-given domain it regulates having now become for the most part "the Political"—this being the postmodern (no offence intended) *ersatz* of transcendent Nature. Alliance was reconstrued as sitting squarely within the domain of the constructible. More importantly, an idea such as the one expressed by Lévi-Strauss when he asserted that the sibling relationship is natural, or at least that its model is provided by nature (i.e., given), would today be flatly rejected. The whole of kinship—brothers just as much as brothers-in-law—is now seen as constructed, or rather as a "process" of construction which leaves no room for notions of the given as a natural or social "structure." Consider, for instance, the following remark from a contemporary Amazonianist. Arguing for the phenomenally constructed character of Amazonian parenthood, my colleague Laura Rival invokes "the current understanding of kinship, no longer seen as a social identity given at birth and fixed in a set of structural positions, but, rather, as a process of becoming" (Rival 1998: 628).[16] The given, the fixed and the structural are thereby lumped and dumped together in the capacious dustbin of disciplinary history. We know much better now (Carsten 2000b).

But do we really? What guarantees that our current understandings, of kinship or whatever, are more in line with, say, Amazonian understandings? Well, in the particular case of parenthood-filiation as a constructive process, rather than a given structure, one could argue that the new understanding is the end result of non-Western ideas having been successfully employed to challenge Eurocentric anthropological conceptions. But one could just as easily argue that Western

16. Rival is citing Carsten (1995: 223).

views themselves have changed, and this independently of any enlightenment dispensed by anthropology. Perhaps, rather, it is a number of specific historical developments such as the new reproductive technologies and certain general cultural trends like the current infatuation with "creativity" and "self-fashioning" that explain anthropology's sudden realization that nothing is "given at birth." And if this is so, we are in no better position than our anthropological forebears, as far as non-Western understandings are concerned.

Be that as it may, the purpose of this paper is not to dispute the current insights of anthropology. Besides, I harbor no anti-constructionist feelings, and am not going to start appealing now to "intractable" or "indisputable" facts of life. My point is simply that there is no *a priori* reason for supposing that Amazonians share our understandings—past or present—of kinship. There is particularly no reason for supposing that all aspects of what we call kinship are understood by Amazonians as equally constructible or "processual." Rival's generic mention of kinship glosses over possible differences internal to this province of human experience.

My argument should by now be obvious. Let us take one of the major conceptual dichotomies of Western kinship practice and theory, the consanguinity/affinity dichotomy of Morganian (and structuralist) fame, and combine it with Wagner's distinction between the innate and the constructed, as formulated in *The invention of culture* ([1975] 1981). This procedure generates four possible cases.

1. The standard model

Consanguinity is the province of the given: it is an innate, passive property of the human relational matrix, its essential bodily substrate. Affinity is active construction: it is differentiating choice, affective or political, and inventive freedom. This is the Western standard model, the well-known cosmology of nature and law, status (substance) and contract (code), theoretically universalized by many as "human kinship." In its comparative developments, this model implies that the cultural constructions placed upon consanguineal relations are severely limited, oscillating around a powerful natural attractor represented by maternity, sibling solidarity and the nuclear family. Affinity, on the other hand, is supposed to vary more freely, ranging from primitive compulsory marriage to modern love-based unions; it reveals itself as "intractable" only in its negative connection to consanguinity, that is, in the incest prohibition.

The standard model conceives consanguinity as an internal relation derived from procreation (see Bamford 2009). The procreative links and resulting corporeal similarities among "blood" kin are (or were until very recently) conceived to make up the unchangeable, ineffaceable, originally constitutive aspects of a person's identity insofar as s/he is thought of "in relation" to other persons.[17] To use the biological metaphor, kinship is primarily a genotypic, rather than phenotypic, property of persons. The genotype (the body as Substance) is ontologically deep-sealed, unmodifiable by any of the active relations through which the phenotype (the body as Subject) engages with the world. Affinal connections on the other hand are purely external, regulative relations between already-constituted persons, binding reciprocally independent partners. So "biological" continuities are our own concrete metaphor of internal relatedness, while real (i.e., social) relations are seen as external and regulative (Schneider 1984: 188).

