

# “The non-essentialist conception of humans and animals among the Pano (Peruvian Amazon): Towards a new model of Amazonian animism”



## Martin Fortier Visiting Student Researcher

Influential comparative models (e.g., Descola 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2014) hold that Amazonian indigenous thinking can be best described as involving some pluralism about physical properties (multinaturalism) and some monism about mental properties (monoculturalism). In this paper, I suggest that this account of Amazonian thinking misrepresents what animism and perspectivism are all about. What matters is not whether physical and mental properties are distributed in a pluralist or monist manner, but rather whether this distribution—whatever it might be—is done in a dynamic and malleable or static and fixed manner. I thereby propose that Amazonian thinking is best characterized as being non-essentialist whereas Euro-American thinking appears to be largely essentialist (the definition of essentialism used here draws upon classic work in cognitive and developmental psychology). I will first examine some of the main inaccuracies and drawbacks of Descola’s and Viveiros de Castro’s models of Amazonian animism. I will next review several ethnographic studies supporting the claim that Amazonian thinking is non-essentialist. Finally, I will present my own data, collected among the Shipibo and the Huni Kuin of the Peruvian Amazon. It will be shown that these data corroborate the proposed non-essentialist model of Amazonian thinking but also call for some interesting qualifications.

Martin Fortier is a doctoral student at Institut Jean Nicod (EHESS, ENS, Paris), a visiting student researcher in Stanford’s Anthropology Department, and coordinator of the transdisciplinary research group ALIUS.

**MONDAY**

**April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 12:30 - 1:20pm**

**Building 50, 51A**



Department of Anthropology

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