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**Semiosphere Challenged by Anthro-Semiotic Enunciation / *La sémiosphère mise à l'épreuve de l'énonciation anthro-sémiotique / A semiosfera colocada à prova pela enunciação antropossemiótica***

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**ABSTRACT**

The confrontation between the model of semiosphere, the Greimassian theory and contemporary anthropology highlights the difficulty of implementing an epistemology of diversity starting from Lotman's work. This difficulty leads to question systematically the conditions required for an anthropological enunciation, in particular summoning the positions of Descola, Latour and Viveiros de Castro. This confrontation tries to update the semiosphere model.

**KEYWORDS:** Semiosphere; Enunciation; Anthro-semiotics; Otherness

**RÉSUMÉ**

*La confrontation entre le modèle de la sémiosphère, la théorie greimassienne et l'anthropologie contemporaine met en évidence la difficulté à mettre en œuvre une épistémologie de la diversité en partant de l'œuvre de Lotman. Cette difficulté conduit à interroger systématiquement les conditions requises pour une énonciation anthropologique, en convoquant en particulier les positions de Descola, Latour et Viveiros de Castro. Cette confrontation s'efforce de réactualiser le modèle de la sémiosphère*

**MOTS-CLÉS:** Sémiosphère; Énonciation; Anthro-sémiotique; Altérité

**RESUMO**

*A confrontação entre o modelo da semiosfera, a teoria greimasiana e a antropologia contemporânea coloca em evidência a dificuldade de se implementar uma epistemologia da diversidade a partir da obra de Lotman. Essa dificuldade leva a questionar sistematicamente as condições necessárias para uma enunciação antropológica, convocando em particular as posições de Descola, Latour e Viveiros de Castro. Esta confrontação busca atualizar o modelo de semiosfera.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Semiosfera; Enunciação; Antropossemiótica; Alteridade

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## 1 Semiosphere to the Test<sup>1</sup>

The dialogue proposed here, between the semiotic theory of Lotman, the one resulting from Greimas' work, and the actualized positions of contemporary anthropology, aims to identify in Lotman's semiosphere model the properties that would allow access to a more general anthropo-semiotic dimension. In short, the aim is to evaluate the present scientific relevance of semiosphere model, and if possible, to identify under which conditions it could even be updated. Indeed, this model adopts at once a transversal, even universal, general anthropological scope that it receives from its definition from the natural functioning observed in the whole of the living world (the biosphere). It must therefore be confronted with the epistemology of diversity, the basis of an anthropo-semiotic perspective. In this case, as we will show, the anthropological model that poses the most problems to that of the semiosphere is the perspectivist anthropology of Viveiros de Castro.

The stake is not small, and goes well beyond the limited ambition of this contribution: so, what would be discussed here is only identifying the specific and restrictive conditions allowing to recognize today a renewed, but circumscribed, scientific validity to the semiosphere model, and to relate these conditions to those, more general, which base the possibility of anthropological enunciation and discourse. This last mention is already a delimitation to our investigation: by focusing on the conditions required for an enunciation to take place and produce interpretable semiosis, not only do we touch the very heart of the epistemology of the anthropological dimension, but we also take a position on the type of semiotics that seems most appropriate for us to approach the confrontation between Lotman's semiosphere and other types of approaches.

*Enunciation* can be defined in an extense way as the set of acts that realize semiotic configurations ("semiotic-objects," in the terms of Hjelmslev or Greimas). To realize semiosis, the enunciation must satisfy certain conditions, which are most often modalities of the underlying experience and of the mode of existence aimed at. The semiosis in question are of very different scope, composition and complexity, from the

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<sup>1</sup> This study takes some aspects of FONTANILLE, 2000.

texts to the forms of life and existence<sup>2</sup>: at the limit, as shown by Philippe Descola (2005; 2015), they arouse and establish entire *worlds* or, according to Bruno Latour (2012), *modes of existence*. If we refer to the original position of Greimas in *Sémantique Structurale* (1966), the meaning would have to be found in *universes of meaning* of great magnitude, but which, for reasons based on the choices and the methodological limits of the time (in the middle of the 20th century), were inaccessible to analysis; then, Greimas proposed to circumscribe the construction of meaning to *micro-universes of meaning* that can be grasped immediately by synchronous perception (GREIMAS, 1966, pp.126-127). But the *universes of meaning* in their entirety (cf. supra, the *worlds*) remain to be explored, provided that the necessary methodological arrangements are made possible.

One of these arrangements, precisely, is to associate the construction of the meaning of these *worlds* or *universes of meaning* with enunciations, themselves subject to conditions. It is in this sense that we can speak of *anthropological or anthropo-semiotic enunciation*: this is the way in which human collectives manage to create and establish the *worlds* in which they are likely to find, to project or to construct the meaning of their lives, of their practices and of their interactions, especially with their environments.

## 2 The Semiotic Experience and the Semiotic Act

According to Lotman, in the worlds of meaning, experience precedes act. As regards semiotic productions, the act in question would be an enunciation one, which realizes semiosis. The *semiosphere* is thus a semiotic *space* where the conditions are met for enunciations to occur. The semiotic experience is the very one that this space, the semiosphere, gives to all those who occupy it. We are therefore at the heart of our purpose, namely the conditions required to make possible and legitimate the anthropological enunciation, that is to say, up to the level of cultures and entire civilizations.

