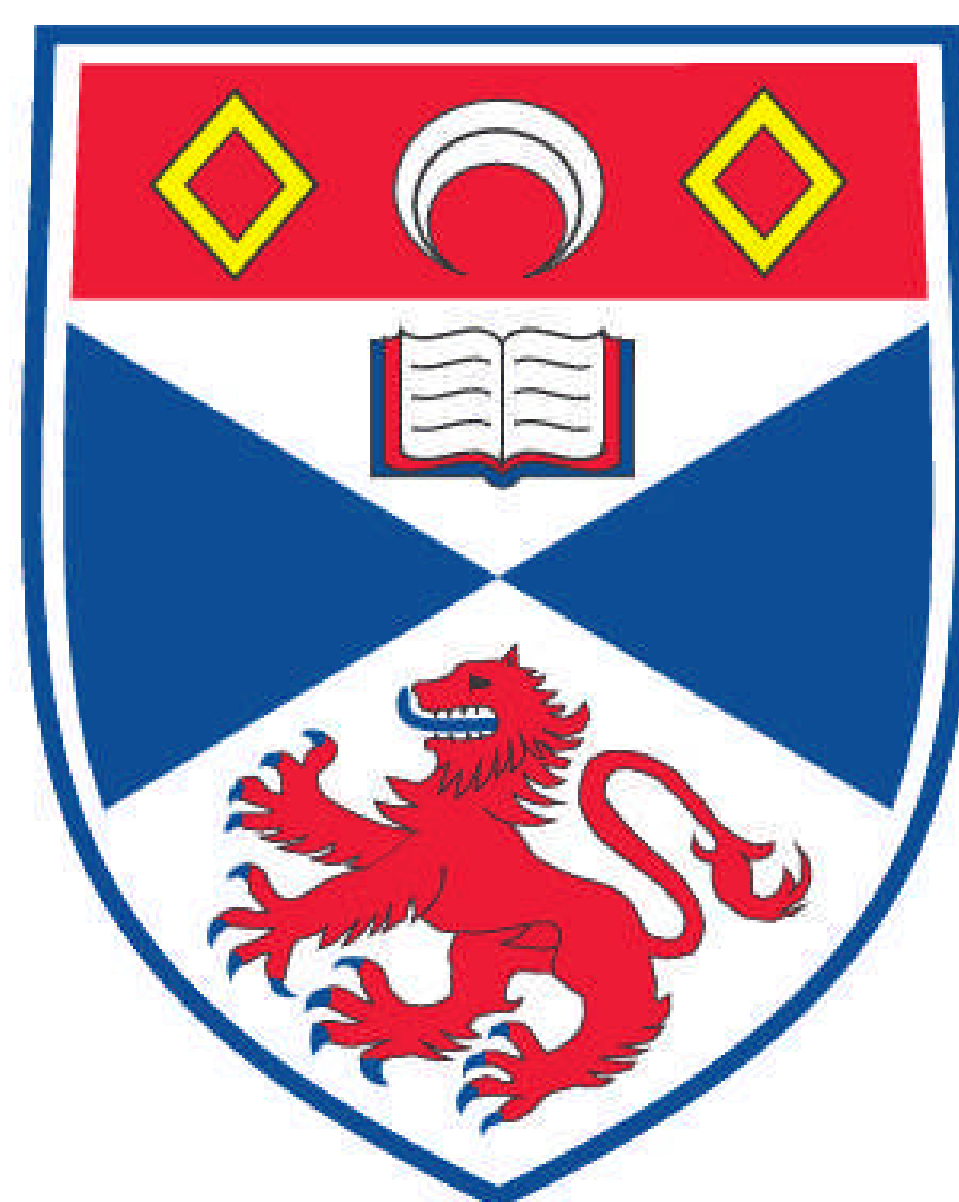


**CASHINAHUA COSMOVISION :
A PERSPECTIVAL APPROACH TO IDENTITY AND ALTERITY**

ELSJE MARIA LAGROU

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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Cashinahua Cosmvision

a perspectival approach to identity and
alterity

Elsje Maria Lagrou

Ph.D.

University of St. Andrews

April 1998



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ABSTRACT

Paths, Doubles and Bodies,

a perspectival approach to identity and alterity among the Cashinahua

This thesis explores the interface of social and cosmogonic thought in an indigenous society of the Southwestern Brazilian Amazon. The first part sets out the Cashinahua ontological framework, describes key concepts and places the Cashinahua in the broader context of an Amerindian worldview where Perspectivism and a special philosophical interest in the questions of Alterity and Identity are central issues. These questions are dealt with by means of a complex dualistic symbolism that pervades the fields of ethnicity, gender, social life and ritual. The second part of the thesis is divided into two chapters (chapter III and IV). Chapter three sets out the mythological framework in which the key concepts previously described gain a narrative form, while chapter IV describes the *Nixpu pima* initiation ritual of girls and boys and shows how this ritual represents an important moment of synthesis and actualisation of the Cashinahua worldview. The initiation ritual illustrates how the Cashinahua basic ontological distinctions between the embodied and rooted self as opposed to free-floating images and spirits are expressed in a graphic way and guide ritual action. Throughout the thesis references are also made to the intimate association and mutual illumination between, on the one hand, the Cashinahua worldview, social life and ontology, and, on the other, eschatology and indigenous conceptions of death.

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Introduction

This work provides a description of the cosmovision of the Cashinahua, a Panoan-speaking group living in the Brazilian Western Amazon region (State of Acre). The analysis is set in the context of Amerindian perspectivism: humans are animals' animals, the Self is another's Other, and the predator-prey, seducer-seduced, or eater-eaten relations are transitive and interchangeable. In this context a dynamic dualism is analysed where alterity is produced from sameness and sameness from alterity, where each side of an opposed pair (moiety *dua*/moiety *inu*, Boa-water/Inka-fire) partakes in its opposite, and form lies in the bounded and relatively stable intersection/mixing of complementary opposites (bone/skin, body/spirit, male/female, kin/affine, etc.). In such a world, the body, identity, and the problem of otherness are not issues of category or classification but relational and philosophical issues.

The problem of sameness and difference lies also in the dynamic, temporal relation between 'fixed' and 'unfixed' form. Being is a process of becoming and human existence depends on controlling the frontiers between phenomena and states of being to produce a just balance between fixity and fluidity, stability and transformation. The fluid powers, fertility, and opposed qualities of 'superhuman' agents must be controlled and fixed to produce human beings whose life evolves at a measured pace. But people can only tap these powers and produce creative mixing by making frontiers permeable. Too much fixity is sterile stasis, too little is an untimely death. To be human is to engage in an endless cycle of exchange of vital essences predicated on difference and played out on earth, half way between the water world as beginning and the sky as becoming; the cost is ageing and death. The gods achieve the epitome of fixedness in their circular dance of eternity, but prey on human souls and are stingy stranger enemies who must be coerced to share their powers through war and theft.

Humans must work hard lest the frontiers between beings and phenomena in the world be constantly effaced. At the same time, however, they play with different

means of mimesis and transformation; for, since the world works by a mingling of difference, separation would spell the end of all movement and life. Thus Cashinahua ritual practice has an obsession with the fixing of forms, with controlling the fluidity and fertility of superhuman powers and making human bodies heavy, fixed and only slowly evolving; at the same time, it is in ritual that one becomes the most aware, via cosmic space, of all the possible other worlds and bodies to be lived, and it is in ritual that switching (between genders, for example) most obviously takes place.

Female techniques of artistic design and of cooking, similarly, are means of fixing; healthy human bodies have designs applied to them to delineate and order them (just like the walls of houses or the framing contexts of knowledge, or the circumscribing processes of interpersonal relations on selves), while commensality makes for bodies in communion with one another. The Cashinahua finally lose the battle with fixity, as human bodies continue an eternal cycle of exchange of matter, of vital essence, with the 'water world', living in this way all the possible states of being.

