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Beyond nature and culture?

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I. CULTURE AND CREATIVITY IN THE MODERN WEST

BEYOND NATURE AND CULTURE?

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In this paper, we will analyze how anthropological thinking, in the last twenty years, has put the conceptual categories of Culture and Nature into radical questioning. Nature was “denaturalized” and deemed as a social construction that was specific to the history of Western world. But to avoid the alternative between nature and culture one should develop a “non-dualist” approach and, in this sense, we will then consider Tim Ingold’s works. According to the British anthropologist, the nature and culture divide is usually the outcome of an assumption recurrent in anthropology, that according to which our cultural frames determine our perception of outside world. For Ingold, phenomenological thinking reversed the ontological priorities of Western rationalism.

Keywords: constructionism, culture, Ingold, nature, phenomenology.

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Introduction

The binary opposition between nature and culture has been the object of strong criticism and even rejection in recent theory in human sciences. Revisions and reconsiderations are of course part and parcel of all scientific research, but the moment in which the humanities put into question their core assumptions is particularly significant and philosophically productive. In fact, almost all elaborations of human sciences can be seen as an interminable effort in establishing the border that separates, and at the same time connects, the human world and the environment. In this paper, I will consider some aspects of the debate over the nature / culture binary that has taken place in social and cultural anthropology, with some references to environmental studies and feminist theory.

In very broad terms, anthropological theories can be grouped around two opposite polarities, according to their account of the relationships between nature and culture