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Ontology and anthropology of interanimality:
Merleau-Ponty from Tim Ingold's perspective

Ana Cristina Ramírez Barreto
Michoacan University of Saint Nicholas Hidalgo

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ABSTRACT:

This essay explores Tim Ingold's anthropological theory following his references to Merleau-Ponty and the concept of interanimality/interagentivity. It poses some ideas of Ingold's "poetics of dwelling", which he highlights from ethnographies of hunter-gatherer peoples, and how these ideas are linked to an ontological consideration which does not dissociate body and person, body and mind, nature and culture, animality and humanity. The paper reviews animal literature in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and Ingold's critique of "Anthropology of the senses". It also gives critical clues for the ethical and political implications of this ontology.

KEY WORDS:

Ingold, Merleau-Ponty, interanimality, interagentivity, perception.

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Introduction

To prove that Being is intrinsically phenomenal, in a positive way and not as something added to the world by humans, Merleau-Ponty¹, in his 1956-1960 courses (*La Nature*), discussed concepts coined by zoologists; concepts such as Jakob von Uexküll's "living beings' environment as sensible and active beings" [*Umwelt*], Lorenz and Tinbergen's impression and animal communication, and Adolphe Portmann's existential value of animal manifestation (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 244-247). His ontology rejects the idea that animals exist as discreet entities, exterior to one another and limited to mechanical reactions. He uses the term *interanimality* (1995: 247) to underline the fact that animals exist within a circuit of expression and resonance involving other animals and the environment. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty approached the relationship between humans and other animals as an irreducible rapport, intertwinement [*Ineinander*], an "odd kinship" which is better portrayed in mythical thought and its art work, as in the case of Inuit masks (Scarso, 2007; Toadvine, 2007:18). Though he accepts the notion of "animal culture" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995:258), his attention turns to an ontological approach: that which is alive establishes within Being a melodic unity "that sings to itself", a reference intrinsic to perception and to "reciprocal expression" of animals and environments, aside from the subjective, intellectual and discursive condition proper to man: "There is no rupture between the planned animal, the animal who plans, and the animal without a plan" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 231).

This idea directly resonates in Tim Ingold's concept of *interagentivity*, a notion derived from his revision of what he calls the non-Western peoples' way of life, as well as of certain Western philosophers' ideas considered critical with the dominant trend of thought; among them, Merleau-Ponty's critique. More accurately we should say that the French philosopher is alive in Ingold's work. Though his presence is merely virtual –parallel to the re-vitalization Ingold has encouraged of figures such

1. A French philosopher (1908-1961), he opposed the dualistic theories on the separation of matter and thought, mechanism and intentionality, perception's passivity and active pure intellection. He emphasized the body's experiential and vital condition, referring not only to humans. Author of *La structure du comportement* (1942), *La phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), *Les aventures de la dialectique* (1945), *Humanisme et terreur* (1947), *Sens et non-sens* (1948), *Eloge de la philosophie* (1952), *Les Philosophes célèbres* (1956), *Les Sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie* (1958), *L'oeil et l'esprit* (1960), *Signes* (1960), *Le visible et l'invisible* (1964, posthumous), *La prose du monde* [1959-1961] (1969) and *La Nature* [1956-1960] (1995). In regard to Merleau-Ponty and his work see *Quiasmi International* <http://www.filosofia.unimi.it/~chiasmi> (accesso 01/11/2009), among other sources.

as Henri Bergson, Jacob von Uexküll, Alfred North Whitehead (influences in Merleau-Ponty's work) and James Gibson—, Ingold's thought reflects some of Merleau-Ponty's works: *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Eye and Mind* and "The Child's Relations with Others". This philosopher seems to be involved in Ingold's proposal of not dissociating organism and person, evolution and history. However, *La Nature* is not among Ingold's references².

In this study I will limit myself to present the subject of interanimality and interagency in Ingold's anthropology (only superficially), exploring the mentioned philosopher's presence in his work, while unfolding the meaning of "living": not referred only to Merleau-Ponty's thought but to the existence of those who are alive: animals among other animals, always and inevitably. Interanimality is a concept that denounces the illusion of human self-improvement beyond the animal condition. An illusion considering the animal as determined, mechanical, instinctive and limited to mere corporeality (ontogenetic constitution); or as an evolutionary past that has been left behind with the acquisition of tools and language (phylogenetic condition), looking upon humanity as purifying and distancing its own human spaces, without animals (social, cultural and historical constitution).

Our existence is an interanimal *continuum* that permeates us in several ways, making us agents among other agents (the latter belonging to "other species"); a *continuum* which is an essential part of us, even when looked upon as exclusively human. The notion of that which is "exclusively human", thus, loses its status as a clear and distinct concept, emerging as a chimera with little effective value. The illusion that separates the human species, defining it as a natural class no-longer-an-animal, is part of a distorted worldview, specific to "Western Culture" at its most blinded and dogmatic level—extremes which are prevalent in the mentioned culture. Ingold makes his point with the aid of ethnographical works³ and his interest in different philosophers—Merleau-Ponty, in this case.

I will firstly present the main ideas in Ingold's work which, in my opinion, reflect Merleau-Ponty's thought. In "Ontology of dwelling", this article's second section, I will provide a presentation of the nature/culture division in anthropology and the criticisms this notion has been subject

2. I reviewed that which was available until mid-2007; in this paper I didn't get to consider two recent books in which Ingold provides a chapter and is editor: *Lines: a Brief History* and *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*.