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<sup>2</sup> We have already proposed a typology of the plans of relevance (signs, texts-enunciates, objects, practices, strategies and forms of living) in *Pratiques sémiotiques* (2008), revised (signs, works, practices, forms of living, forms of existence ) in *Terres de sens*, with Nicolas Couegnas (2018).

If we can say that the semiosphere is the space where *semiotic competence* takes shape and where it is acquired in the collective experience, this formulation immediately invites a confrontation with Greimas's theory, which highlights a first difficulty: the representation of the semiotic competence takes the form of a *generative path*, a linear stratification of levels of relevance, while that of Lotman is based on a three-dimensional space of dialogue, with frontiers, center and periphery.

The *generative path*, on the one hand, is conceived to order, in an *a priori* rational way, the semiotic articulations, starting from an elementary isotope structure; thus, a generative theory globally postulates, as a condition of possibility of the semiotic act, the coherence and homogeneity of an original category, homogeneity which will be preserved up to the most superficial levels of the generative course. The *semiosphere*, on the other hand, is asymmetrical and heterogeneous. It also assumes an incessant re-articulation of contents and categories, an increase of information and meaning, but not on a linear mode:

The structure of the semiosphere is asymmetrical. Asymmetry is expressed in the internal translation currents which make permeable the whole thickness of the semiosphere. [...]. And since in most cases the various languages of the semiosphere are semiotically asymmetrical, [...] the totality of the semiosphere can be considered as an information generator (LOTMAN, 1988, p.8; our translation).<sup>3</sup>

Then we understand that the object is quite different: it is not, as with Greimas, a *universe of meaning*, whose apprehension would lead to the construction of the meaning, but an information space, which is specifically designed to produce and manage the flow of information between semiospheres and within each semiosphere. The principle of asymmetry is manifested in *translations*, which could be related to the Greimasian principle of intersemiotic translation. But in Greimas, intersemiotic translation is not the management of an information flow, but simply the only means by which we can grasp meaning, in the passage from a semiotic domain to another one.

The semiosphere is heterogeneous, because the stratification that characterizes it results from the coexistence between different stages of development:

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<sup>3</sup> In French: "La structure de la sémiosphère est asymétrique. L'asymétrie trouve son expression dans les courants de traduction internes qui rendent perméable toute l'épaisseur de la sémiosphère. [...] Et puisque dans la plupart des cas les divers langages de la sémiosphère sont sémiotiquement asymétriques, [...] la totalité de la sémiosphère peut être considérée comme une génératrice d'information."

The semiosphere is marked by heterogeneity. The languages that fill the semiotic space are varied, and connected to each other along a spectrum that goes from a complete and mutual possibility of translation to an equally complete and mutual impossibility of translation (LOTMAN, 1988, p.5; our translation).<sup>4</sup>

In all places of the semiosphere, several layers of experience coexist, several epochs of the future of culture are superimposed. The heterogeneity is maximal at its periphery, and the homogeneity is reached only in its center. On the other hand, Greimas's semiotic competence is only computable from an accomplished, stabilized, and homogeneous meaning process. It implies a congruence of the layers of meaning, and therefore it would only deal with the center of the semiosphere. In Lotman's conception, each enunciation, at any moment, influences the competence organization, displaces the center, and reshapes the superimposed layers: from this point of view, it would then be similar to the *enunciative praxis*, as defined by Greimas and Fontanille:

The enunciative praxis is this back and forth which, between the discursive level and the other levels, makes possible the semiotic constitution of cultures. [...] In this sense, the enunciative praxis reconciles a generative and a genetic process and associates in the discourse the products of an atemporal articulation of the meaning and those of the history (GREIMAS; FONTANILLE, 1991, p.88; our translation).<sup>5</sup>

The *generative path* would appear in this confrontation as static, in the sense that it provides the image of a simulacrum of coherent and stabilized competence, to which the *enunciative praxis* must be added to give it a dynamism. In comparison, the semiosphere appears at once and without any addition as a permanent movement, which subjects the semiotic competence and the conditions of enunciations to incessant changes.

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<sup>4</sup> In French: "La sémiosphère est marquée par l'hétérogénéité. Les langages qui emplissent l'espace sémiotique sont variés, et reliés les uns aux autres le long d'un spectre qui va d'une possibilité complète et mutuelle de traduction à une impossibilité tout aussi complète et mutuelle de traduction."

<sup>5</sup> In French: "La praxis énonciative est cet aller-retour qui, entre le niveau discursif et les autres niveaux, permet de constituer sémiotiquement des cultures. [...] En ce sens, la praxis énonciative concilie un parcours génératif et un processus génétique et associe dans le discours les produits d'une articulation atemporelle de la signification et ceux de l'histoire."

The two points of view are opposed, particularly as regards the topology of the theory (a linear path between depth and surface / multiple paths between the exterior and interior, the periphery and the center of a sphere), but they are articulated around the same problem. The point of view of the generative path emphasizes the center of coherence in semiotic stratification, and therefore gives preference to hierarchical and linear relationships between strata of meaning, and delegates to enunciative praxis the task of exploring other areas of the semiosphere. The semiosphere's point of view favors conflictual or peaceful interactions between areas of variable congruence, and therefore gives preference to another topology, a field topology (center, depth, and horizons).