Cashinahua ideas about identity and alterity, embodied selfhood and sociality are analysed from three angles: conceptual, mythical and ritual. The first angle of analysis is represented by the first part of the thesis. In two chapters, I undertake a broad sketch of Cashinahua cognition and perception. The first chapter approaches the problem of sameness and difference in Cashinahua dualistic thought from the point of view of Perspectivism. The second chapter is dedicated to the key concepts that orient the Cashinahua conceptual framework. Since the meaning of each pair or triad of interconnected and polysemic key concepts can only be unfolded through the presentation of extensive ethnographic material, this second chapter of the first part has become more substantial and dense than had originally been planned.

The first pair of key concepts presented is that of *yuxin* (vital force, soul, spirit) and its relation to *yuxibu* (powerful being). *Yuxin* and *yuxibu* are the most difficult of all Cashinahua key concepts to address properly. This is due to the all-embracing character of the concept of *yuxin* and to the extreme closeness of its meaning and use to the related concept of *yuxibu*. *Yuxin* is that which gives form to matter, and can be perceived as image, movement and energy. Every phenomenon in the world has its *yuxin* side. Yet, not all beings can be called *yuxin*. For a being to be a *yuxin*, its

relationship to the fixedness of a bodily form has to be free enough to enable it to abandon that body without losing its power of intentional agency. A *yuxibu* differs from a *yuxin* only in the degree of its power. A *yuxibu* is an otherworldly being with great powers of transformation. In this exposition, the complex sphere of “yuxinity” has been subdivided into several topics, each of which deals with a specific aspect of the manifestation of this fluid and most central category of Cashinahua thought.

The next pair of key concepts again takes *yuxin* as one of its relational terms. Here *yuxin* (human soul) is examined in its relation to the human body, *yuda*. The concept of the body is the second most pervading and central category of Cashinahua thought. The term *yuda* can refer to the individual body of a person, as well as to a community of persons who live together. When a community is called ‘our body’, some important conceptions of the body, as well as of community life are expressed. In relation to the community, the term ‘our body’ expresses the idea of shared substance. People who live together, sharing food, bodily fluids and other physical and psychic influences, are said to become of a kind. Since they have been exposed to the same influences, their bodies start to resemble each other. A person’s body is understood to be the product of the active intervention of close relatives who literally sculpt and model the body of their kin.

This brings us to the second important conception expressed by the use of a word for body that can refer to the individual as well as to a community. That is the fact that the identity of an individual is conceived of as constituted by a person’s relatedness to other beings. The self cannot be thought of outside its relation to others and to the world around. The embodied self is a person because it has a body through which it relates to others. It is also through its body that others have brought a person into existence. Without this fusion into a thinking body, that which acts and thinks within and through the body would not exist or would be something else. Thus, the dissolution of the body gives rise to the birth of several *yuxin* beings, who are defined by their lack of a fixed bodily form, interpersonal relatedness and a fixed abode.

The third section on key concepts addresses Cashinahua symbolic dualism. The Cashinahua cosmivision is marked by an all-pervading dualism. This dualism, however, serves less to classify phenomena in the surrounding world into separate

categories, than to conceptualise the constant interdependence of complementary pairs that are, in fact, more characterised by what they share than by what separates and distinguishes them. Thus, all phenomena in the world are the result of the joining of opposed principles and no one being or object can be thought of as existing in a 'pure', unmixed state. The stress on the necessity of mixing pervades all spheres of Cashinahua activity, from ideas of conception to the daily ritual of food consumption, where a meal is only considered to be proper if meat is mixed with vegetables.

The two primal forces that create the world and the cosmos through their constant mixing are represented by, respectively, the Master of the water world, called *Yube*, and the Master of the sky world, called *Inka*. The manifestations of the Master of the water principle are the moon and the cosmic snake, while the manifestation of the master of the Sky, who owns the principle of light, is basically one, the *Inka*, Cannibal God of death. Each of the Cashinahua moieties is associated with one of these two cosmogonical principles. The moiety of brilliance (*dua*) is associated with *Yube*, Master of the water world, while the moiety of the jaguar (*inu*) is associated to the *Inka*, Master of the sky world. The unfolding of this symbolic dualism in its relation with the moieties and with ritual practice is the content of this third section on the key concepts that orient the Cashinahua conceptual framework.

The fourth pair of concepts presented is that of *nawa*, which can be roughly translated as stranger, and *huni*, which means human being. This contrasting pair of terms expresses clearly the complexity of Cashinahua dualistic thought. Cashinahua discourse on identity not only includes the ever latent possibility of self becoming other, but also the possibility of other becoming identical to self. The term for other is not used to unequivocally define self as different from other, but to always suggest the possibility of an overlapping. The Cashinahua notion of self is essentially processual. The problem posited by this philosophical approach to identity and alterity is not how to delineate clear boundaries between self and other, or between human and enemy, but how to conceive of difference and sameness as an artificial division to be overcome through conceptual ambiguity and eschatological speculation. The problem of otherness for the Cashinahua and for the Panoan people in general is therefore not classificational but relational.

The use of the terms for stranger (*nawa*) and human being (*huni*) illustrate this point well. Most neighbouring Pano groups call themselves by a variant in their language of the Cashinahua term for 'true human being' (*huni kuin*), thus subtracting from this ethnonym any differentiating quality. A real human being is someone who, from the point of view of the speaker, lives in a recognisably human and social way. Those conceived of as others are called strangers or enemies, *nawa*. Yet, *nawa* also means people of a certain kind, a term needed to differentiate and name one's neighbours. Some groups even go as far as to call their own name-giving sections, groups inside one's own community, by the name *nawa*, people, preceded by a qualifier.

To define the sphere of self, one does not need the category of other. Since other can also come to signify the sphere of self, the sphere of self itself has other means to distinguish how much a certain situation, person or object approaches the pole of the real self. The terms used to thus qualify beings and situations are *kuin* (true self), *kuinman* (not truly self), *kayabi* (not other) and *bemakia* (totally other). Using these terms one can specify whether or not an object or a person can be said to be close to the pole of self without coinciding with it, and this idea can be expressed without having to recur to the category of the other¹.

The last key concepts to be explained in their relation to each other are design (*kene*), image (*dami*), and, again, spirit (*yuxin*). These terms are examined in their relation to each other, as well as in their relation to the human body. The concepts are of crucial importance to close the conceptual framework, since they allow us to delineate more clearly the specificity of Cashinahua phenomenology. All things and beings perceived are phenomena for the Cashinahua. This means that all perceptions have some degree of existence. There are no illusions, only different levels of being on the basis of which different values are attributed to the things and beings perceived. The most important distinction made between levels of existence is that of fixed *versus*

¹ The use of these qualifying terms in Cashinahua classificational systems has been the principle object of study of Kensinger (1975), who identified the system, and Deshayes and Keifenheim, who used and further specified use of these terms in their thesis (1982) and posterior

unfixed form, a distinction that corresponds to the difference between embodied and disembodied existence.

In this framework, the role of the patterned abstract design system (*kene*) is not to express the image of a being through resemblance of form, but to fix and structure the fluidity of forms and images that inhabit the disembodied world of *yuxin*. The design pattern is that which adheres to bodies and fixes their form. The execution of this art is an exclusive female privilege. The figurative image, or three-dimensional form called *dami*, on the other hand has a different relation with the object to which it refers. Its relation is that of becoming, of transformation and of masking. *Dami* signifies an imperfect replica of a being or image, a transformation of it, or a production in the process of being made, not yet finished.

If *dami* is something on its way to becoming and *yuxin* is the image itself, like an image in a mirror, *kene*, the stylised design system, is the structuring inscription of form that makes perception possible. The structured geometrical design can therefore be understood to be an important guide for Cashinahua perception and cognition, a guide that makes the transition from the fluctuating world of *yuxin* images to the fixed world of bodies possible. In this way we are guided, by means of a delicate distinction in terms between three different words for 'image', to important conclusions related to Cashinahua phenomenology.