3. I underline his resort to ethnographies on hunter-gatherers in North America (Cree studied by Feit, Scott and Tanner; Objíwa researched by Hollowell, Callicot, Bird-David and Black), and the Amazon (Descola, Viveiros de Castro), among others.

to. In this debate Ingold has also been a controversial protagonist by proclaiming the mentioned division's uselessness. Later, I will approach one of the text's main ideas: the ontological equivalence between humans and other animals, an idea Ingold bases on hunting peoples' ethnographies –though these are only mentioned. We discuss the projection of this notion as an epistemic inversion, for, in Ingold's work, that which is seen as worldview or folklore (in the worst subjective sense of the word) is the traditional separation and spiritual distinction between humans and other animals. In the third section I intend to provide a quick comment on how Merleau-Ponty is referred to in Ingold's mentioned work (see note 2). For instance, in the practical and mundane notion of perception, the plasticity of “making sense in the world” and the critique of simplified analysis within the “anthropology of the senses”, which opposes hearing to sight as “channels” that predominate according to each “culture”.

I find this form of interpretation interesting for I have dealt with the relations between humans and other animals for some years now, especially those interactions where violence is involved and someone (not necessarily human) is chased, trapped and, eventually, killed. There are basically two ways of legitimizing and naturalizing violence: one is by *dehumanization* while the other is based on the “scale of needs” or “priority of interests”. Firstly, the dehumanization, animalization or naturalization of certain groups (Indians, blacks, jews, women and, more recently, “terrorists”) is a well-known political tool to exercise power over them, something that would be unacceptable without the use of such monicker; by viewing them as beasts we feel entitled to dominate and guard them. But we have a practical problem in regard to the opposite movement (the *anthropomorphization* of non-anthropomorphically designed animals), which is equally seen as an epistemological error and an ethical and political danger (Mitchell *et.al.*:1997). However, do we exactly know what anthropomorphism is in order to decide when the concept is unduly extrapolated to other animals? This is something I will later discuss by underlining limitations in Ingold's ontology, for it restores a compartmentalized view, establishing language, creativity/authorship and self-conscious projection as something still “exclusively human”⁴. The other accepted tool is the “scale of needs” or “priority of interests”: it is less controversial to abuse animals for “biological needs” (avoiding being devoured by

4. In my opinion it should be noted that Ingold 1) does not assume this “distinctiveness” from a “perfectionist” logic (Cavaliere 2009), that is, the belief that some beings have a moral status which others lack; and 2) he does not theoretically reject the possibility that in the future some animals may “develop their own symbolic and linguistic competences of their own –that is, if they have not done so already” (Ingold, 1988a: xix).

animals or contracting illnesses from them by consuming them) than due to “cultural needs” (entertainment, tradition); a well-known argument among animal rights activists. Also, *human* interests, even those considered most trivial or superfluous, go before the interests of other animals in keeping their lives and environment; this, of course, depending on the legal, social and economic taxonomies established by humans who act with or against those animals (Kim, 2007; Ramírez, 2002). Here an interesting interpretation emerges: that of “animal geographies”; an interpretation to be developed according to the politics and history of the diverse agents involved (Wolch and Emel, 1998; Johnston, 2008). Is it enough to state that, unlike other differences between humans, this one is “effectively natural” and, therefore, it legitimizes violent treatment and exploitation of other animals? Accepting, as I find it urging, that the ontological status of animals is truly the same (Ingold, 1988a: xxiv) –whether they are human or not–, political and ethical questions will arise in years to come. The debate shall be founded on ethnographic information which must give an account of what happens, how and why, no matter the place: in public squares, military occupied zones, native peoples’ hunting and fishing areas or tourist attractions, small ranches and large industrial breeding complexes, as well as those compounds where animal products are commercialized, where animals are fattened and slaughtered⁵.

I would like to contrast Escher’s image “Plane Filling II” (1957), used as the cover for *What is an Animal?* –book edited by Ingold (1988a)–, with the cover of philosopher Adela Cortina’s recent book, *The boundaries of the person. The Value of Animals, the Dignity of Humans* (2009). In Escher’s lithography the image saturated with figures of diverse animals in whose outlines other animals grow; recognizable animals, most of them, molluscs, birds, fishes, humans... a guitar and some other fantastic, impossible or monstrous animals. The jigsaw of images connects and relates each figure to the whole. Each movement and gesture resonates in

5. Some activists fighting for “animal rights” can’t see advance in their agenda when our ethnographical descriptions provide evidence that human-animal interactions in contexts of conventionally accepted violence (e.g., bullfighting and horse riding games) are not based on the notion that the other animal is a depersonalized automat, but an agent, a person without moral or legal responsibility regarding its own actions which is sought after precisely due to its unexpected and creative behavior during the game, from his/her own experience –non-human animal experience. This new ontological approach in anthropology seems to be insufficient in order to defend animals –so they say. The cruel machinery and lack of attention remain whether the one who is being tortured in the bullring is a non-human person. No one cares for the fact that the one on your table or in your dish once was a person. At the other end, some authors are worried about humans’ destiny and the defense of their rights, if the traditional human-animal hierarchy is questioned (Ramírez, 2004 and 2008).

others with polychrome intensity overflowing Escher's black and white tones. In Cortina's book, on the other hand, we find two columns. One of vertebrates' silhouettes (cow, horse, elephant, pig, dove, dog, cat and mandrill), motionless, lined up, separate, facing the right; the other column showing an adult human male, facing the viewer or against him –it is not clear–, in a stiff position. Between both columns there is a notable dotted line with the symbol of a pair of scissors on its lower left side; "cut here", it seems to convey. Escher's creation, published on Ingold's book cover, expresses interanimality and interagency. There is no chance of cutting space without mutilating any figure. The cut is neither central nor appropriate. Anthropology is here seen as anthrozoology and ecology. However, according to Cortina's worldview, dignity is placed on the stereotypic human (the only one to be considered a person) and value (price, estimate, use) is placed on the rest of animals. Between dignity and value there is the same metaphysical difference to be found between the soul (immortal) and the body (mortal). The first image challenges us to accurately describe how lives, deaths and movements are intertwined, without taking easy or comfortable solutions into account. Thus, reflecting anthropology's main task. The second orders things putting them in place, cleaning that which is blurred, facilitating analytical operations, the justifying of interests... and domains.