This rapid confrontation reinforces the preceding suggestion: the Greimasian theory can cover the whole semiosphere, but under the condition of completing the semiotic competence built in the generative path – which coincides with the coherent part at the center of the semiosphere – by the enunciative praxis – which extends the effects of semiotic competence to the periphery.

At this point in the confrontation, the semiosphere seems to be better adapted to an epistemology of diversity and to an anthropological perspective, since it includes, in its very definition, the principle of a continuous variation, of random accidents, of temporary freezes, breaks and bifurcations, and especially a capacity for storage and memorization of all these semiotic events. But we must clearly discern the reason for this theoretical difference: for Greimasian semiotics, as in Lotman's, it is the *meaning* we have to construct and not *information*. However, if the information is widely distributed in the semiosphere and beyond, it is not the same for the meaning, which requires a certain rate of redundancy and possibilities of coherence. As the stakes set are those of the conditions required for an anthropological enunciation, for enunciation and semiosis to be possible, the information is not sufficient, and it is meaning which is required and implied in semiosis.

### 3 Dialogic and Passionate Roles

The co-presence of meaning layers in the semiosphere is interpreted by Lotman, faithful to the tradition of Russian semiotics (cf. Bakhtin), as a *polyphony* implied in a

*dialogue*. Likewise, for the enunciative praxis, the subject of enunciation is never solitary, its enunciation is in interaction with all the past and present enunciations, sometimes even future ones, and makes its way through them, while making reference, mention or allusion to some of them.

From this point of view, the notion of *dialogue* would be very reductive, because it would make the interaction between only two actants the obligatory composition element of the totality of the interactions. It should therefore be added at least *a law of propagation* of these dual relations to the totality of the semiosphere. The process of *cultural propagation* has been systematically developed in theoretical anthropology by Dan Sperber (1996), from a naturalistic, individualistic and mechanistic perspective; it is clear that in this case the propagation process is not a *dialogue*. And if we adopt another anthropological solution, based on the practices of *transmission* and the processes of *tradition*, as Paul Ricœur throughout his work, we invoke the long chain of solidarities and reactualizations between successive and accumulated enunciations, which are, also, very far from a “dialogue,” even heard in a very extense way.

Moreover, the notion of dialogue would not be even appropriate for dealing with the semiosphere, since the interactants are previously defined by Lotman as the person (*us*) and the non-person (*them*). The person may influence or mobilize the non-person, but certainly not interact with it, except to convert it into person (*you*)! It would therefore be more prudent to start by laying down the principle of *multilateral interactions*, which constitute an original and becoming collective, even if it is necessary then to specify, as the case may be, the actantial roles in formation, as well as the types of relations that they maintain (including, possibly and locally, the *dialogue*). From an anthropo-semiotic point of view, in fact, we cannot invoke relations between *us* and *them*, or between *I* and *you*, until we have understood how the collective that acts and means in the semiosphere takes shape and identity.

This precaution is all the more necessary because the intrinsic heterogeneity of the semiosphere already implies at least that of *us*: whether it gathers a set of *I* and *you* or a set of *I-you* and *them*, *us* is necessarily heterogeneous. Therefore, this heterogeneity implies an internal *otherness* into the semiosphere: there are as many *others* within it as outside. If the collective is not homogeneous and if it is not a set of *same* but a set of *others*, the question then arises as to the way in which we nevertheless may reach a

coherent meaning. It is necessary to make the hypothesis of an axiological force that would gather all these *others*, agglomerated in the center of the semiosphere, and which, conversely, would weaken when approaching the border.

This axiological force is an *assumption*: we either assume or do not assume the values, the objectives of the practices, the norms and the common rules. What belongs to *them* is outside the sphere of *us*, and therefore is not assumed. The movements of progressive integration of the semiotic productions of *them* within the sphere of *us*, movements that we will describe just now, imply that we gradually assume these semiotic productions, until assuming them totally when they reach the center of the semiosphere. As several types of semiotic productions are concerned at the same time, in each zone of the semiosphere there coexist assumed layers, others not, some strongly, others weakly.

For Lotman, the variation of the *force of assumption* results from *axiological judgments*: the inner domain is that of harmony, culture, security; the external domain is that of chaos, barbarism and threat. The two domains are opposed through differences of assumption, based on differences in perception of cultural facts. But *assumption* is, with *predicating*, one of the two elementary enunciative operations: *predicating* is the act of enunciation itself, and *assumption* is its modalization, by which the nature and the intensity of the connection between the enunciation instance and what it enunciates are asserted or denied.

These perceptions-assumptions are based on two elementary semiotic dimensions. The first, rather cognitive, aims at semiosis through their internal *mereological structure*, relations between parties and their totality (*harmonious* in one case, *chaotic* in the other). The second, rather affective and emotional, aims at semiosis through the flows of energy that support or compromise the *course of existence*: as they are comforted or compromised, the effects of *them* on *us* are felt as *security* or as *threat*. But these effects are variable and graduated. Lotman points out, for example, the alarming brilliance of foreign contributions as they enter the realm of *us*: the threat comes from outside, the anxiety is on the periphery, and security inside. The semiosphere thus elicits a great variety of passionate effects, based on the variety of *affective perceptions of stability and cultural instability*.