The second part of the thesis, 'Expression and Agency', represents the second and third angles through which Cashinahua ideas about identity and alterity, embodied selfhood and sociality have been approached. The chapter on myth has been restricted to myths dealing with themes of ontogenesis: the origin of the world, of time, of death and of humanity. Each of these myths has its counterpart in other myths related to the basic distinctions dealt with in the myth of origin. Thus the theme of the ordering principle of day and night, introduced by the primordial beings, is related to myths dealing with a sudden collapse of this ordering principle. The unexpected darkening of the day before a traveller's eyes puts the traveller into contact with the co-lateral realms of imaterial beings who act in the darkness. In this way we can explore the way in

which organising principles of Cashinahua cosmovision are expressed in the narrative form of mythic reflection, and how these myths are relived and reinterpreted.

Special attention is given to the myth of the re-creation of humanity after the great deluge. This myth is important for its correspondences with the initiation ritual. The myth is the story of the journey of the primordial mother *Nete* and her four children, the first true human beings (*huni kuin*). On their journey, the primordial mother teaches her children the names of all cultivated plants. At the end of the journey, they observe the teeth-blackening *Nixpu pima* ritual, performed by *Nete's* brother. The blackening of the teeth is the crucial event in the sequence of interventions on the initiates' bodies. The whole sequence of the initiation ritual is understood to be a preparation for the final blackening of the children's teeth, a sequence that parallels at several points the progression of the myth of origin of humankind.

The fourth chapter describes the initiation ritual *Nixpupima*. The ritual is a synthetic statement about the principle ideas that structure the Cashinahua worldview. During the ritual transformation of the initiate's identity, every single change one wants to produce in the child's status or on its mind, is produced through a direct as well as metaphorical intervention on the child's body.

This ritual procedure reveals a basic conviction of Cashinahua thought which is that a person or true human being can only be conceived and produced in the form of an embodied self. It is the body that thinks².

*

*

*

The Cashinahua are a Pano speaking group of about 2500 to 3000 people who inhabit a region situated in Western Amazonia, on both sides of the frontier between Eastern Peru and the Northwestern state of Acre in Brazil. Cashinahua villages in Peru are located on the Purus and Curanja rivers, while Cashinahua villages in the state of

² The first author to call attention to this strongly embodied ideology of knowledge among the Cashinahua was Kensinger (1995). This idea has later been taken up by McCallum (1996a).

Acre are spread along various important rivers and their affluents (such as the Tarauacá, Jordão, Bréu, Murú, Envira, Humaitá, and Purus).

I conducted fieldwork in three Cashinahua villages, Cana Recreio, Moema and Nova Aliança, located on the Purus river close to the Peruvian border. The population of these villages was basically composed of Cashinahua from the Peruvian side of the border, who, in the early seventies, descended the Purus river to live in the newly demarcated indigenous reserve (*Área indígena do Alto Purus*) on the Brazilian side of the border. The Brazilian and Peruvian Cashinahua had been separated for a period of fifty years. This separation occurred in the beginning of this century, when one group that had been concentrated on the Envira river to extract rubber, moved to the headwaters of the Purus river after a rebellion against their rubber boss (McCallum, 1989a: 57-58; Aquino, 1977). The Peruvian Cashinahua intermarried with the Brazilian ones, although differences in life style still survive today.

The Brazilian Cashinahua inhabiting the reserve, migrated from the Envira river, where they worked as rubber tappers. Most of the Cashinahua from the Envira established themselves in the village of Fronteira and in the small surrounding nucleus. During the two decades following the first settlement of the Cashinahua on the Purus, more Cashinahua arrived from Peru, as well as from the Envira and Jordão rivers.

The Cashinahua share this reserve with their traditional neighbours, the Culina, for whom the reserve was originally created, as well as with a small group of Yaminahua, recently arrived from other indigenous reserves..

I lived among the Cashinahua for period of a year and a half, spread over four visits. The first five months of fieldwork (March 1989-August 1989) were carried out in the villages of Cana Recreio and Moema, and resulted in a master's thesis defended at the University of Santa Catarina in Brazil (1991). The second period of fieldwork lasted three months (April 1991-July 1991). The third stage of my research lasted four months (October 1994-February 1995). It was during this visit that I witnessed the initiation ritual, *Nixpupima*. After three months of transcription and elaboration of the material collected during the initiation ritual, I returned to the field for another period of four months (May 1995-September 1995). Of these last four months of fieldwork, two months were spent in the villages of Moema and Nova Aliança, while the last two

months were spent in the city of Rio Branco, capital of the state of Acre, when I accompanied Augusto (song leader, with whom I was working on the transcriptions of the ritual songs) when he suffered a stroke that put his life in danger. Fortunately he survived and recovered well. While assisting Augusto and his close relatives who accompanied him to the city, I continued to work on the translation and interpretation of the data I had collected in the field.

* * *

The Cashinahua are the best known group among the Panoans and about them exists abundant historical and ethnological documentation³. The first writings on the Cashinahua appear early in this century with the French priest Tastevin (1919, 1920, 1925a, 1925b, 1925c, 1926; Rivet & Tastevin, 1921) who describes the Cashinahua tribes he encounters on his journeys on the rivers of the Juruá-Purus basin, along with other Nahua groups living in the same area. From the first two decades of this century appears a voluminous and extremely valuable collection of Cashinahua myths, supplied with a literal transcription and translation of the myths by the Brazilian historian Capistrano de Abreu.

Kenneth Kensinger (see bibliography) was the first anthropologist to live with the Cashinahua, in Peru. Kensinger produced a vast collection of short papers on almost all topics of Cashinahua life and society. The generation of anthropologists that succeeded Kensinger continued to elaborate on questions dealt with in his early works.

Also in Peru, research on the Cashinahua was carried out by Keifenheim and Deshayes (1982, 1986, 1990, 1992, 1994). Both authors give priority to themes related to identity and alterity as well as to classificatory systems. Marcel D'Ans (1983) studied the nomination system and classification of colours (D'Ans and Cortez, 1973)

³ Gonçalves (1991) edited an annotated bibliography of historical and ethnographic sources about Acre. About the linguistic group of Panoans, and including all the areas where they can be encountered, an annotated bibliography of linguistic and anthropological research was edited by Erikson, Illius, Kensinger and Aguiar (1994). This bibliography continues being completed periodically with news works.

and elaborated a compendium on mythology (1978).

In Brazil, the Cashinahua have been studied by Aquino (1977), Iglesias (1993) and Lindenberg Monte (1996) on the Jordão river. These studies centred around themes related to interethnic relations and education.