While tracking the traces of a philosopher's intuitions in an anthropologist's work –a task I decided to undergo as a tribute to the former–, I found myself questioning this separation between philosophy and anthropology as quiet arbitrary and comfortable only for those who'd rather remain idle. As a philosopher, Merleau-Ponty is a difficult case, for his work is filled with biologists, ethologists, anthropologists, philosophers "of science", novelists, painters, musicians... a man little inclined to focus exclusively on Husserl's phenomenological method or on areas associated with official philosophy, as such. Without a doubt, as an anthropologist, Ingold is another controversial subject. The fact that he deals with philosophical and aesthetic problems, while openly acknowledging it, seemed to me refreshing and encouraging, although two gestures often found in him I consider to be mistaken: to criticize Geertz⁶ and to accept

6. Ingold portrays Geertz as the bluntest version of the hermeneutic turn in anthropology, something I do not find properly grounded, if we read Geertz with the aim of tracking down ideas and not merely as a form of persecution (Ramírez, 2005). Cfr. Ingold, 2000a:374 with Geertz' text there mentioned "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man"; in my opinion, Ingold maintains the same principles as Geertz, that is, that a layered notion of human is flawed, conceiving humanity as made up of a hard and identical core (human's biological dimension) and other more diverse and superficial layers (cultures). The nuance Ingold emphasizes as a great difference in both anthropologists' approach

the “Western/non-Western” conceptual pair. In the latter case, Ingold re-enacts the same dual image, based on the same metaphysical foundation I have previously rejected. An apparently clear reference to something distinctive slips into the valuation and, there, it remains as long as the referred figures are in line and separated by a clear dotted line. But this is not the image that we generally find. According to Ingold’s hint, the Cree, Ojibwe, Achua... are non-Western. Are the Mexican Charros in the US, Western (Ramírez, 2002)? Are the Huichol (*Wixaritari*) organized in charreadas and jaripeos in Mexico, Western? In my opinion, we must abandon the traditional Western and non-Western categories, as long as they are not fixed in a framework explicitly explaining the object of reference. This framework is not to be found in Ingold’s mentioned work.

1. Tim Ingold. Re-thinking the body, mind, culture

Ingold defines himself as a “perpetual student of anthropology”, passionate about natural sciences and the ethical and political commitment they embody (2000a: x-xv). He chose to study anthropology (in Cambridge), a degree with potential to fill the void between art, the humanities and social sciences, in connection, as well, with the natural sciences. For four decades, Ingold has tried to mobilize anthropological knowledge along many disciplinary lines and, thus, has fought against several prevailing trends⁷.

One of these is the theoretical separation between evolution (vital, organic) and history (technical, cultural). Ingold’s ontology offers an alternative to this “Western” metaphysic or worldview. Ingold has questioned the representations which dissociate human beings’ organic condition and their proactive potential, imagination and intentionality (Ingold, 1986, 1999, 2000a and 2000b). He has opposed both constructivist interpretations postulating environmental perception as “constructing representations of the world inside their heads” (Ingold, 2000a: 2), and evolutionists who, omitting decades of critical literature while using an “antediluvian notions of culture”, portray human beings as information-receiving machines; “the accounts of the people themselves are packaged as just another ‘traditional worldview’, supposedly downloaded over the generations from one passively acquiescent head to another” (Ingold, 2000b:1-2). He rejects the paradigm that forces us to choose

seems to me out of proportion.

7. This is an effort that has aroused criticism against him; hostility that, in my opinion, reflects impatience and disciplinary prejudice. See, for example, Cartmill (1994).

between human or animal, between a culturally determined world and a given natural one (1990b: 112 and ss). In “An Anthropologist Looks at Biology” (1990a), Ingold shows how people grow to exist as intentionality and awareness centres within the sphere of social relations, which, in turn, are cultivated and transformed by their own actions. Skills grow differentially, they unfold, are cultivated, they are predetermined neither by codes (genetic or memetic) that the organisms or subjects themselves automatically follow, nor are they *ex nihilo* constructions, beyond or above the diverse force fields that actively contribute, according to their difference, to the mentioned dynamic display.

In April 1988 –Ingold says– he noticed that the body-mind, nature-culture dualism shouldn’t be approached in terms of substance complementarity (one biophysical, the other sociocultural) attached with psychological cement, but considering *the person to be an organism*, and not an addition pasted on top; throughout organic life’s *continuum* (and not only in the human sphere) persons/organisms exist and act as nodes in fields of dynamic relations and compositions, “then we have to think in a new way not only about the interdependence of organisms and their environments but also about their evolution” (Ingold, 2000a: 4).

From then on his efforts are framed in this agenda which revolutionizes forms of knowledge and practices, for it requires the combination of relational thought in anthropology with ecological approaches in psychology and applications of systems biology. This synthesis would be better aimed than the alternative “biosocial” or “biopsychocultural”, for it crucially looks upon human beings not as a singular creative development *locus* but as the continuously unfolding within the field of interactions among diverse agents –not all of them human. Therefore, he prefers to speak of *interagentivity* than of intersubjectivity (Ingold, 1992: 47). We should not infer that every agent, with practical conscience, is subjectively determined, thoughtful and intellectual, with discursive, narrative awareness, as we commonly believe adult humans to be.

Another prevailing trend that Ingold challenges is the double simplification of certain analytically identified entities. Within an interaction process a focus of attention is emphasized, which is limited, in turn, to a biasedly chosen function or determining feature. Thus, the organic is doubly simplified as DNA and the latter as a “genetic programme”; human condition is thought of as cognitivism (intellectualism) and this, in turn, as the “instructions and blueprints transmitted from one generation to the next”; the organism is seen as natural while the natural is considered as given; the non-human animal’s relationship with its environment is looked upon as passive, identified with instinct (mechanic, organic,

automatic response to certain stimuli); objectification and distancing are interpreted as mediated by vision (rather than hearing), while the latter is considered a privileged form of perception proper to Western scientism. We will return to this point later on.