These two dimensions are the two main ways of semiosis formation: *totalizing semiosis* on one side (aiming at coherence or congruence between their components), and *cursive and fluent semiosis* on the other (aiming at persistence, protection, or resilience of courses of existence). In the Lotmanian conception, they give rise to the two types of perception of cultural facts, the cognitive perception which captures the relations between the parts and the whole, and the affective perception which experiences their strangeness or familiarity, both subject to incessant movements in the semiosphere field (inputs, outputs, integrations, and expulsions). Here we can better see what the conditions for an anthropological enunciation are: variations of the assumption (a required condition to enunciate) are the effects (or consequences) of the semiosis structure to be identified or constructed, that is to say, effects of their semiotic morphology. In this case, it is a question of *meaning structures*, and not just information.

For all that, the actants in the perceptive semiosphere field are mainly characterized, according to Lotman, by their informative activity: each one in turn, they *emit* and *receive*, either in an *active phase*, or in a *passive phase*. The alternation and combinations between these roles and phases changes both the orientation of the relationship, and the level of activity, the amount of cultural production, and the intensity of energy deployed in each phase. This is expressed on both dimensions, in both types of semiosis: when *us* emits, and *them* receives, *coherence* and *security* are reached; when *them* emits, and *us* receives, *incoherence* appears and *threat* is felt; globally, the centrifugal orientation of the movements in the field is cohesive and reassuring, whereas their centripetal orientation is dispersive and disturbing. When the two types of actants emit and produce at the same time (both active), we find ourselves in intermediate phases where the passional effect (from *worry* to *familiarity*, passing through *worrying familiarity*) depends on balance between the two types of activity. We understand then why all this cannot be described only as a *dialogue*, and why what happens may even less be reduced to an information exchange. Whether from the perspective of totalizing mereologic semiosis, or that of cursive and fluent semiosis, the interactions themselves are of a great diversity, far beyond mere exchange, far beyond mere information. We also understand that putting the category *us / them* as preliminary to the definition of the semiosphere is to base the model on an unresolved problem, or,

at worst, to impose an epistemological obstacle. Before being able to understand how the collective is able or not to assume the semiosis, it is necessary to know how it is constituted itself.

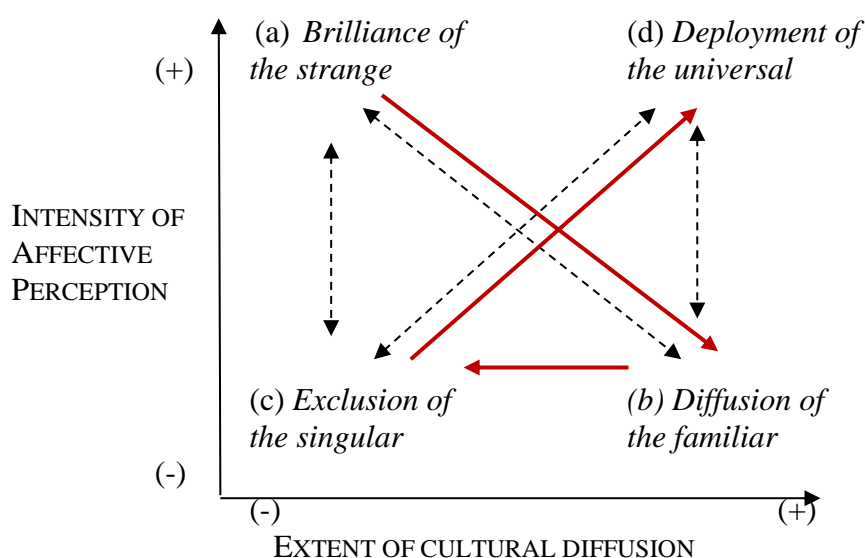
#### 4 Schematization of Diversity

We first propose to schematize the movements in the semiosphere to appreciate the potential for differentiation and diversification. The movements in the field, according to Lotman, go through four main phases (not exclusive of other combinations): (a) B is active in production, and A is passive in reception. (b) A is active in reception, B is passive in production. (c) A is passive in reception, and B is passive in production. (d) A is active in production, and B is passive in reception. Each of these phases is defined as follows:

- (*Phase a*) The contribution of B is perceived by A as striking and singular, overvalued as prestigious or disturbing. The axiological perception of A is ambivalent: positive as to the surprise or the interest that B's contribution arouses, negative as to its subversive or distinctive force within the host culture.
- (*Phase b*) The contribution of B is imitated, reproduced, transposed and translated by A in the terms of *own* and *ours*, which allows it to be diffused and integrated in the whole inner field. It loses all brilliance, both its astonishing and disturbing character.
- (*Phase c*) The contribution of B, thus integrated, is no longer recognized as foreign, and A withdraws from it everything specific; it can even obscure its foreign origin, and all that could recall it, to better assimilate it to the host culture; the domain of B seems all the more singular, confused, incomprehensible.
- (*Phase d*) The contribution of B, whose origin has been erased, can be set up as a new universal norm, and offered in return not only within the domain of A, but also to the outer domains, as a paragon of any culture.