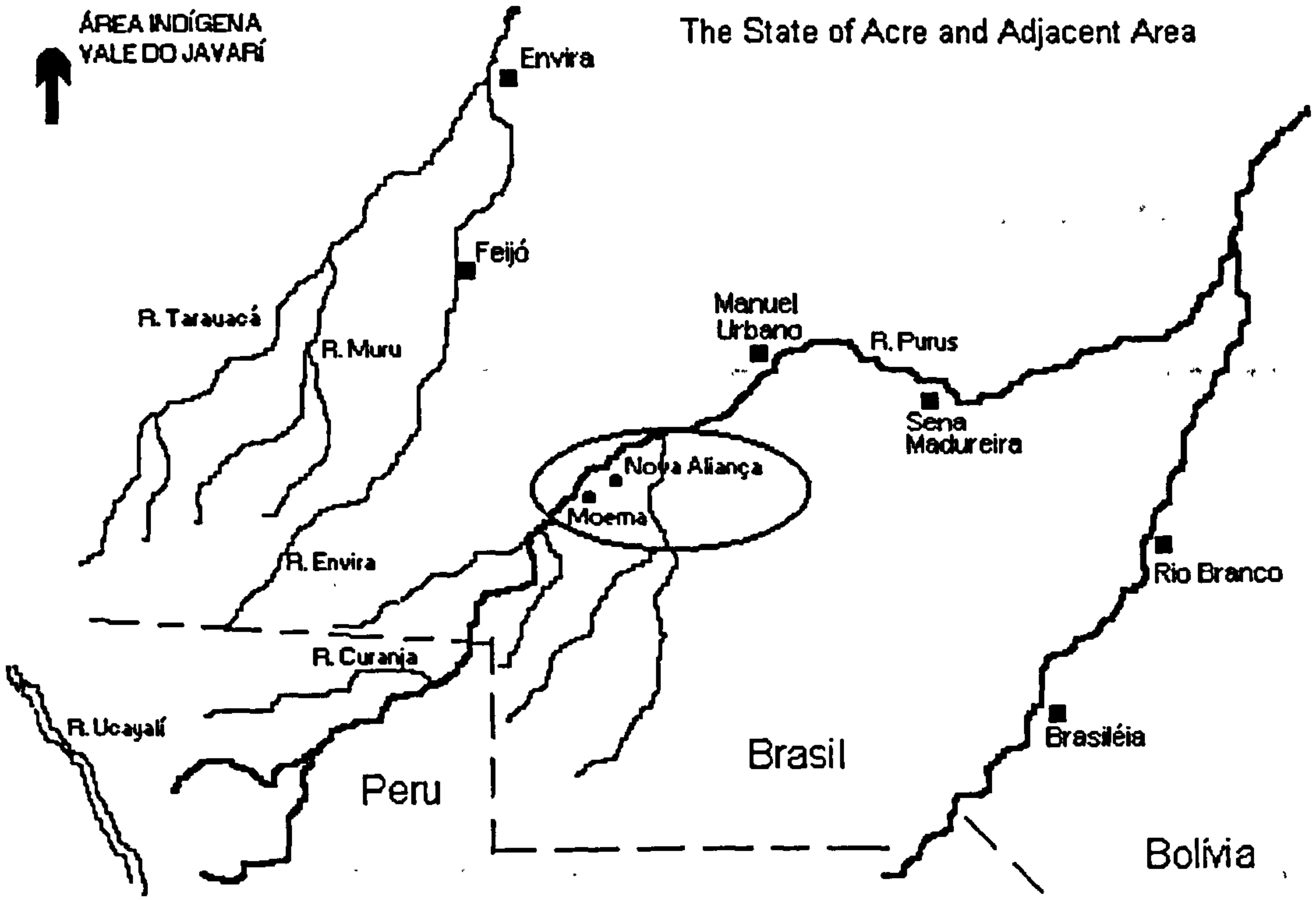
The Cashinahua of the Purus river with whom I did my fieldwork were previously studied by McCallum (see bibliography). McCallum's study focuses on social organisation and gender relations. In the context of gender relations, the author analyses the *Katxanawa* increase ritual.

The research of Kensinger, Deshayes, Keifenheim and McCallum, frame this work ethnologically and ethnographically. My work is the result of the sum of what I learned from their writings, added to my own observations in the field, which I have directed towards areas of interest that had been insufficiently explored up to this moment.

In my master's thesis I privileged a sustained dialogue with the literature on the Cashinahua and other Panoan groups, systematically relating my own contributions to questions dealt with by other authors. This strategy of ethnographic writing resulted in a monograph of the 'classical' type, where the division in chapters (history, social organisation, life cycle, cosmovision, art) followed a pre-established scheme of organisation of the material, dealing with classical topics of monographic interest. This new work, however, adopts professedly an opposed strategy, which consists in an attempt to construct an ethnography structured by concepts and reflections of the Cashinahua themselves. Although I use the literature on the Cashinahua in particular, and on the Panoans in general as a reference, this work was conceived as an ethnography based on and constituted by data gathered by myself in the field.

This is the reason why I made a stylistic choice in this thesis: not to cite and comment the existing bibliography on the Cashinahua and Panoans, if not to use it only when directly related to the questions dealt with in the thesis. In this way I hope to have rescued the coherence of the ethnographic treatment of my data. Specialists will easily recognise differences and similarities between my data and arguments, and their own.

The State of Acre and Adjacent Area



Part I: Perception and Cognition: Ontological frame work

Chapter 1. Sameness and difference in the light of Perspectivism

1.1 Sameness and Otherness

“The capacity to mime, and mime well, in other words, is the capacity to Other.”
Walter Benjamin, in Taussig, 1993: 19.

“I always thought that for the world to be, only two were needed: water and light, man and woman. But I discovered that the world is made of three. Water and light are not enough, there needs to be air to have movement and to link, to make things go. It is the third element that gives life. In the same way it is also because of the child of a couple that the world continues.”

Agostinho Manduca, Cashinahua of the Jordão river.

Cashinahua daily and ritual praxis reveal a dynamic and complex dualism that questions insistently a substantialist definition of identity and difference. Through recurring inversions of role and position in naming system and ritual, and through persisting definitional paradoxes in discourse, the question of sameness and otherness becomes salient as the central theme around which turns Cashinahua ontology.

This is not only the case for the Cashinahua, but has been noted among all other closely related Panoan groups. Panoans are known in the ethnographic literature as especially “obsessed” with foreigners and all kinds of “otherness” (on the topic see Erikson, 1986; Keifenheim, 1990, 1992; Calavia, 1995). Paradigmatic for Pano ambiguity towards a fixed definition of boundaries between Self and Other is the puzzling concept of “*nawa*”, for which there exist variations in almost all Panoan languages.

Nawa can be used as a term to denote “real” otherness: strangers and potential enemies, like the white colonisers or mythical *Inkas* (Cannibal Gods). When people or game are called or named in ritual songs, they are always called *nawa*, enemies. But

Nawa is also used in the literature to name a broad range of different Panoan groups (the Nawa of the Yuruá-Purus area, including Cashinahua, Yaminahua, and other *nawa*), or as part of an ethnonym attributed to and by Pano neighbours, where it comes to mean “people”, as in *cashí* (vampire bat) -*nawa* (people), *yami* (stone axe) -*nawa* (people), *mari* (agouti) -*nawa* (people) etc. *Nawa* can also be used in terms denoting one of the moieties or name-giving sections inside one’s own community (as among the Yaminahua, Marubo and Amahuaca), where it has the same meaning as the pluralizer -*bu* (the Cashinahua use this pluralizer for their alternating name-giving groups: *awabu* (those of the tapir), *yawabu* (those of the white-lipped peccary), *dunubu* (those of the snake), *kanabu* (those of the blue macaw), *awabuaibu* (the female ones of the tapir) etc.).

The above shows that, in Pano languages, one and the same concept can occupy all the different positions of a scale going from the pole of complete otherness and enmity to the we-pole that includes the self, denoting membership of one of the subdivisions that define the interior of one’s own community. This does not mean, however, that the term *nawa* loses its intrinsic relational character. No matter how close it comes to the self, *nawa* will always mean someone other than oneself. This is why no one will ever refer to himself as *nawa*, nor will the word *nawa* be used to refer to a person to whom one wants to feel close. In this sense *nawa* remains the other, although an other that can easily be transformed to the same, if switching point of view.

The “philosophical notion of what it means to be similar and different” (Overing, 1986b: 142) seems to have been of special interest to all Amerindians and to many Americanists (Lévi-Strauss, 1991; Maybury-Lewis, 1979; Viveiros de Castro, 1986, 1992; Carneiro da Cunha, 1978; Overing, 1984, 1996; Clastres, 1974, 1982). As an indigenous interest, this notion has been expressed in varying idea systems of complementariness and interdependence between the sexes, and in different kinds of sociological or cosmological, diametrical or gradual dualisms throughout the Amerindian Lowlands.