Finally, in relation to this confrontation, Ingold rejects an anthropological trend that reifies cultural differences, making them into “explanation” devices for cultural differences (intrahuman and extrahuman). The realm common to humans and non-humans is thus severed in as many compartments as “cultures” (obviously, human only) that are analytically detected by the use of well-known ethnographical indicators: language, religion, knowledge, technologies... In opposition to this, and according to Ingold,

the world is not a determined state of affairs but a “going on”, which is constantly being furthered by agents within it. And these agents are not only human, but include other organisms as well. The world is not “there” for us or anyone else to represent or to fail to represent; the world is come into being through our activities [...] we cannot exclusively privilege us human beings with this world-producing effort –for the world is coming into being through the activities of *all* living agencies. At the root of the argument, then, is a question about our understanding of human uniqueness (Ingold, 1990b: 115).

Thus, according to this perspective, anthropology must give an account of an heterogeneous, multiple and dynamic intercorporeal composition, that only eventually and in a limited form includes discursive, projective actions... that is, the conversation which, according to Ingold, is exclusive and specific to humans, found only among humans (Ingold, 1988:94-97).

2. Ontology of dwelling

As Esteban Krotz has pointed out (1990: 8), since anthropology’s origins as a scientific discipline in the 19th century, the culture-nature relationship has been one of the discipline’s most discussed and recurring topics. It is notable to find the opposite poles within this interaction to be forever changing, not only from an interdisciplinary perspective but even from a given author’s viewpoint, depending on the concerned time period. For example, in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, seventeen years after its first edition, Claude Lévi-Strauss bravely recognized in the Preface that the criteria used to distinguish and oppose nature to culture was neither

empirically sufficiently founded nor well conceptualized philosophically:

As far as the contrast between nature and culture is concern, the present strata of knowledge and that of my own thought (the one, moreover, following upon the other) would seem in several respects to present a paradox. My proposal was to trace the line of demarcation between the two orders guide by the presence or absence of articulated speech [...] But on the other hand, the appearance of certain phenomena has made this line of demarcation, if not less real, then certainly more tenuous and tortuous than was imagined twenty years ago. Among insects, fish birds and mammals, complex processes of communication, which now and then bring true symbols into play, have been discovered. We also know that certain birds and mammals, notably chimpanzees in the wild state, can fashion and use tools [...]. The question then is just how far the contrast between nature and culture may be pushed (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:xxix)⁸

Despite Lévi-Strauss' concession, almost half a century ago, the mentioned opposition is well established and basically unquestioned in the case of most social and humanistic sciences. It is not the case with anthropology, which has frequently discussed this distinction's texture, function and implications in depth; even questioning the use of the "culture" concept in anthropology (Ramírez, 2005). Among other problems attached to the term, Western neo-colonialism stands out: "cultures" are always those of others contained in museums, seen as exotic, post/colonized, folkloric, indigenous.

8. Although, tricky, for after recognizing his mistake in taking the "current human" (Cromagnon) as the only cultural being, he blames the species:

"The question then is just how far the contrast between nature and culture may be pushed. Its simplicity would be illusory if it had been largely the work of the genus *Homo* (antiphrastically called *sapiens*), savagely devoted to eliminating doubtful forms believed to border on the animal; inspired as it presumably was some hundreds of thousands of years or more ago by the same obtuse and destructive spirit which today impels it to destroy other living forms, having annihilated so many human societies which had been wrongly relegated to the side of nature simply because they themselves did not repudiate it (*Naturvölken*); as if from the first it alone had claimed to personify culture as opposed to nature, and to remain now, except for those cases where it can totally bend it to its will, the sole embodiment of life as opposed to inanimate matter. By this hypothesis, the contrast of nature and culture would be neither a primeval fact, nor a concrete aspect of universal order. Rather it should be seen as an artificial creation of culture, a protective rampart thrown up around it because it only felt able to assert its existence and uniqueness by destroying all the links that lead back to its original association with the other manifestations of life" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: xxix-xxx).

Several anthropologists have written “against culture”, for a range of reasons. Lila Abu-Lughod has done so in order to favour the acknowledgement of human diversity (Abu-Lughod, 1991) against the exotization of people being researched for the sole reason of having cultures, languages and, therefore, “worlds”, supposedly very different from ours. Wikan, on the other hand, rejects the concept of culture for the sake of practicing Davidson’s “charity principle”; in accordance with the “wide naturalist theory” and the pragmatic theory of language that places emphasis on tacit communication beyond the meaning of spoken words, concepts, texts and discourses (Wikan, 1992:471 y 464-465).

At the far end of this position, Tim Ingold not only writes against Tylor’s and Lowie’s culture concepts (whether one idealizes culture as “the essential *curriculum* of Humankind” or the other identifies it with arbitrary actions), but in favour of the total flattening of the world’s landscape. According to him, we must reject this key concept (culture) in order to “imagine the world where people dwell in a continuous and unlimited landscape, endlessly varied in its features and contours yet without seams or brakes” (Ingold 1993:226 cited by Hannerz, 1993: 98 and Brumann, 1999: 13).

It is difficult for this idea not to echo Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the “smooth and striated”. The grooves that dominate space, cutting and elevating culture above nature, positioning humanity above animals, the metropolis above rusticity, can be revealed as a form of abstract action, enabling steps and recombination, smoothing space, while recognizing the coexistence of differentiated forces. Thus, the groove to distinguish culture from nature embodied in Lévi-Strauss’ “language/instrument”, is shaken, changes speed, is blurred as a flawed film, reacting to the perspectives of anthropologists, ethologists and psychologists: chimpanzees in Gombe, wolves, birds, *scenopoïetes*⁹ or nest builders that dedicate so much time and bodily efforts, sense of rhythm, to gradually improve their ability, just as, according to Collias and Collias, “it seem to us that what every young male weaver has to learn is what in subjective terminology one would call ‘judgement’” (cited by Ingold 1998b: 360). After shaking the groove it can be reinstalled as part of common sense: “for it to be considered culture it has to be done by people such as us” (Ingold 1997); anatomically modern humans, rejecting a great amount of contemporary humanities, which are different from ours and people coming from other species also affecting the world. “There is, in truth, no species-specific, essential form of humanity, no way of saying what an ‘anatomically mod-

9. A bird Deleuze and Guattari talk about in “Del ritornelo” that uses the leaves of trees as form of expression.

ern human' *is* apart from the manifold ways in which humans actually *become*" (Ingold, 2000: 391).