In the *dialogue* between semiospheres, cultural facts thus go through different and clearly identifiable states: (a) pure brilliance, and unassimilable scandal, (b) translation or simple imitation, (c) marginal specification, or (d) production of universal

forms. The four selected states, among many possible other ones, are mainly differentiated on the one hand by the *intensity (high or low) of activity and affect*, and on the other hand by a *capacity (extended or restricted) of cultural diffusion*. The threatening brightness of phase (a) is thus characterized by a strong emotional intensity and a weak diffusion. Translation-replication in phase (b) weakens affective intensity and increases the diffusion capacity. In phase (c), intensity and diffusion capacity are at the lowest. In phase (d) intensity and diffusion capacity are at the highest. This distribution is represented in the following diagram, where the solid arrows represent the canonical course according to Lotman, and the dotted arrows, the available courses.



This schema is a *tensive structure*, which defines all the possible combinations between the respective degrees of *affective intensity* (conventionally represented as a vertical gradient on the left) and the *cultural diffusion capacity* (conventionally represented as a horizontal gradient below). This implies that the space thus defined has infinity of possible positions, not just four. The four phases selected by Lotman are defined by the extreme degrees (maximum and minimum) on both gradients. The principle of diversity is now acquired, formalized, and potentially exploitable. Its anthropological significance remains – and this is not the least problem – to be explored.

## 5 The Epistemology of Diversity

Lotman's model of the semiosphere is universal, and it is its internal functioning that engenders diversity. In addition, this universal model is based on two other universal ones: *Vernadsky biosphere*, to which the semiosphere belongs, and *cybernetics*, which underlie the analysis of the production and exchange of information. The Lotmanian model cannot therefore claim to belong to an epistemology of diversity, the one that founds contemporary anthropology.

To erect diversity as an epistemological principle leads to shifting the value of universality (or generality) from the models to the structuring process of their diversity. For contemporary anthropology, it is not the explanatory models and the functioning of *human nature*, as Levi-Strauss once again said, that have universal or general significance. On the contrary, the structural principles of their diversification have a universal status. Indeed, if we postulate that there is a human nature, only one, and that in order to know it, it is necessary to propose a system of laws that are valid at all times and in all places, then the diversity of human cultures becomes not a true object of knowledge, but a set of temporary and marginal accidents that must, for the best, be described case by case, or, at worst, reduced to general laws (such as the *explosion of culture* of Lotman).

It also follows that these various cultures are hierarchical: at the top of the list are the cultures that most clearly express and fulfill universals or general patterns, and at the very bottom of the list, other cultures, so particular or so exotic that many allow themselves to believe in good faith that they must be *helped* to come out of their primitive and unfulfilled state, not to say eradicate them and replace them with cultures more in line with universal patterns. It is very difficult to serenely re-read Lévi-Strauss today when he speaks of *wild thought* and its various manifestations, without feeling any discomfort with the enunciation of this *wild* qualifier: should it be taken at first degree? Or as a mention put at a distance? And with how many pairs of quotation marks? At this degree of generality, we may fear some condescension towards a thought that does not apply the argumentative norms of scientific naturalism. Yet, if we take into consideration the properties of this *wild thought*, namely its *mythical* and *magical* character, we, Western people, know that we often practice this regime of meaning in

everyday life: of course, we think like *modern naturalists* when we do semiotics (I hope so!), but we shamelessly practice wild, mythical and / or magical thinking, when we cultivate our garden, when we taste the presence of our parents who bequeathed to us such shrubs, such kind of roses. Similarly, when we taste a wine, we appreciate its terroir, its traditions of production, and the vine grape variety, the oak wood of the barrels where its aromas and flavors have been enriched, without questioning the nature of the links between all these properties. *Wild thought* dwells in all of us, thanks to the mobility provided by the changes of the meaning regimes, and the shifts of points of view. We will come back to it.

When we generalize the principles of structuring diversification, instead of generalizing dominant models, we do not fall into relativism. On the contrary, it is the choice of dominant models that engenders relativism: in face of the diversity of documented and observed cultures, we are led precisely in this case to *relativize* the dominant models, to admit that they suffer from numerous exceptions, and to be unable to explain how we may pass from general models to specific achievements. Constructed from the biosphere model, borrowed from Vernadsky, the semiosphere model presents itself as a global and unique hypothesis of organization of all cultures, laying (1) on each environment by a border permeable to exchanges with neighboring and foreign cultures, (2) on a differentiated internal topology, from the center to the periphery, where are distributed the different stages of integration into the main cultural identity, (3) on a reflective capacity, giving rise to *self-descriptions* of the semiosphere by itself.

But when it comes to describe specific cultures, the model is disseminated between particular achievements, without being able to explain these differentiations, other than through direct contact and proximity exchanges (temporal and spatial) between specific semiospheres. What about the differentiation of cultures that are not in contact, distant in time and space? We cannot say anything anymore. Added to this is the fact that the original model itself, the biosphere, has itself exploded into an Umwelten multitude, under the pressure of the Umwelt theory, developed by Jacob von Uexküll (2015 [2010]), which is itself, in its very constitution, a model of the specification and diversification of living environments.