The Panoans, and the Cashinahua in particular, present an interesting variant to this colourful mosaic of different ways of dealing with otherness, that can be situated

somewhere between the Tupi concentric and the Gê diametrical dualisms, or, to phrase it another way, somewhere between the Amazonian and the Central Brazilian social models. Following Lévi-Strauss's characterisation of these societies, the Gê of central Brazil would have elaborated complex dualistic social systems, "closed" to the exterior through the introjection of difference into society. In these societies, social dynamics are played out through antagonisms and oppositions between types of moieties which all possess inherited and fixed attributes. Amazonian and Tupi social systems, on the other hand, could be characterised as "open" societies that reduce internal differentiation to a minimum to better express external antagonism. Such a social dynamic results in a network of endogamic monads linked to others through cannibalism and war.

This general sociological difference leads Viveiros de Castro (1993: 149-210) to rename these two kinds of mechanisms of dealing with otherness as "diametrical dualism" and "concentric triadism". Diametrical dualism is exemplified by the Gê case where the exterior is incorporated by the interior, resulting in a closed system of moieties and a rich manifestation of this dualism in ritual and in ornamentation, as well as in daily social interaction. Whereas concentric triadism, the second style of dealing with otherness, would be typically Amazonian. The model shows a gradual relation between the inside and the outside, distinguishing terminologically between close others and total strangers. This type of definition of identity is extremely contextualized. Depending on the context, another group can be considered either of the same identity in opposition to a common other, or of another identity, in opposition to a more limited definition of self.

The Pano people form a perfect link in this typology that contrasts Amazonian and Central Brazilian social philosophies, because they do have a ritually elaborated moiety system, but the dualism of their moiety system is not diametrical: one moiety seems always to be more exterior than the other. Also, the difference created through dualistic classification is of a gradual and hypothetically reversible kind, and not of a dichotomous, exclusive "A is not B" kind. Thus, within Viveiros de Castro's model, this concentric dualism would tend towards a concentric triadism, both in sociological and in cosmological classificational systems. Taking into account the situational

character of this way of defining identities however, one could even question the utility of a triadic scheme and replace it with the stress upon the importance of context and perspective in the indigenous dealing with and naming of sameness and difference.

Among the Cashinahua, the belonging of kinspeople to one of the two moieties and to four or more marriage sections is traced through their personal names (in the Kariëra system there are four sections, alternating with the generations, which makes two sections for each moiety, or eight if we divide a section along gender lines). Because names can be classified in groups defined by generation, sex and moiety, they function as an ethnically encompassing guide to the Cashinahua in their choice of kinship terms in addressing and classifying kinsmen previously unknown. Names and moieties are guidelines for the choice of marriage partners (the belonging of the names to alternate generations seems to be less important, though, than their belonging to a moiety, see McCallum, 1989a⁴). In particular for a first marriage, young people are encouraged to choose a partner belonging to the opposite moiety. Moiety complementarity is also profusely played out in ritual activity.

But there is still the longed for and prohibited real Other, who comes from outside the controlled social order. This other would constitute the third element in the gradual scale which defines self and other, and is the potential, hypothetical affine, omnipresent in myth, ritual songs, visions, dreams and fantasies. This “real other” functions as an encompassing cosmological and eschatological value which never should be concretised in an effective marriage alliance in this life on earth. The Cashinahua are endogamous when possible, at a village level, a practice that reflects their concentric ideology of marrying, above all, kin instead of affines. This is in a line with the Amazonian ideology of consubstantiality which is achieved through living

⁴ This is the case for the Brazilian Cashinahua, but has not been confirmed by specialists of the Peruvian Cashinahua (Kensinger, 1977; Deshayes and Keifenheim, 1982) who stress the ideal of an exchange of sisters, especially on the occasion of the foundation of a new village. For other Panoan groups, however, Erikson mentions “*le “point faible” de la structure “kariëra” pano” being “la rupture introduite par les mariages obliques avec le frère de la mère.”* (1986: 205)

together, sharing the same food, and thus becoming of a kind⁵.

The most inclusive self-definition for a Cashinahua is *nukun yuda*, which means a person who belongs to our same body: a body that is collectively produced by kin living in the same village and sharing food. It is these close kinsmen who provoke the strong feeling of belonging and who are, when absent, "longed for", expressed by the term *manuaiti*, a word used for the nostalgia for close kinsmen as well as for the physical, vital need for water. Kin are as vital to one's self and body as water. This can be illustrated by the following sentence of Antonio Pinheiro: "He who does not miss his kinspeople as one can miss (need) water, is not a person (a human being), but is just like a *yuxin* (spirit being), wandering around randomly."

The Cashinahua Self is constituted by the links that tie a person to his/her kinsmen. This network of vital ties is created over time through living together, by sharing food and other vital substances, and by partaking in medicinal baths and in body painting during ritual. Bodily secretions and smells are also understood to directly affect those with whom one lives. Any direct or indirect intervention aimed at transforming the body of one's kin also affects that person's mind, thoughts and feelings. This is why, when Amerindians talk about the body, they are also talking about the self and about the transformations suffered by the body, sometimes referred to as 'souls'.

In this way we can say that the Cashinahua Self is inclusive, not only of its body, but also of its close kin⁶. This explains why a person who no longer lives in the

⁵ The same logic of consubstantiality can be found among the Cubeo (Goldman, 1963), Piaroa (Overing, 1975), Apinayé (Da Matta, 1976), Airo-Pai (Belaunde, 1992), Piro (Gow, 1991), to cite only a few examples.

⁶ The relation between body, self and society among the Cashinahua is remarkably similar to that encountered among the natives of the Fiji islands as described by Anne Becker (1995). The author demonstrates how in Fiji embodied experience emanates from a "notion of selves deeply embedded in a relational matrix" (1995: 5). Since the self is defined in terms of its insertion in a network of relatedness, more than in terms of an entity enclosed within the boundaries of its individual body, personal identity is expressed by means of caring for and nurturing of others instead of by means of a successful shaping of one's own body in accordance with the aesthetic norms of beauty held by the community. From this follows that embodied experience and bodily shape is lived as a matter of social responsibility reflecting a person's social interconnectedness, more than as an individual achievement used to distinguish one's self from

village becomes more and more a stranger, a non-kin and in the long run a non-Cashinahua in the eyes of those who used to call him kin. Sometimes this person might even transform him- or herself into a non-Indian, a *nawa*, or lose their human qualities altogether so as to become a wandering spirit, a *yuxin*, a formless being, formless meaning here not only that its bodily appearance changes, but also its behaviour and its thoughts: *yuxin* in this context means a being lost in the world, without ties, without a place to go, without people longing for them.

This gradual transformation of a proper human being into a stranger and ultimately into a non-human or non-being happens through time, through behaviour and through contagion with too much otherness. The same logic applies to illness. To be ill means to be in a transformative state of losing one's self and acquiring otherness. The source of illness is not straightforward but is always caused by a combination of external and internal forces. The external predatory forces become active within the person by entering, through food eaten or through odours smelled. They also enter when a person is in an emotionally vulnerable state, such as when feeling sad or lonely. The process of becoming of another kind is complex and is almost always reversible. One stops being a "real" Cashinahua by no longer sharing with village people any more, by living for too long in different places, thus acquiring a different body and through this difference in body, by having different thoughts and feelings, different values and memories. Thus, to be properly human in the Cashinahua sense of the word means to live in community with close kin.

This village endogamy with a strong ideology of consubstantiality is complemented by a verticalized cosmology, akin to the Araweté (Tupi) model, where the longed for potential affine is projected into afterlife. Once dead, the dead person's eye 'soul' will acquire the new body and clothes which are able to transform him or her into an immortal being so as to enable him to marry and live with the ones, who, for the living represent the extreme pole of absolute and dangerous, unliveable Otherness, who are the *Inkas*. As among other Amazonian people, the social order and the kinship system as a unified interior of "people of a kind", a people of the same

that of one's close others.

body with shared thoughts and habits, is encompassed by the cosmological order of otherness, cannibalism and predation, and their relationship to this other is a temporal one: humans are on their way of becoming others and this process, for people such as the Araweté and the Cashinahua, will be completed upon death.