This is a drastic simplification, of course (Carsten 2001). When it comes to modern Western conceptions of kinship, "biology is never the full story" (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 160), and genetic transmission still less so (Edwards 2009). Lived consanguinity always evinces a complex interdigitation of "social" and "biological" dimensions, and the latter are just as likely to be accepted as rejected as the basis of a relationship. Still, the simplification holds to a very important extent, for there are limits to the combinations of social and biological attributes inherent to our cosmology. A choice always exist as to whether or not biology is made the foundation of relationships, but there is no choice about making relationships the foundation of biology—this is impossible. The code of conduct may prevail over substance, but it cannot create substance. It is admissible for the relation not to proceed from substance, but not that it precedes substance. An adoptive son may be more of a "son" than a natural one, but there is nothing that can make him a natural son. Biological connections are absolutely independent of social relations, but the reciprocal does not hold. Even though biology may not be destiny, or the full story, it will always be necessity, because it is history; through it, time is irreversibly inscribed in the body: "contained within the bodies of living human beings is a protracted history of procreative events extending back in time from the present to the remote past" (Bamford 2009: 170).

17. Contrast with Bamford's (2009: 173) subtle observation concerning the Kamea: "Unlike Euro-Americans, the Kamea make a sharp distinction between what goes into the making of a person in a physical sense and what connects them through time as social beings."

If consanguinity embodies the procreative causes of kinship, affinity is an effect of marriage or its analogues. And it is precisely as a consequence of conjugality that affinity can be said to be constructed. The true "construction" is conjugality, the outcome of choice; the affinal kin resulting from conjugality are "given" *a posteriori,* as the spouse's consanguines or as consanguines' spouses. Hence the possibility of situating, in the standard model, affinity along with consanguinity on the side of the given, in contrast to freely "chosen" constructed relationships, such as love, friendship, spiritual kinship, etc. Hence also the contemporary tendency to separate conjugality from affinity, in order to root more firmly, as it were, the former on the soil of affective choice. "I did not marry your relatives"—this was a formula frequently voiced in my country a generation ago, when it sounded amusing because of its wishfully-thought utter counterfactuality; nowadays, however, it is beginning to ring ever more true.

To summarize, let us say that the kinship content of the Given, in the standard model, is a constitutive relation of consubstantial similarity inscribed in the body and resulting from procreation. The form of the Constructed is a relation established by free choice, expressing the spiritual complementarity of the individuals entering into it; such complementarity (or difference), embodied in conjugality, results in procreation. Put together, these two dimensions of given substance and constructed choice are the condition of possibility of the "diffuse, enduring solidarity" found at the root of human sociality.

2. The constitutive model

Here both dimensions are seen as given, the first naturally (and thence socially, once sanctioned by culture), the second socially (but also in a sense naturally, since it evinces the essence of human sociality). This corresponds in effect to the structuralist conception of "primitive" kinship, especially as expressed in the concepts of elementary structure and prescriptive marriage: both the consanguineal and affinal areas of an elementary kinship structure are treated, by the persons abiding by it, as "given at birth." In such a model, affinity is not created by marriage, but the other way around: we do not see as affines those whom we marry, but, rather, marry those whom we have always seen as affines (or construe as having always seen as affines—since we marry them now).

Now, one might wish to emphasize—were one willing to conflate constitutive and regulative understandings and read the model in a "prescriptive" key—the debt of the structuralist model to the traditional view of primitive society