When, on the contrary, we generalize the principles of structuring diversification, we construct a theory whose purpose is to describe and explain

differentiation and specification, and above all to control their conditions and effects. Two major examples can be given. The first example is that of the constitution of anthropological collectives: it is a question of generating a diversity of types of collectives whose differences are globally relevant and significant for humanity, and not delivered to the hazards of the world history of human groups and the geography of their settlements. First of all, we wonder what the general principle that founds such collectives is: it is first the difference between the Self and the Other, or, in Lotman's own terms, concerning the semiosphere, the difference between *us* and *them*. But as this general distinction is not a principle of differentiation of collectives, we must question the composition of collectives, and more precisely on what structure their differences.

Then we search deeper properties to explain the constitution of the collectives, the structuring properties that underlie the internal system of each collective. Contemporary anthropology (DESCOLA, 2005) identifies two properties of existent entities considered as relevant for the constitution of anthropological collectives, and only two: *interiority* and *externality*. We wonder if such collective admits interior or external dissimilarities and/or resemblances between its members. *Externalities* are of a physical nature, and derive from interactions between the living being and its environment (the Umwelt). *Interiorities* are reflective capacities, possibly psychic, and arise from the interactions of the living being with itself and with other ones. Therefore, the category interiority vs. externality does not describe, as in Lotman's work, the delimitation of the collective semiosphere, but a mode of differentiation and internal identification within this collective. In addition, exteriority and interiority are not ontological data, but only constructions which are specific to each type of collective.

The controlled diversification of anthropological collectives is structured by a typology, where each type of collective is established by one of the combinations of these elementary properties. Since it lays on a collective actant and its internal interactions, the adopted solution must provide opportunities for interaction between members of the collective, whose differences are more or less marked. These possibilities of interaction form the common basis of the collective existence and of the resulting *world of meaning*, and they are conditions for this collective itself to enunciate its identity. Anthropologists, following Descola (2005), then distinguish:

- Collectives for which the world consists only of differences, internal and external, which repair this dispersion thanks to superimpositions of analogies (the analogist collectives).
- Collectives for which the world consists only of similarities, internal and external, which compensate for this general similarity by projecting distinctive filiations, between human clans, animal and plant species, and figures of natural landscapes (the totemist collectives).
- Collectives for which all the existing entities are radically differentiated by their physical properties, and which compensate this cleavage by attributing to them one same interior reflexivity (the animistic collectives).
- Collectives for which all the existing entities are radically differentiated by their internal reflexive capacities (those who have a *spirit* and a *conscience*, and those who do not have any), and which compensate this other division by attributing to them the same physical properties obeying the same natural laws (the naturalist collectives, which call themselves *modern*).

The possibilities of interactions being established, the second example of structuring diversification is that of the *relationship practices* themselves. Levi-Strauss, and in his early wake, the semiotic narrative in the twentieth century, knew only one anthropologically relevant practice, the exchange, the communication of goods, women and symbols, or, as in Lotman, information exchange. If all the collectives would only communicate and exchange, there would be no need to conceive of a significant differentiation of the dominant practices in each type of collective. The structuring principle of diversity leads to the selection of two properties of relationship practices: (1) the relation is established between actants of identical or different status, (2) the relation admits or not the reversibility or the reciprocity of the actantial roles. Diversification can then be founded: *exchange* is a reciprocal practice between identical agents; *gift* and *appropriation-predation* are non-reciprocal practices between more or less similar actants; *transmission* and *protection* are non-reciprocal practices between actors of different status, etc. This diversification is particularly appropriate to account for practices that generate internal movements of the semiosphere, without reducing them to the exchange of information.

The epistemology of diversity is not limited to these two examples. Structuring diversity makes it possible to situate and compare major types of conceptions of human-nature collectives, without postulating any dominant model, any reference group: the dominant reference is the combinatorics that engenders the diversity of models of explanation.

## 6 Subjectivity and Otherness: Perspectivist Anthro-Semiotics

The concepts of *subjectivity* and *otherness* would seem self-evident if the structuring diversity lays first on the distinction between *us* and *them*: subjectivity would be inside, and otherness, outside. Reflexivity would be inside, and the outside would be devoid of it. But this conception, traditional in a naturalist perspective and taken up by the semiotics of culture (Lotman), is seriously discussed by contemporary ethology and anthropology.

First of all, it is no longer obvious that the other is outside. If it is *other* because it does not belong to the collective, then an hermetic boundary is postulated improperly, because even the theories which are based on the asymmetry between *us* and *them*, *I* and *it*, admit a porosity of the border: one of the problems dealt with in particular by the semiotics of culture is precisely the integration of the Other into the Self, from *them* to *us*. If it is *other* only because it is different, then nothing prevents it from belonging to the same collective as Self: as we have seen, the four types of anthro-semiotic collectives are based on internal alterities, internal or external dissimilarities, or both. In addition, the other is no longer just another human, but any other existing entity with which each living being interacts in its environment and in the broader context of the semiosphere. Finally, the *other* is already plural: there are as many environments (Umwelten), and other specific populations, as there are species and living beings. As far as humans are concerned, there are as many profiles of the other as there are human-nature collectives. If the Other is within the collective, would it be constitutive of subjectivity and would it burst into a multitude of Self? The problem is singularly complicated.