Ingold focuses his ethnographical arguments on hunter-gatherer groups and shepherds dwelling in different regions of the planet, especially in the Arctic circumpolar area. According to reports Ingold takes from Feit, Scott and Tanner, several Canadian Cree groups say they hunt the animal that is generously self-offered to them for food. Ingold encourages us to believe this, not in a condescending way, as if the hunter were deceiving himself (conveniently for himself) or trying to lie; he encourages us to attentively listen to the reality this relation reveals: the recognition of a link between man and the animal, the interest in the animal's behaviour and the debt of gratitude toward it. Ingold considers this form of knowledge, not as competing with biological science, but as an intuition, "sentient ecology" (he borrows the term from David Anderson, who researched the Taymyr in northern Siberia), pre-objective and pre-ethical. Poetics of dwelling (Ingold, 1998a: 24-27).

In the Ojibwe, according to reports by Hallowell, Callicot, Bird-David and Black, Ingold finds the same basic idea: there is a knowledge, or poetics of knowledge, that lead to the effective ontology, that which is not to be considered an alternative to scientific knowledge but a foundation improving the former (Ingold 2000a: 110).

In general, Ingold argues that hunter-gatherers do not interact with their environment as with an external world to be conceptually dominated or symbolically appropriated. They don't consider themselves to be conscious beings facing a hostile and mute world. According to Ingold, the way in which these groups exist cannot be considered as a representation of *their* worldview, *their* cultural tradition, *their* folklore. Ingold offers another option

What I wish to suggest is that we reverse this order of primacy, and follow the lead of hunter-gatherers in taking the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world. This ontology of dwelling, I contend, provides us with a better way of coming to grips with the nature of human existence than does the alternative, Western ontology whose point of departure is that of a mind detached from the world, and that has literally to formulate it – to build an intentional world in consciousness – prior to any attempt at engagement. The contrast, I repeat, is not between alternative views of the world; it is rather between two ways of apprehending it, only one of which (the Western) may be

characterised as the construction of a view, that is, as a process of mental representation. As for the other, apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it (Ingold, 1992:42).

Ingold is not using ethnography (the description of other forms of life) to relativize culturally differentiated representations in relation to humanity and animality or between culture and nature¹⁰. He is using the discipline to project the perception hunter-gatherers have of their own existence as net ontology, not the metaphysics of subjects and intersubjectivity that prevails in the “West”. I find this idea to be compatible with Merleau-Ponty’s position, expressed in *La Nature* (1956: 277n.a), where he appeals to mythical thought, in this case, expressed in the Inuit’s animal masks, as the best way to indicate the relationship between humanity and animality¹¹.

Even more, for hunter-gatherers’ consciousness is neither an addition on the cusp of organic life nor an exclusive privilege of the “human” species,

Now the ontological equivalence of humans and animals, as organism-persons and as fellow participants in a life process, carries a corollary of capital importance. It is that both can have points of view. In other words, for both the world exists as a meaningful place, constituted in relation to the purposes and capabilities of action of the

10. The next step, once the critique of ethnocentrism is assumed, Geertz, for example, proclaims when he says: “We [anthropologists] have been the first to insist on a number of things: that the world does not divide into the pious and the superstitious; that there are sculptures in jungles and paintings in deserts; that political order is possible without centralized power and principled justice without codified rules; that the norms of reason were not fixed in Greece, the evolution of morality not consummated in England. Most important, we were the first to insist that we see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and that they look back on ours through ones of their own.” (Geertz, 1986: 123-124). According to Ingold’s encouragement of criticism, we would continue by saying that “Westerners” (his term) cover their eyes with lenses that provide them with a view that makes them perceive *their* distance where there is none (with and facing the object) and *their* dignity. This reflects “Western” metaphysics, stating that there are three substances: physical-chemical/the inert, living/animals, people/spirit; every person has a dignity that non-people lack, non-humans are not to be considered persons under no circumstance. To cap it all, “Westerners” consider that thanks to *this* mediation (lenses) they see something. Hunter-gatherers use less flamboyant lenses and see what they can with their whole corporality, without the illusion of “distance” (Ingold, 1988 and 1994).

11 See also Scarso (2007) to compare the styles of thought of Merleau-Ponty and Lévi-Strauss on the subject of the animal and, at the same time, the intent to show here, in mythical thought, the point contact between both.

being in question. Western ontology, as we have seen, denies this, asserting that meaning does not lie in the relational contexts of the perceiver's involvement in the world, but is rather laid over the world by the mind (Ingold 1992: 51).

This is one of the most radical ontological formulations I have found, within or outside philosophy. He affirms the existential equivalence and doesn't immediately introduce "*but...*"¹², which would quiet the anxiety in the face of a possible indistinctness, the loss of the point where something which is exclusively human elevates itself above "mere" animality, even at the expense of not being present in every "anatomically modern human", nor always among those in which it manifests itself (reason... something). Instead of appeasing the restlessness induced by the thought of what positions us in a situation of privilege –in our mind–, Ingold digs deeper, rejecting the notion of meaning as something exclusively ours, for meaning is not something reserved only for those who have human mental and intellectual gifts. In the absence of God, which guarantees spiritual salvation and distinction from other animals, and with a concept of culture that has also lost its function as a source of salvation, this ontological equivalence may be seen as an unbearable idea to some.