as a rule-dominated, no-choice universe, as well as to the "Durkheim-Saussure hypothesis" (as it were) which sees human action as the automatic enactment of a transcendent set of cultural instructions (a cultural genotype of sorts). But one could also argue—and with much more reason, I think—that this model displays a thoroughly relational or non-substantivist view of kinship, since it implies "that persons have relations integral to them (what else is the specification of the positive marriage rule?)" (Strathern 1992c: 101).[18] Above all, we can observe that although both dimensions of kinship are "given" in this model, they are not given in the same way and at the same logical time. For the Lévi-Straussian concept of the incest prohibition means strictly no more (nor less) than this: affinity is prior to consanguinity—it comprises its formal cause. There are no consanguines before the inception of the idea of exchange; my sister only becomes a "sister" when I apprehend (or anticipate) her as a "wife" for someone else. Men do not "exchange women," and women are not there *for* exchange: they are created *by* exchange. As are men. Indeed, as a matter of fact (or rather, a matter of right), it is never a case of some people (men) exchanging some other people (women): marriage is a process whereby people (men and women) exchange kinship *relations,* as Lévi-Strauss suggested a while ago ([1956] 1983: 91),[19] or *perspectives,* as Strathern put it more recently (Strathern 1988: 230 *et passim,* 1992c: 96–100; 1999: 238–40).

3. The constructive model

Both dimensions are treated here as the result of socio-practical processes of relating; that is, they are conceptualized as equally constructed by human agency. Kin ties are not given at birth—not even birth is given at birth (see Rival 1998 on the *couvade).* Instead, they are "created" or "produced" by purposeful acts of feeding, caring, sharing, loving, and remembering.[20] The

18. And what, one may ask, is a positive marriage rule if not the kinship-terminological inscription of the aesthetic of the "anticipated outcome" (Strathern 1988)?

19. Kinship *relations*, it should be noted, not kinship *rights* ("over people," "over the reproductive capacity of women," etc).

20. The "production" idiom is evoked here simply to recall its role as a variant of the "construction" idiom, the main difference being that "production" builds that much-frequented metaphorical bridge between "kinship" and "political economy," sometimes allowing the former to be derived from certain politico-economical givens.

overwhelming theoretical emphasis rests upon the socially created nature of consanguineal relations, in particular the parent-child ties; it is considered unnecessary to argue that affinal ties are also socially created. This constructionist model seems to be the currently dominant anthropological understanding of kinship; it has also been attributed, causally or consequentially, to many—perhaps all—non-Western peoples. It has largely emerged as a reactive inversion of the preceding position, although it could be argued that it is as old as anthropology itself, having been adumbrated by authors as different as McLennan and Durkheim. But it has also reacted to some contemporary competing understandings of kinship in (then) socio-biological and (now) psycho-evolutionary terms, which propound a particularly imperialistic version of the Given: genotypic consanguinity not only determines phenotypic behavior vis-à-vis "relatives," it also governs "affinal" choices (i.e., mating) in the best interest of gene replication.

Partisans of the constructionist model devote much attention to "optative" and "adoptive" relations, as well as to extra-uterine, post-natal modes of creating or validating bonds of consubstantiality. Adoptive kinship, milk kinship, spiritual kinship, commensality, co-residence and so forth are shown to be considered by many peoples as equal to, and often more valued than, relations based on the sharing of pre-natally produced bodily substance. Kinship, in short, is made, not "given by birth" (Carsten 2000a: 15; Stafford 2000: 52). Note that "kinship" here essentially means consanguinity—filiation and siblingship—not affinity: the latter seems to be already regarded as a kind of "fictive consanguinity," and as I remarked earlier, the question of the possibility of something like a "fictive affinity," that is, a relation of affinity not based on a "real" marriage alliance, fails even to see the light of day. Apparently, to argue that affinity is socially constructed would be deemed redundant—a telling presupposition.

The primary target of the constructionist model is the notion of biologically given relatedness. It aims to show that, when it comes to kinship, "the world of made" is as good as, and often better than, "the world of born." But under closer scrutiny, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the equation at the base of the Western standard model still remains in force—the equation between "biological," "given," and "non-negotiable," on the one hand, and "social," "constructed," and "optative," on the other. The notion of "substance" may have been theoretically extended from the sphere of the given to that of the constructed (Carsten 2001)—but that is about it. Biology ("sex," "birth," etc.) is still the given in the constructive model; it simply carries less value than the constructed

("gender," "feeding," etc.) dimensions of kinship. Some peoples may even entirely ignore the given, entertaining a "nothing is given, all is made" type of ontology—but no people would have something other than biologically-grounded consanguinity as the given.[21] Why not, though?