We may now go through animal ethology to treat such aporia. In the thirties of the previous century, Jacob von Uexküll (2015 [2010]) proposed the concept of



Umwelt, to replace that of *environment*. The environment is the whole surrounding us as living beings, determining and directing our adaptation; the Umwelt is everything with which we interact, which transforms us and which we transform by interacting. In other words, the Umwelt of a living being is its perimeter of transformative interactions, that is to say, relevant from a semiotic point of view. For Jacob von Uexküll, all Others which are relevant to the Self are inside the Umwelt, and not outside, in a *surrounding environment*. Therefore, to account for the dissymmetry between the center of interactions (the Self of the living being) and all the other parts of the Umwelt, Uexküll characterized this center as a *center of activity and sensitivity*, and the Umwelt as a *subjectal point of view* on a perimeter of relevant interactions. This center of sensitivity and reflexivity is essential to explain that the Umwelt results from a selection of interactions which are relevant for the living being, into a defined perimeter, and that, for this reason, it is significant. This center and everything with which it interacts selects and transforms each other, and the point of view can at any time switch, because the Umwelt is populated by other living beings: we can go from Umwelt of A, which contains B, to the Umwelt of B, which does not necessarily contain A, or at least not exactly the same! For example, for A, B can be reduced to an odor and a texture, whereas for B, A will be just a moving form. The Umwelt is similar to the semiosphere, but without the anthropomorphic projections, and especially with a considerable expansion of the practices of relations, well beyond the dual dialogue, and beyond the exchange: the Umwelt is a machine that produces and processes the signs and meanings of perceptions and actions; it does not produce nor process information.

Let's go back to humans and their collectives. The *subjectality* of the collective and of each of its members is only an effect of the point of view from which they appreciate their alterities, and of the minimal *reflexivity and sensitivity* which make it possible to regulate the interaction with the *others*. The subjectality and the otherness are themselves constituted by the type of collective in which beings place themselves: the otherness of a totemist collective is that of another clan, and not that of another kind of existent; the otherness of a naturalistic collective is that of another culture, and not that of the natural physical laws which impose themselves on everything. Henceforth, the problem is not the *I*, still less the transcendence of a universal Self, but the establishment and management of Others, in all their diversity.

Viveiros de Castro draws the ultimate consequences of this epistemological reversal, in his *perspectivist anthropology*. His reflection is rooted in the Brazilian movement called *anthropophagic*, born in the early twentieth century in reaction against the Brazilian elite's submission to the aesthetic canons, cultural norms and scientific views forged in Europe. Viveiros de Castro (2009) assumes this heritage, notably choosing as the title of his main work *Cannibal metaphysics*.<sup>6</sup>

To grasp the key to anthropophagic ritual, we must recall the two founding scenes that Suely Rolnik relates in *Zombie Anthropophagy* (ROLNIK, 2008, pp.13-15). In the first, a Portuguese bishop is taken prisoner, he is firm in his commitments and convictions, and he faces adversity: he will be worthy of being consummated. In the second, a German adventurer is captured, and he begs to be spared, he promises compromises: he will not be invited to the cannibal feast, even and especially, as a main dish. Devouring the bishop makes it possible to appropriate the power of the colonizer. Not eating the German adventurer, however, protects from his contagious cowardice. The first affirmed his power, his conviction and his otherness, and not the second. The choice of the Other whose identity is to be appropriated depends on the intensity of his sensory and bodily presence, and the intensity he displays to assume his own otherness. The chosen otherness, valued and desired, will then be incorporated into the very being of the one who absorbs it, to increase and enrich it accordingly.

This collective practice of appropriation-predation begins with homage to the otherness of the Other. To consume the Other is not to destroy him/it, but to respect him/it as another who assumes himself/itself, and to perpetuate him/it in him/itself after absorption. The anthropophagic practice begins with the projection and/or recognition of value (in the Other) and continues with the absorption of that value (in the Self). By retaining only the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the ritual, the so-called *anthropophagic* cultural movement appears as an experience of thought, and a semiotic configuration of great magnitude. This thought experiment can be generalized, far beyond the ritual that inspires it, and it will found a broad intellectual and cultural movement in Brazil, and in particular the perspectivist anthropology of Viveiros de Castro. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazil lived in a quasi-colonial state,

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<sup>6</sup> The whole of this analysis of the anthropophagic movement and of perspectivist anthropology resumes, summarizing and adapting it, the matter of a chapter of the book *Terres de Sens* (FONTANILLE; COUEGNAS, 2018).

from a political, economic and cultural point of view, despite the political and formal independence obtained in 1822 and the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. Then, the anthropophagic movement exploits the singular thought experiment resulting from the interpretation of the cannibalistic ritual: this movement rejects the postcolonial *exchange* with the West, and values the anthropophagic *predation* of its identity and its values. But it must first be admitted that *exchange* is not a universal practical scheme and that it gives way to other schemes, such as *appropriation-predation*. The anthropophagic movement will provoke important transformations in Brazilian human and social sciences and will spread in all dimensions of collective life: aesthetic, political, religious, social, academic, and intellectual. A world being established thereby, on the basis of a dominant practical scheme, of multiple concrete semiotics, then became possible.