We will have the opportunity to return throughout this text to the complexity of the relation between sameness and otherness in Cashinahua ontology, as it appears to be the central theme in myth, the rationale behind the organisation of ritual practice, the silent discourse of visual art, and also the frame for the everyday practice of the classification of beings and things. Cashinahua social thought does not project difference outside society like many other Amazonian societies do when they try to invent a life spent only in the company of equals/kin, through the avoidance of affinal terminology, and through the domestication of all the powers and substances taken from the outside. Because of an acute awareness of the predation and possible retaliation implied in every possible act creative of life and community, these people choose to neutralise and conceal as much as possible any expression of immanent violence and thus reduce the danger implied in any productive skill (see Overing (1985, 1993) for the Piaroa). Nor does Cashinahua ideology totally introject difference so as to deal with it from the inside, as seems to happen with the complementariness in the oppositional dualism of Gê moiety systems and social life.

Cashinahua ontology considers Otherness to be such a difficult and ultimately fatal, inescapable and unsolvable paradox, that the only way to conceive of the other is to become oneself that other. Without the possibility of becoming other at least temporarily, one would be constrained to remain among equals and this was only possible in the mythic times of incestual sameness and separateness of beings of different kinds. Since contact between radical others leads to conflict and death, the Cashinahua found several ways of “mimesis” and “transformation”, different ways of “changing skin” to play with this possibility of otherness that are but a preparation for the final journey and transformation at death in the epitome, both of Selfness and of extreme Otherness, the *Inka* God. This mythical figure behaves as a cannibal or jaguar towards those he considers to be too different, while he behaves as a spouse and civilizing force towards the same Cashinahua, now dead, who have become of a kind.

The dead have become as beautiful and luminous as the eternal *Inka*, inhabitants of the sky world. Those who run the risk of being eaten by the masters of the sky world while living on earth will be fed by the same Inkas when living in the sky.

The puzzling production and reproduction of alterity through sameness and sameness through alterity, noted also by other Panoan scholars (see Erikson, 1986, 1992; Keifenheim 1990, 1992; Calavia, 1995; Townsley, 1988), constitutes the background of this research where, for the Cashinahua at least, we can conclude that the artifice of dualism serves the end of becoming one instead of two, and serves both the end of becoming self and other. Ontological divisions are positional and temporal in this worldview, they are relative and changeable, not essential nor substantial and never fixed. Differences are not of an oppositional kind but of a gradual kind.

As an example, we can, once again, return to the enigmatic *nawa*; *nawa*, in a classificatory sequence, means the largest representative of a species, such as *nawan tete*, the harpy eagle, largest amongst the birds of prey; and the moiety associated with the exterior is called the moiety of the bigger one of a pair. In comparing the two kinds of jaguar known to the Cashinahua, for example, the smaller one, *txaxu inu* (the red jaguar), is classified as *dua* (the moiety of brilliance, linked to the water world), while the biggest one, *inu keneya* (the jaguar with design), is classified as *inu* (the moiety of the jaguar, linked to the *Inka*/Sun world)⁷.

⁷ There seems to be a contradiction between the data on Cashinahua moiety symbology gathered in Peru and data gathered in Brazil. Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982, 1994), working in Peru, link the *inu* (jaguar) moiety to the pole of self and the interior, while they consider the *dua* (brilliance) moiety to have affinities with the exterior and the pole of the other (*l'autre du dedans*). McCallum's (1989a) and Lagrou's (1991) data gathered in Brazil, on the other hand, agree on the opposite interpretation, where the *inu* moiety, linked to the *Inka*, would be oriented more towards the exterior than the *dua*. Erikson (1995: 7) suggests that this difference in interpretation might be due to the fact that the village leaders in Peru were mostly *inu*, while in Brazil they were *dua*. In this case the anthropologist would have adopted the leader's discourse and point of view, associating the leader's moiety to the pole of self and that of his rivals to the exterior. I would suggest that instead of blaming the 'norme' ("*Faudrait-il postuler que la norme fluctue en raison des aléas politiques et que les données ethnographiques varient en fonction du jeu factionnel?*") (Erikson, 1995: 7)), we might understand this inversion of the poles of interior and exterior in Cashinahua moiety symbolism as a sign of the dynamic and vital character of a dualism that, rather than fixing normative schemes, tries to give meaning to the social, political and symbolic experience of a community.

The duality of the *Inka* figure is, as noted above, another example of sameness in difference or dualism used to conceptualise the oneness of (a) Being. At the beginning of my research, questions about the *Inka* were answered in an explicitly dualistic way: one being is *Inka pintsi*, the *Inka* hungry for meat, who were a people of mythic/historical time, that once cannibalised the Cashinahua; a totally different kind of being would be *Inka kuin*, our *Inka*, the true or proper *Inka*, in whose village the eye 'soul' goes to live after death.

By now, however, it has become clear to me that this duality in the figure of the *Inka* is not due to a duplicity of characters denoted by the same term *Inka*, but to a duplicity of possible viewpoints and relations, because these two *Inkas* are one; they are but different sides of the same coin. *Inka* is a stingy cannibal or a skilful spouse depending on who you are to him and who he is to you. This will become evident in the analysis of several *Inka* myths below. Both the definition of *nawa* and of *Inka* give us a glimpse of how Cashinahua dualism needs to be understood from the point of view of Amerindian Perspectivism (this theme will be dealt with in the next section).

But dualism is an even more encompassing value for Cashinahua thought than may appear from this discussion about identity and from the introduction of the perspectival view that stresses its contextual and dynamic character. Cashinahua ontology postulates the intrinsic, inherent duality of all beings. The world, all living beings, and life itself depend on the proper mixing of opposite forces and qualities. All beings and things of the world are the result of rhythmic and controlled mixing, and all display the phenomenological duality of the contained and container, the skeleton and skin, the seed and its wrapping.

Any absolute separateness of different kinds means absence of life, while their mixing induces movement, the indication of all life. The myth of origin of the ordering of the world (see Part 2) starts with the creation of day and night. Before the world was made, these qualities, like all qualities, lay dormant within their separate caves. This

In fact, in the mark of a successful leader is one whose interpretation of the facts gains the approval of the community as being the 'truth', a useful working hypothesis that can mobilize the people. When the chief's speech loses this power of persuasion, he is on his way of losing his people too (on this topic see Deshayes, 1992: 95-106).

was time before time, when nothing changed because nothing was mixed; there was no interaction whatsoever between qualities and beings of different kinds. Difference was created through the act of its revelation, when the primordial beings opened the caves of dawn and nightfall, the cave where the sun was hidden, and the one that kept the cold inside (Capistrano de Abreu, 1941). Creation is making accessible to the senses the possibilities of being.

The first organisational principle of the world was the mixing of pure darkness with pure light along a rhythmic time scale which introduced day and night, time for work and time for sleep and dreaming. A key symbol for this mixing is the rainbow. The colours of life, red and green/blue, as well as the more problematic colour yellow (see below) (all other colours are composites of these primary colours, or derivatives of words expressing states of maturity) are the result of revealing the potentiality of form and being, hidden in darkness, through the power of light.

We will see that ritual songs can be read both on a social level that deals with proper kinship behaviour and affinity (the problems of dealing with otherness), and on a more abstract level that deals with ontology - the quality and state of being of beings - displaying in poetical images the encompassing value of the intrinsic interwovenness of all bodies and matter on this earth, through mutual creation and predation, through contagion, and through the mixing of qualities. “That which is eaten eats at the same time”, “that which eats becomes of the same kind as the eaten” (or “you are what you eat”) but also “you eat what you are”⁸.