Nowadays, social constructionism's dominance is under siege on multiple fronts. The model just evoked is being hit by a volley of criticisms, the more hostile of them coming from the camp of those I would dub "natural instructionists"—cognitivistic-minded anthropologists, their associates and fellow-travellers. Virtually all of the criticisms, however, amount to restatements of the old modernist ontology of natural universals and cultural particulars. "Kinship," "gender," and "person," among many other concepts, have been victimized by these somewhat reactionary reconstructions. In the face of the "nothing is given" banner waved by the constructionists, these reactions content themselves in reaffirming the universal content of the Given, "given" certain universals—be they physico-material ("nature"), psycho-cognitive ("human nature"), or phenomenological (the "human condition"). Back to case one.

In total disagreement with these rejections of the social constructionist stance, I assume that what is pre-historical and generic is that something is always presupposed as given, not its specification. What is given is that *something* has to be given—that some dimension of human experience must be constructed (counterinvented) as given.[22] And *that* is about it.

So one possibility is left, given the parameters chosen "by construction," for the present experiment.

4. The Amazonian model

The remaining possibility is the converse of the first one. Here we find affinity as a given, internal and constitutive relation, and consanguinity as constructed, external and regulative. This, I suggest, is the value distribution present in the Amazonian relational world. If the privileging of the fraternal idiom in our own model of sociality (we are all brothers in something, sociality is fraternity

21. See Bamford (2007: 57–58): "Despite the novelty of these newer formulations . . . they continue to rest upon two underlying ideas: first, that kinship is a bond of substance; and second, that it unites two or more people in a 'physical' relationship."

22. I believe I'm following Wagner ([1975] 1981) here. For a similar criticism of the constructive model, see Leach (2003).

writ large) derives from the given character of consanguinity for ourselves, then the analogous privileging of the affinal bond by Amazonians would point to affinity as the given dimension of kinship there. Likewise, if affinity is seen as constructed in our social tradition, then consanguinity has a good chance of standing as the non-innate dimension of Amazonian kinship. If all this happens to be true, then Lévi-Strauss was not correct in arguing that the brother relationship is natural, i.e., given and socially sterile, while the brother-in-law one is cultural, i.e., constructed and socially fecund. As far as Amazonians are concerned, I would say that the opposite is true: affinity is natural, consanguinity is cultural. (It is precisely because affinity is seen as a *natural* given by the Nambikwara, I would argue, that they treated it as socially *fecund*, resorting to it when constructing a relation with the foreign band.)

I am stretching the meanings of "natural" and "cultural" here, to be sure; but that is the whole point of this exercise. Amazonian affinity cannot be "natural" in exactly the same sense as our consanguinity—that is, given as a deep-sealed organismic condition, although it does entail important bodily determinations.[23] It is not a given in *The elementary structures of kinship* sense, either, although it does incorporate "prescriptive alliance" as one of the possible consequences of a wider cosmopractical structure. Affinity is the given because it is lived and conceived as an ontological condition underlying *all* "social" relations. Affinity, in other words, is not something that comes after prior natural relatednesses; rather, it is one of the primordial givens from which the relational matrix ensues. It belongs as such to the fabric of the universe.[24] So, if we wish to continue to think of affinity as cultural or conventional, we must also realize that "human" culture, for Amazonians (and others), is a trans-specific property, belonging to the province of the universal and the "innate"—or what we might as well call

23. Cannibal determinations, for instance; see Viveiros de Castro 1993b.

24. It is worth remembering that the protagonists of the major Amerindian origin myths, as abundantly illustrated in Lévi-Strauss' *Mythologiques* (1964, 1967a, 1967b, 1971), are related as affines. Our own Old World myths seem to be haunted, on the other hand, by siblingship and parenthood, particularly fatherhood. Not to put too fine a point on it, we had to steal culture from a divine father, while Amerindians had to steal it from an animal father-in-law. "Mythology" is the name we give to other people's discourses on the innate. Myths address what must be taken for granted, the initial conditions with which humanity must cope and against which it must define itself by means of its power of invention. In the Amerindian worlds, affinity and alliance/exchange, rather than parenthood and creation/production, would thus comprise the unconditioned condition.