Ingold does leave a crack for something that might serve as an "element of distinction". The ontological equivalence is present among sensitive, suffering and conscious organisms/persons/agents, but only human animals would have a unique tool: that of language, the "skill of skills" (1998b: 361), which is exceptional in conforming our thoughts, our *mind* and our communication with other humans. This implies a great many consequences: the possibility of acting innovatively, by following an abstract, imagined and projected plan. To execute an agenda *authored* by a planner, incarnated in the *narration* of an idea to be realized. Something that shouldn't be done by following a pre-established tradition, as even so-called humans commonly do (Ingold, 1988: 94-97), and much less to continue tradition by a mere act of external observation and imitation.

Overall, I share the distinction and believe this is the approach to be followed, finding a first example of this in Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), where he rejects the idea of language as a divine gift to which humans are entitled in order to express reason as a faculty they have been endowed with; a faculty (reason) looked upon as complete and formed. According to Herder, reason, whatever it be, is not pure. It has evolved *in* language and through humans' actions while squarely con-

12. As in Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others".

fronting and browsing the world (something essential to the anthropos, as Herder puts it in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Humanity*), as animals. Herder also emphasizes the fact that humans exist as creatures dwelling in a world inhabited by forces and animal presences, with which we establish much more complex interaction than that of predator and prey. The truth is humans learn to deal with new environments by coexisting with animals.

It is important to maintain this practical, carnal, relationship between thought and expression (“expressiveness”) so that one is not dissociated from the other, at the risk of –as Morgan showed in his description of beavers’ constructions (Ingold 1988b: 84-87)– considering them (other animals) not as brutes (not lacking reason or mind) but as mute (they only lack language). However, there exists a collateral risk in maintaining this “expressiveness” in a radical way: it can confuse the lack of *a form of language* with the lack of intelligence or dementia –mistake made by Herder as to deaf-mute people, who at the time did not have a “proper language” alternative to the heard/spoken form.

I may share Ingold’s view on the dance of the bees around nectar-secreting flowers (1988b: 92-93) as a non-dialogic interaction; the dance is not an intentional game of mental representations among thinking subjects (Ramírez, 2003). He is right when he says that they communicate without the use of words, lacking the intellectual constructions that these entail. However, I believe that back then (1988) he discussed “languages” taught to apes and other animals under laboratory conditions too swiftly: “the animal was merely emitting conditioned responses to covert stimuli of which even the investigator was unaware” (Ingold, 1988b: 91)¹³; he went through intra-species’ animal sociability and the ways of in-group communication too quickly (“they have nothing to say to one another”), notwithstanding the fact that these forms seem few compared to the complexity of human conversation (1988b: 91); he discussed the relations between other species and humans too superficially and, finally, he too quickly examined the subject of anthropological observation as an avenue to understand forms of communication between diverse species. Ingold established then what he considered to be a fundamental proposition: “*Conversation across boundaries of culture is absolutely different from communication across boundaries of species*” (Ingold, 1988b: 94). This proposition is limited to the creation of two distinct columns while drawing a dotted line between them. But we should aspire to more. We must ask anthropological questions by taking into account the differ-

13. Which he seems to revise when he writes the Introduction to his book (1988a).

ences, without annihilating them by establishing identity or the absolutization of differences.

In regard to this, it is important to check the articles published in journals such as *Animals and Society*, *Anthrozoös*, and *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*. Also Barbara Noske's work (1989), that of Donna Haraway (2008), as well as the patiently researched publications merging anthropology and primatology, which have exposed similar modes of "conversing" and innovating among animals in their environment. The latter have revealed among animals problems such as "betrayal of trust" or the frustration of foreseen expectations, so interesting in the realm of communicative interactions between different species, as happens in collective fishing with wild dolphins in Brazil, shepherding with dogs, cattle slicing or bullfighting on horseback. I believe Ingold, at the time, hastened to belittle any investigation on communication channels between different animals, because "...no amount of searching for alternative channels of communication, or attempts to inculcate human-like communicative modes in animals, will reveal thoughts that are not there" (1988b: 95). The question is not if they *think* and *talk* "like us", but how we (animals) agree on doing something, how we get to act collectively, knowing each member will carry out its part, *also* beyond species-related boundaries, and how, among different species, judgement intervenes in improving or jeopardising collective action. The easy way out, seeing "conditioned responses" in other animals' actions, is not today as clear and satisfactory as it was twenty years ago.

3. Merleau-Ponty in Ingold.

Critique of the anthropology of the senses

3.1 Living, sentient

The studies on Merleau-Ponty agree on emphasizing the turn he underwent in his last period, focusing on nature, its history and the different scientific disciplines that had been developed in the first half of the 20th century, carrying out interesting critiques regarding the latter. The literature dealing with subjects such as nature, ecology, corporality and body-language in Merleau-Ponty's work is now extensive¹⁴; more precisely, in

14. Naming only works available in English, Italian and Spanish, studies on Merleau-Ponty's influence on ecology and ontology are worth mentioning, starting with numbers 2 and 8 of *Chiasmi Internacional*, *Analecta Husserliana* (2007), articles in *Logos*, by Alicia Pochelú (1992, 1993, 1998), other contributions by Mauro Carbone (2000), María del Carmen López (2006), Renault Barbaras (2001, 2004), Buchanan (2008), works by Johnson

the field of animals and animality.

In reference to Portmann and Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Dewitte postulates the need to assume a “critical anthropomorphism”. That is, a reflexive position on the search for conditions of possibility regarding the knowledge of the living, and the life of the animal in particular. This would be done in order to rehabilitate a certain form of reference to human experience in its access to other forms of life, showing neither insensitive objectivism nor sentimentalism, while appealing to the aesthetic dimension in order to found a new alliance between humans and animals. We are dealing with a practical attitude in which the reunion with the animal arouses the decentralization of the human who, with the aid of imagination, accepts transference toward the other pole of perspective (Dewitte 2002: 256).