What differentiates in these life processes is not so much a difference between agency and absence of agency, between subject and object, as a difference in moment and relative power. Because all beings exist simultaneously on the level of both the material and immaterial, it is capable of agency, perception and subjectivity. To have form and consistency, matter needs to be imbued with *yuxin*, because “without *yuxin*, anything turns into powder, only empty shell. You touch it and it collapses; then you see it was but ashes, powder” (Antonio Pinheiro). The definition of a being as a real *yuxin* or as a mere “thing” will, here again, depend on a gradual scale where A

necessarily implies B, instead of on a diametrically opposed pair, where to be A means not to be B.

What defines the situation at first (and tends to be a guiding principle in the classification of beings along scales of the less and the more dangerous), is who initiates the process of exchange and/or predation, a process that never leaves any of the beings involved the same as when they entered it. All actions of intercourse, exchange of words and substances, unleash processes that provoke others and this is what keeps the world going.

From the above we can conclude that if, in Cashinahua dualism, A necessarily implies B, oppositions in thought and action exist only to be dissolved. This dissolution of duality can be achieved following the temporal logic (encountered in Cashinahua mythology and in eschatology) or by means of the logic of predation. In this sense, the problem of sameness and otherness in Cashinahua ontology seems to result in a solution, a solution found in the continuity of opposed terms, instead of through their mutual exclusion. Therefore, difference is not so much defined in terms of complementariness of opposed categories as in terms of a movement towards integration. Cashinahua dualism is less a classification of things and beings than a problem, a question to be resolved.

⁸ The same logic has been encountered by Isacson (1993) among the Emberá.

1.2 Perspectivism

“The human phenomenon is a single, coherent idea, organised mentally, physically, and culturally around the form of perception that we call ‘meaning’.”

Roy Wagner, 1986: xi.

“The eye that exists is the one that sees”. “*O olho que existe é o que vê.*”

Chico César, Brazilian song writer.

“To declare that writing itself is a mimetic exchange with the world also means that it involves the relatively unexplored but everyday capacity to imagine, if not become, Other.”

Michael Taussig, 1993: x.

Over the last twenty years, several authors have called attention to the non-essentialist character of the Amerindian worldview. Amerindians’ philosophical inclination would be ‘nominalist’ instead of ‘realist’ (Overing, 1985, 1990; Seeger, Da Matta, Viveiros de Castro, 1979). The introduction of the notion of perspectivism goes one step further in the process of trying to approach the meaning of native statements. Briefly stated, indigenous perspectivism means that the world (reality) one sees depends on who one is; from where and with what intention one being looks at another being. That animals see themselves as humans while humans see them as game, and that the same happens to humans, seeing themselves as humans while they are seen by certain spirits as game, is a well known phenomenon to Amazonianists. This is what is meant by a commonly heard statement that such or such an animal “is a person” (Gow, 1988). Humans themselves can also at times switch viewpoint when right before their eyes an animal they had been pursuing in a hunt suddenly transforms itself into a human being. These transformations are omnipresent throughout Amazonian mythology⁹ but also crucial in daily (and even more so, nightly) experience. Scholars of

⁹ To recognise this also solves a recurrent problem with which several scholars of shamanism have been faced, and that is to be confronted in the field with shamanism, but with no shamans being present (Hamayon, 1982). Linked to this problem of absence or lack of visibility of shamans is the question of their power. Another is the gender of shamans. Could it be the case that in these egalitarian societies access to the ‘spirit’ world tends to be the privilege of one gender over the other? If the whole living world is understood to be imbued with agency and with shamanising power to a greater or lesser extent, we will have to phrase the question “are

Amerindian shamanism (Langdon & Baer, 1992; Chaumeil, 1983; Overing, 1990; Crocker, 1985) have since long noted this capacity for switching perception as a capacity specific to the shaman, but we can now easily recognise this feature as a structuring principle that not only applies to shamanism as a separate field of thought and specialisation, but also to the Amerindian ontology as a whole.

This basic framework that posits the transformability of the world can be found, in the case of the Cashinahua, in all fields of thought and action. Upon death a person changes his body (a process of transmutation of quality expressed in terms of changing clothes), and transforms into the *Inka*, the archetype of otherness. During the rituals of the collective intake of the hallucinogenic brew *ayahuasca* (*cipó*, *nixi pae*, *nawa huni*), the forest and its animals transform for the drinkers into human beings and 'spirits', while large trees and their inhabitants transform into huge foreign cities before the closed eyes of those who themselves become transformed into the mythical ancestor/anaconda *Yube* through the ingestion of its "blood". But the logic of the transformation of one animated substance into another is present even in the most prosaic act of eating: when one eats maize, for example, one becomes maize, and the maize becomes part of the person (in a way similar to that described by Isacson for the Emberá of the Colombian rainforest).

My perception of the "perspectival quality" of Amerindian thought (an expression first used with this general meaning by Arhem, 1993), is closely related to an ongoing discussion about the meaning and proper use of metaphor, both amongst anthropologists and scientists (Overing, 1985a, 1987; Crocker, 1977; Goodman, 1978; Ortony, 1993; Ricoeur, 1981). This discussion calls attention to the cognitive role of

there still shamans?" differently. And we will see again that A does not exclude B. "Yes there still are shamans", can be one answer, but the same person in another context can answer just as well, "no there aren't". We could phrase the question differently, and ask "is there still shamanic power, is there still shamanic knowledge?", and some would answer, "no there isn't any left, only the old ones knew" or "yes, there is, but far away, upriver", or "the neighbours know, not us." The logic of concealing and revealing is linked to the politics of power and knowledge and to the strategies to obtain them. These are important questions to bear in mind when we reflect upon our own process of acquiring indigenous knowledge, because there are implicit rules of transmission of knowledge. There are the right questions to be asked in order to obtain understandable answers, and knowledge is revealed only when the context justifies it.

similarity in metaphor and thought in general, and revalues in this way, although indirectly and implicitly, some of the insights in Lévi-Bruhl's discussion (Cf. Cardoso de Oliveira, 1991; Goldman, 1993) of the animism of 'the savage mind'.

Structuralist use of metaphor in the tradition of Lévi-Strauss stresses only the differentiating capacity of metaphor through analogy, leaving aside a more literal and polysemic reading of the complex contents of indigenous statements in their own specific framework, whereas these statements might be communicating much more than structuralist equivalencies alone, such as when, the Bororo say "My brother is a parrot" (Crocker, 1977) or the Cashinahua "The anaconda is our *ibu* (father/mother)".

"Lévi-Strauss does unfold a salient aspect of tribal classificatory logic, that of analogy, where in his words (1963: 77), 'it is not the resemblances, but the differences, which resemble each other' that counts, e.g., crow is to eaglehawk as clan A is to clan B. The 'primitive' is claiming neither mystical nor blood relatedness to his totem and therefore does not believe the similarity that he might be thought to believe when he calls his neighbour a parrot or a crow. Forthcoming from the Lévi-Straussian understanding of metaphor is the evasion of an analysis of similarity (the relation between my neighbour and a parrot) which, after all, as much as difference and analogy, is crucial to the understanding of metaphoric statements." (Overing, 1985: 153)

Recent studies on metaphor in the western philosophical and cognitive tradition (Ricoeur, 1981; Shanon, 1993; Lakoff, 1990) reveal how all language is, in the end, metaphorical and polysemic in its ongoing role of giving meaning to experience, of connecting known images and concepts of previously unrelated fields to new ones. The cognitive process needs these creative tools to be able to bridge the gap between known and unknown realities and to name new experiences and understandings. New worlds are made imaginable through metaphorical language, and that is why metaphor is indispensable both for the scientist and for the anthropologist, much in the same way as it is to the artist¹⁰.