This experience of thought has the effect of a transition of forms of living. Every form of living emerges from a confrontation with other forms, anterior, posterior or concomitant, near or far. Every form of living asserts itself in the congruence between systems of values, regimes of meaning, styles of behavior, etc. This is precisely the case for the anthropophagic movement. The change in point of view is so radical that it changes the boundary between *us* and *them*. It even questions both the composition of *us* and that of *them*, because the anthropophagous eats both the Indian and the so-called civilized. In other words, he appropriates both a part of *them* and a part of *us*, a distinction which is not at all relevant to him, since only the possibility of their transformation into an Other assimilable to the Self is taken into account: so, the category of the person (*us / them*) is neutralized and replaced by a perspectivist category (*Self / Other*). And above all, he focuses on the Other, adopts his point of view to discover the potential value and therefore appreciate what it is likely to bring him at the anthropophagic banquet.

Viveiros de Castro takes up this thought experiment which reinvents the Other as *appropriable*, and he defines a position of anthropological enunciation, that of the altering enunciation, creating others at any time, and the value of these others. The problem to be dealt with, once again, is the diversity of Others, not the identity of the Self. But how does the anthropophagic experience of alteration differ from an experience locked in otherness? Thanks to the *mobility of points of view*. Indeed,

Viveiros de Castro submits the enunciative alteration to critical shifts of points of view. The West postulates that others conceive of otherness as we conceive of it, that is, exclusively reciprocal: I am the other of my other. However, this is not necessarily and exclusively the case, because the others are precisely others because they do not have the same others than us! And that is why perspectivist anthropology is asymmetrical.

For Viveiros de Castro (1992), the shift of point of view releases the enunciative interactions with the native, under the condition of radical empathy. If empathy is the experience by which the Self can occupy the point of view of the Other without losing the consciousness of Self, then we must add here: by making sure to maintain and magnify the consciousness of the Other. The shift of point of view is then controlled by a double reflexivity (Self-consciousness, consciousness of the Other). For Viveiros de Castro, the critical point is precisely the reflexivity of the other. Indeed, what blocks the enunciative interactions, from the *Western* point of view, is the presupposition that what makes the native a native is that his relationship with his own culture would be spontaneous, non-reflexive, implicit, still better: *unconscious*. This was the teaching of Levi-Strauss, but it is also the position of Lotman, for whom the external domain is necessarily confused, chaotic and barbarous: both conceived of anthropology in the perspective of naturalistic collectives (a single nature, and multiple hierarchical cultures). Therefore, only the anthropologist could maintain a reflective and conscious relationship with his culture and that of others. We understand then why the rejection of all reflexivity in the Other, and reflexivity different from that of the Self, can become an epistemological obstacle, in the perspective of an epistemology of diversity.

The altering enunciation must therefore aim at the specific elements of reflexivity involved in the other's point of view: by changing point of view, the anthropologist must find the form that the native himself gives to his culture. Viveiros de Castro puts forward a specific example: contemporary anthropologists, such as Descola and Latour, claim to have invented the concept of *multinaturalism* (multiple natures, as much as cultures), to distance themselves from the *naturalist* world (only one universal nature) to which they belong. Viveiros de Castro replies to them: no, it is not the anthropologists who invented multinaturalism, but the animist peoples, and with full knowledge of it and in all consciousness!

The reflexivity of the Other is therefore the decisive point in the construction of its value we are about to *absorb*: this was already the case for the bishop and for the adventurer in the ritual of the anthropophagic banquet. *For an anthropo-semiotic perspectivist, otherness does not exist; it is produced by anthropological enunciation*: it becomes altering precisely because of the critical shift of points of view, and the reflexivity of the Self enunciating is only fulfilled and only fully realizes itself in the discovery of the reflexivity of the Other.

## Conclusion

If the Other is the central problem to be dealt with, it is because it is in the field of presence of the analyst, nearby, and not at the antipodes. It is even sometimes in us, here and now, at least near and familiar, and integrable with the Self. The analysis certainly implies a distance, but internal; shifts of points of view, but critical and reversible. Anthropological enunciation meets the required conditions only if it enunciates in immanence, from within the targeted culture, and not in an overarching and transcendent position.

How to conceive a semiosphere where the *others of my other* would not be the same as *my own others*? A semiosphere in which the interaction between culture A and culture B would lead A to recognize critically the reflexivity of B, and vice versa? We should first give up the ontological and fixed distribution between *us* and *them*. It would then be necessary not to conceive a dialogue between cultures in contact, but *a network of multilateral interactions*, where each culture would be in search of the most valuable Other, especially whose reflexivity would be the most different and the most enriching for its Self, for nurturing practices of gift, appropriation-predation, transmission, exchange, protection and production, not just exchange.

Nevertheless, the most suitable topological model would not be that of a sphere, but that of a *rhizome*, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari (1972; 1980), that is to say, without center, without previous hierarchy, animated by replication and repetition, in constant metamorphosis, and able to switch between provisional and reversible points of view. Projected on this reticular topology, the structuring properties of diversification would provoke the modes of collectives' constitution, and the practical relationship

schemas. Thus, some local forms would then emerge and stabilize: clouds, bubbles, and perhaps even spheres!

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