Glen Mazis (2000) considers interanimality to be part of Merleau-Ponty’s nature concept, along with landscape (travel) and the oneiric. The value given to the species category in order to advance towards a new ontology is not looked upon as the ontology of the isolated individual, but as a fabric of interspatiality, a circuit where humans may construct their identity with other bodies, whether animal bodies or things (Mazis 2000: 242).

Elizabeth Behnke (1999) describes her experience of reversibility between perception and intracorporality in an interspecific situation: a virtual fight among cats in her courtyard. Overcoming her fear, while implementing her skills to enforce peace, she physically (through intracorporality) “makes sense” with the bellicose felines and dissuades them from fighting¹⁵.

Ted Toadvine (2007) explores Merleau-Ponty’s works in search of the presence or absence of the animal subject, to show that the “strange kinship” we share is due to the ambiguous position held by animals in the author’s system. On the one hand, his allusion to animal life as a melodic unity expresses the former’s irreducible and original character; but, on the other, he holds a position of incommensurability that brings him closer to Scheler’s spiritualist position than to Bergson’s vitalism (2007: 17).

and Smith (1990), Evans and Lawlor (2000), Cataldi and Hamrick (2007), among others.
 15 Her work is particularly useful due to the fact that it deals with the inter-corporality-intra-species antithesis in agonistic games with livestock units (horse shows, public fiestas, bullfights, etc.): “make sense” not in order to pacify but to enrage the beast, for the core of these celebrations is the aesthetic of violence, its cultivation in genealogical lines of fierce “castes” and with experiences that encourage certain types of behavior or animal *performance* (Ramírez 2002).

In general, investigations on this subject in Merleau-Ponty's work point out the French thinker's conception of the living being as a constitutive reference, ontologically relevant, to perception and sense.

Also, in anthropology non-human animals have largely been dealt with as *substance* (nourishment and source of raw matter required for multiples processes carried throughout human existence) and as *symbol*: typically the totem or the emblem that serves to identify a human group in order to distinguish it from and relate it to others. These characterizations of the animal have been associated with materialist positions, explaining the relationship between men and animals in economic terms as well as in terms of protein supply, and with intellectualist positions, symbolical-structuralist theories focusing their explanation on the "election" of the totemic animal, not just because it is "good to eat", but because its species expresses habits and characteristics that make it "good to think" (Lévi-Strauss 1962; Shanklin 1985, Willis 1990). Apart from this "structural" opposition, which is at the heart of one of modernity's most relevant theoretical controversies, we can point out Molly H. Mullin (1999) and the title of her revisionist article: *Mirrors and Windows: Sociocultural Studies of Human-Animal Relationships*. Human-animal studies have mirrored our condition, our past, as well as windows toward other conceptual and intellectual landscapes.

But the treatment provided by Ingold, which echoes the thought of Merleau-Ponty, adjusts neither to the mentioned interpretations nor to any of these four metaphors (substance, symbol, mirror, window) when dealing with the effective and vital human-animal relationship. As we have seen, Ingold's perspective is founded on the rapport between humans and a living, sentient, active and passive world, which perceives, moves, acts and experiences existence.

3.2 See, hear and move

The bulk of texts in which Ingold resorts to Merleau-Ponty's ideas refer to perception, the bodily/existential dynamics and cultural difference. Almost all of these have been compiled in his book *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000). His earliest work referring directly to Merleau-Ponty was originally published in 1991: "Building, Dwelling, Living: How animals and people make themselves at home in the world". In the latter, largely based on von Uexküll's work, he contrasts what he calls the "dwelling perspective" with the "building perspective" and scrutinizes conventional ideas, as the alleged distinction between humans and other animals due to considering

the former as building their own world (and "...suspended in webs of significance man himself has spun") while animals are limited to occupying space. Ingold criticizes the "building perspective" which essentially postulates *first*, that the human being (exclusively) designs artefacts, builds his own environment, enforces order and *then* dwells in it, as Godelier held –following Marx (Ingold, 1991: 179). However, the "dwelling perspective" considers the organism-person immersion in its own habitat as an inescapable condition for existence; the starting point is the animal-in-his-environment and not the self-contained individual who intellectually projects a world and then inhabits it. "Building, then, is a process that is continually going on, for as long as people dwell in an environment. It does not begin here, with a pre-formed plan, and end there, with a finished artefact" (Ingold, 1991: 188).

In "Culture, perception and cognition" (1996a) Ingold shows how important it is for anthropology to approach the question on cultural difference from cognitive science, ecological psychology and phenomenology. He considers the phenomenological approach to contribute notably to the adequate comprehension of the problem and believes anthropologists who start reading Merleau-Ponty (Michael Jackson, Thomas Csordas), though late, are on the right track toward a paradigm alien to Cartesian dualities (body and mind, object and subject). Despite the obstacles hindering the development of this phenomenological anthropology¹⁶, Ingold considers the separation between anthropology, psychology and ecology to be completely unjustified.

There are other scanty references to the *Phenomenology of Perception* in other chapters of Ingold's book. I will focus on one chapter that, as an exception, seems to be truly written for this book¹⁷. It is titled "Stop, look and listen! Vision, hearing and human movement" (Ingold, 2000c). Here Ingold seriously questions the anthropology of the senses, a line of investigation derived from MacLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), which suggests that the invention of the printing press started a new era,

16. He names three obstacles: A problematic status remains regarding biology and even those who claim to fight the body/mind distinction from the embodiment paradigm reinforce the paradigm by repositioning the body and placing it, as a subject, next to culture. Ingold says: a final step must be taken, to "recognize that the body *is* the human organism, and that the process of incorporation is one and the same in the development of the organism in its environment" (Ingold 1996b: 170). The second obstacle: we will advance very little if we emphasize incorporation at the expense of "enmindment". The third and last: the phenomenological approach, if it is enriching to consider human experience from a close perspective, it shouldn't disregard cognitive science's efforts (e.g. artificial intelligence).