the natural.[25] By the same token, Amazonian consanguinity is experienced as constructed, but not only (or always) as an instituted set of jural categories and roles, a "social structure." Consanguinity is constructed more or less along the lines of the current understanding of kinship: in the phenomenal sense of being the outcome of meaningful intersubjective practices. It is "culture," then—it is, for example, history (Gow 1991). This has nothing to do with choice, as in our own notions of the constructed. Humans have no option but to invent and differentiate their own bodies of kin; for this, too, follows from the conventional givenness of affinity.[26]

EPILOGUE

Let me conclude by insisting that consanguinity and affinity mean very different things across the four cases summarized above. In each configuration they highlight possibilities that are downplayed or subsumed by the meanings they assume in the other configurations. Hence, my decision to stick to these two words in the face of a lived world quite foreign to the constellation of ideas we express by them was not taken just for the sake of the debate—much less because I believe "that our words consanguinity and affinity have some universal value" (Leach [1951] 1961: 27)—but in order for us fully to appreciate the extent of such foreignness. Indeed I think that one of the most rewarding anthropological experiments is the anti-Fregean trick of forcing unfamiliar "references" onto familiar "senses," the subverting of the conceptual regime of everyday notions-making the right mistake, so to speak.[27] To my mind, this sort

25. See Wagner 1977b; Viveiros de Castro 1998b.

26. The reader is asked to note that, although I have been using a Wagnerian frame (adapted from *The invention of culture)* here to redistribute the Lévi-Straussian "affinity/consanguinity" pair in relation to the contrast between the "given" and the "constructed," the resulting inversion is *not* identical to the inversion proposed by Wagner himself in *The curse of Souw* (Wagner 1967) for the equivalent pair "exchange/consanguinity." In the latter book, the relevant parameters are the functions of "unit definition" and "unit relation," not the given and the constructed.

27. To paraphrase the editors' description of the theoretical task of *Relative values* (Franklin and McKinnon 2001: 7), my purpose is also "to open up" the categories of consanguinity and affinity and "examine how [they] can be put to use in ways that destabilize the 'obviousness' of [their] conventional referents, while expanding the scope of [their] purchase as well."

of controlled equivocality is the stuff of which anthropology is made. And this, after all, is what "kinship" is all about.

The reader will have noticed that my two intermediary cases (the "constitutive" and the "constructive") were not directly associated with culturally-specific instantiations. They are theoretical constructs developed within anthropology by a sort of internal dialectic that took off through a negation of the Western viewpoint. Perhaps one might find ethnographic examples of these two cases, though I suspect this would be a far from easy task. If my general argument is correct, the opposition between consanguinity and affinity—as with any conceptual dualism not submitted to deliberate, reflexive equalizing—is inherently unstable, and tends to fall into a marked/unmarked distribution: you cannot have both affinity and consanguinity as given, or both as constructed.[28] Such asymmetry can be seen even within the theoretical constructs that apparently impose the same value upon both poles: the structuralist "constitutive" model obviously privileges affinity as the truly interesting "given"—since the model reacts against an artificialist and individualist conception of sociality—while the constructive model tends to concentrate on consanguinity as the critically interesting "constructed"—for the model opposes naturalized views of kinship. Therefore, should the symmetrical character of the relation between the "Western" and the "Amazonian" models look a tad too neat, I invite the reader to see the latter as an analytical cross between the structuralist model, from whence it draws the notion of affinity as the given, and the constructionist model, from whence it draws the idea of consanguinity as processual construction.