17. This is a detail that is not discussed in Tomás Sánchez-Criado's (extensive and accurate) review of Ingold's book.

characterized by an absolute hegemony of vision; a sense that reifies, objectifies, is analytic and atomizing, applies distance and a logical sequence to every object which might fall into its range. The ethnographies that have been elaborated in this direction corroborate the question from which they emerged: there are cultures where vision dominates (and they are portrayed as such and such) and cultures where hearing prevails (depicted in such and such way). In favour of this duality of cultural styles we find many examples among philosophers and intellectuals in history, as well as ethnographic evidence, that examines everyday speech to verify if one says “I see” or “I hear” when referring to the act of understanding. Thus, two explanatory facts are brought to light: one, a long Western tradition considered as “vision-centred” and two, the relevance of hearing among non-Western societies. While vision represents the external world of existence, hearing represents the participative socialization within an ever-changing world.

Ingold criticizes this form of anthropology by showing that the radical contrast between sight and hearing is based on the anthropologist’s intellectual tradition supposedly “verifying it”, among informants. He also compares the ethnographies provided by MacLuhan’s associates with others which provide experiences different from perception. He resorts to autobiographies by people who became blind or deaf, not in order to carry out speech analysis but to comprehend the sense itself, if the loss of a “channel of perception” implies a limitation to one of the two forms¹⁸. He also discusses Descartes’ optics, the meaning of light (*lumen* and *lux*) and reviews three 20th century thinkers who sought for alternatives to the “metaphysics of vision”: Hans Jonas, James Gibson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

These thinkers make up the speculation-participation-form triad of being, that Ingold develops in the following way: according to Jones, “vision was indeed the superior sense, due not to its identification with reason, but to its peculiar phenomenal properties. The second, James Gibson [...] argued that perception is an activity not of the mind, upon

18. He presents the texts of David Wright (who became deaf at seven years of age) and John Hull, blind, to show that these individuals, just as the rest of people/organisms, perceive their environment with their body as a whole. Thus, there exists the possibility to hear by seeing and to see by hearing. Wright describes his perception of sonic rhythm as a bird in flight: “each species creating a different ‘eye-music’, from the nonchalant melancholy of seagulls to the staccato flitting of birds.” (Ingold, 2000c: 268). With Hull, Ingold recovers the experience in which a blind person can sense the outlines surrounding him: with rain. “Falling rain creates continuity of acoustic experience...Rain has a way of bringing out the contours of everything; it throws a coloured blanket over previously invisible things... This is an experience of great beauty” (Ingold, 2000c: 271).

the deliverances of sense, but of the whole organism in its environmental setting” (Ingold, 2000c: 258). The third,

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, has perhaps gone further than any other recent thinker in recognising that vision is not just a matter of seeing things but is crucially an experience of light [...] Like Gibson, Merleau-Ponty stressed that while there cannot be vision without movement, this movement must also be visually guided [...] But whereas Gibson asked how it is possible for the perceiver to see objects in the environment, Merleau-Ponty went one step further back. For how could there be an environment full of objects, he asked, except for a being that is already immersed in the lifeworld, in ‘the soil of the sensible’” (Ingold, 2000c: 258-263).

In further pages Ingold continues in the same vein, recovering Merleau-Ponty’s perspective, situating the viewer as perceiver immersed in a holistic manner within the course of existence and as dwelling in a visible world. He concludes this section by summarizing his itinerary, from a notion of vision as a form of *speculation* (Jonas), to *participation* (Gibson) and, finally, of vision as a mode of *being* (Merleau-Ponty). The mistake made by the anthropology of the senses, as it is currently presented, deals with the naturalization of properties of those channels (vision and hearing) by comparing them and then attributing such properties to the “cultures” themselves.

On the other hand, in this situation a double simplification takes place. We reduce existence to a “sense” (vision) and its supposed attributes, and, thus, we characterize it as a cultural type of being: “[It is] unreasonable to blame vision for the ills of modernity [...] I believe that the responsibility for reducing the world to a realm of manipulable objects lies not with the hegemony of vision but with a ‘certain narrow conception of thought’” (Ingold, 2000c: 287).

Conclusions

Tim Ingold is one of the contemporary and working anthropologists who recovers Merleau-Ponty’s work in order to provide a theoretical-methodological agenda of great importance for anthropology: to nurture a new ontology that may serve to reinstall the intercorporality / interagentivity / interspatiality dynamism as an achievement reached with the use of various scientific and philosophical disciplines, while paying special attention to ethnographical knowledge. This achievement reveals a need

to question (while keeping an eye on) how the different departments of knowledge, which analytically fix or identify cultures, senses or biological species, are established.

In my opinion, for ontology to be viable it must be in composition with ecological anthrozoology and with the “poetics of dwelling” we hear from different agents (some of them human), in different contexts. Ontology as a revelation of existence from an isolated subjectivity elevated to a pure and universal form is, in my view, a dull metaphysical delusion.

However, there are pending questions to be retaken further down the road: Does the continuity between interanimality / interagentivity involving humans and other animal species have any ethical and political consequences? Until now, when someone merely questioned the roots of power and hierarchy there seemed to be a metaphysical justification for the instrumentalization of the body, strength, life and death of other animals. That is, knowing that they “are only animals” and are not recognized as “relatives” (not even as “estranged relatives”); they are nothing but raw material within production processes led by the interests of some humans who have a right to own their meat, their life and death...if this metaphysical justification of property were questioned and revealed as a particular worldview, which can and must be overcome as well as replaced by other more adequate interpretations in accordance with the latest discoveries in ethology, psychology, anthropology... Would we be ready to carry out this practical dialogue with the sciences, as well as with our societies’ life forms? Which non-assumed tasks should our societies take care of?

Our only legitimate claim is to converse, in a discontinuous way, with other agents speaking other languages, or speaking none at all, but who have ways of making themselves understood. In order to do this it is indispensable for anthropological research to widen its perspective beyond the biological species and to question certain values currently looked upon as unquestionable.

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