But there is a critical subtext here. I take the Constructive model to be a particularly strong version (a terminal transformation of sorts) of the Standard model, since it does "no more" than extend to consanguinity the constructed status traditionally given to affinity in modern Western kinship ideology. Thus the Constructive model would be describing (or prescribing) what we might call, in Lévi-Straussian terms, a post-complex kinship system, where the element of "choice," which in complex systems characterizes only the affinal dimension, ideally defines the consanguineal one as well. This seems to be pretty much in

28. "The precipitation of one [semiotic] modality [i.e., literal or figurative] by the other follows from the fact that their complementarity is essential to meaning. And the interpretive separation of one modality from the other, assuring that the actor's intention will conform to the lineaments of literal or figurative construction, *but not both, or neither, or something else,* emerges as the crucial factor in the construction of human experience" (Wagner 1977b: 392, emphasis added).

phase with recent transformations in the Western culture of kinship (Strathern 2001), since we have now begun to be able to choose (or imagine we can, and perhaps must choose) both the kind of children we want to have, thanks to the new reproductive technologies—the transcription of the old nonliterate "analogical kinship" into the digital genealogical alphabet of DNA—and the kind of parents and siblings we prefer, by way of the new optative solidarities and alternative families. We can now offer ourselves the luxury of two *entirely* different genealogies, one consisting of (biological) relatives without (social) relatedness, the other of relatedness without relatives.[29] Having divided the world into what one is obliged to accept and what one can/must choose—a very peculiar cultural reading of the formal distinction between the given and the constructed—our contemporary social sensibility has become obsessively impelled by a desire to expand the latter domain, indeed, we seem to have finally arrived. We succeeded so well that our predicament is now one of being obliged to choose (Strathern 1992c: 36–38). And *there* we have our own postmodern Given; a sort of dialectical vengeance.[30] The contrast has thereby become absolute, between our state of forced choice and the "choosing to be obliged" characteristic of gift-based socialities. In a way, the constructive model represents the final hegemony of consumptive individualism, which has taken possession of the intrinsically anti-individualist (because relational) field of kinship. This expansion of the sphere of constructiveness of human kinship has, to my mind, an essential connection to our "own particular brand of magic"—technology. Whence the ideologically central character of cultural enterprises like the new reproductive technologies

29. "Relatedness without relatives one might say"—Strathern (2002: 44). The contrast with the relatives without relatedness of the new optative families is my own authorship. Here Strathern is discussing, via J. Dolgin, the practico-ideological generalization of the concept of genetic kinship, which establishes entirely "a-moral" links between individuals; the latter have now simply become the carriers of infra- and supra-individual biological units. The relatedness without relatives of bio-kinship contrasts both with the "traditional" family founded on the naturalization of cultural norms and with the contemporary optative family based on affective choice. This postmodern fission of "kinship"—again, of consanguinity—has an interesting parallel in the fission of affinity one finds in Amazonia, where "affines without affinity" stand in opposition to an "affinity without affines" (Viveiros de Castro 2001: 24).

30. As Sartre would have phrased it, our human "essence" consists in being "condemned to freedom." Of course he was not thinking of self-customized late-capitalist productive consumption, but well, history also takes its own liberties

or the Human Genome Project in our present civilization. Kinship still has its magic.

Conversely, I believe the Amazonian model is only accessible by way of a theoretical construct, which emphasizes the givenness of affinity in human kinship—the "Constitutive" model. Or rather, I see in the Amazonian model an image of a pre-elementary system, since one might argue that the classic (Lévi-Strauss 1969) concept of "elementary structures" held that marriage exchange relations necessarily take place between groups defined by a rule of consanguineal recruitment. In truth, my "Amazonian" schema may be taken as a radical version of the structuralist constitutive model; as I remarked above, what does the concept of "incest prohibition" ultimately mean, if not the idea that all consanguinity must be a consequence of affinity?

If this is the case, then we can start to understand why incest is often associated, in Amazonian languages and cosmologies, with processes of metamorphosis—that is, the transformation of the human body into the body of an animal. Kinship, in Amazonia, is a process of constructing a proper human body out of the primal analogic flow of soul-matter in which humans and animals interchange their bodily forms unceasingly. Incest inverts this process (Coelho de Souza 2002), "unrelating" us to other humans and taking us back to where we came from—the pre-cosmological chaos described by myth. But this, in the appropriate context, is exactly what magic and ritual are supposed to do.

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