¹⁰ One example of anthropology as "a metaphoric exercise" is N. Rapport's *Prose and Passion* (1996: 30). His description of metaphor juxtaposes a selection of quotes among which the following are of relevance to this discussion: "Inasmuch as the essence of metaphor is the crossing and the breaking of boundaries, transcending the ordinary usage of any one semantic domain by bringing it into unusual relationship with others, then for Paine the metaphor is the figure of speech which most develops and extends thought" (1981: 188); Ricoeur (1981:180-1)

What unites science and art in their use of metaphor is that, through their *oeuvre*, they change our view and knowledge of the world, and once our view of it has been changed, the world itself will never be the same. This is the performative link that attaches language and perception to the world. The world out there is the world as it is imaginable, perceptible, experiential and thus meaningful to us. It is our embodied, contextualized and therefore changeable perspective on the world that makes the world as it is. And in this way there are multiple worlds (Goodman, 1978). As we will see, this philosophical insight has been taken much further by Amerindian thought than has been the usual praxis in our own thought tradition.

If metaphors stand for our “openness to the world”, to use a Gadamerian expression, we need to be as reflexive as possible about the metaphors we use. Metaphors are used to throw bridges between different domains, different worlds, creating a new one, by way of the famous “fusion of horizons” (this image implies a mutual and not a unidirectional movement and is therefore inherently intersubjective). But they become a limitation to our understanding of the other if we reify them, if they become devices to reduce the cognitive and experiential anxiety provoked by the facing of non-sense. We need the nightmare of facing incommensurability in order to be opened to the finding of new metaphors and bridges, unimaginable when we were still on safe territory¹¹. Metaphors fail in their intent to bring forth understanding when

“the most important feature of metaphor... is its nascent or emergent character”; Shelley (1954: 283): “here in the provision of previously unapprehended combinations of thought, is an enlarging of the circumference of the imagination, and such extension can go on forever”; Steiner (1975: 23) “(every) new metaphor... is a new mapping of the world or a reorganisation of the habitation of reality”; and finally Berger (1984: 97) “If all correspondences were ‘discovered’... one would secure proof of the ‘indivisible totality of existence’.” It is because of metaphoric creativity and the conscious use of it, that the author considers anthropology and literature to be twin disciplines with similar tasks to fulfil in the education and amplification of human imagination.

¹¹ A reflection on the dangers of improper use of metaphor can be found in Jackson (1989). In this passage Jackson is criticising the abuse of textual metaphors by post-modern writers. “It would be a mistake to disparage metaphorical instrumentality as a primitive mode of thought, a magical or primary-process activity. In my view, differences in modes of thought across cultures are idiomatic rather than formal, and if we take care to relate thought to context of use when we make cross-cultural comparisons this becomes quite obvious. If crisis be considered one such context, we find that metaphorical instrumentality is just as typical of modern

they explain away difference, reducing difference to sameness; while well-chosen metaphors create new worlds, functioning as a bridge capable of being at the same time experience-near to the subjects we try to evoke and experience-near, at an imaginative level, for the community of possible readers for whom we are writing.

In a recent article, Viveiros de Castro (1996) situates his dealing with “Amerindian perspectivism” within the classic Nature/Culture paradox inherited by Americanism from Lévi-Strauss¹².

“Before, what used to be noted was the refusal, by the Indians, to concede the predicates of humankind to other people; now it is stressed that they extend these predicates much further than the frontiers of our species, in a demonstration of “ecosophical” wisdom (Arhem, 1993) that we should emulate as much as the limits of our objectivism permit. Before, the assimilation of savage thought to narcissistic animism, infantile stage of naturalism, needed to be contested, showing how totemism affirmed the distinction between man and nature; now neo-animism reveals itself as the recognition of the universal *mestiçagem* (mixing) between subjects and objects, humans and non-humans... Both these approaches are false in the sense that they refer to a substantivist understanding of the categories Nature and Culture (be it to confirm them, or to negate them) that is inapplicable to Amerindian cosmologies.” (1996: 9-10).¹³

Viveiros de Castro goes on to show how categories such as ‘human’, ‘animal’

societies as pre-industrial ones... In both cases a shift is effected from a domain of anxiety to a comparatively neutral domain..., the second domain, however, corresponding to the first. Again, recourse to jargon and to “experience-distant” concepts in the human sciences indicates how anxieties which arise in the course of research are alleviated through a shift to a neutral zone of abstract language or of number, which, nevertheless, is held to correspond to the domain of human events... As for the world of scientific theory, one has only to consider the mechanistic imagery of eighteenth-century philosophy (Turbayne, 1962), the arboreal metaphor in nineteenth-century palaeography, the topographical and archaeological imagery in psychoanalysis and in structuralism, the organic analogies in functionalist sociology (Leach, 1961: 6), and the metaphors of the mirror, the fountain, and the lamp in literary theory (Abrams, 1958) to agree with Luis Borges that the history of ideas may be nothing more than the history of a handful of metaphors. Furthermore, if, as Stephen Peppers argues, world theories are so often generated from the immediate sensible world, might not adequacy in explanation be seen as a matter of choosing the right metaphor rather than a question of epistemological correctness?” (Jackson, M., *Paths toward a Clearing, Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*, 1989: 151).

¹² Lima (1996) published a reflection on perspectivism based on data collected among the Juruna. Unhappily, I was unable to incorporate her discussion in this text because I had access to this work only after having written this chapter.

¹³ This and the following quote are my translation from the original version in Portuguese.

and 'soul' are 'perspectival categories' to the Amerindians and that they need to be analysed in terms of a theory of signs. The point of view defines the place occupied by the subject. Citing Deleuze (1988: 27), the author defines perspectivism in the following terms: "thus is the foundation of perspectivism. It does not express a dependence in the face of a previously defined subject; on the contrary, he will be a subject who accedes to a point of view".

And from subject to soul is but one step: "to have a soul, is to be capable of a point of view" (1996: 11). If what defines humanity is to be a subject with a point of view, then what links humans to animals is not their common animality, but their common humanity. But inherent to the capability of a point of view is to have a body and it is this situatedness and embodied agency that will define how the world is to be perceived. It is not so much the morphology of a jaguar that defines its identity as a jaguar-being, as its behaviour, its intention and its manner of perceiving the world through the perspective of predation. That is how a human being can become a jaguar: when he gets into the jaguar mood.

"What I am calling a body, therefore, is not synonymous with a distinctive physiology or with a fixed morphology; it is a whole set of affections or modes of being that constitute a *habitus*. Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms, there is the intermediate level of the body as a feature of affections and capacities and as the *locus* of perspectives." (Viveiros de Castro, 1996: 13)

In the same way, the widespread use by Amerindians of auto-designations referring to themselves and to related peoples as "true or proper human beings" (in the Cashinahua case, *huni kuin*) is not intended to denote humanity as a natural species, but as a condition, the condition of person, subject, and social being. In this sense, ethnonyms should be understood as pronouns and not as substantives (Viveiros de Castro, 1996: 10).

The relationship of predation is one of those where the contextuality and reversibility of one's identity is most acutely felt. An ethnographic example close to the approach to Amerindian perspectivism presented above, is that of the Wari by Vilaça (1992), where predation appears to be the root metaphor for human and non-human relationships and identity. For the Wari, to be human is to be in the position of

the hunter, while to be animal is to be in the position of the prey. For animals and 'spirits' who prey upon humans, humans are animals. Thus, human identity is identified with agency, and more so, agency is identified with the act of predation.

In this way, the ontologically founding opposition in the naming of different beings is constituted by the opposition of hunter to prey, an opposition defining the contrastive qualities of subject and object of an ever ongoing activity of predation. This activity is considered to be omnipresent at all times, and implies by its proper dynamics of attack and retaliation the inherent possibility of inversion of perspectives and roles, where the hunter becomes the prey.

The same logic has been noted for warfare amongst Amazonian peoples (Fernandes, 1970; Viveiros de Castro, 1986, 1992). I think, this logic reflects an egalitarian ideology with an explicit consciousness of the essential sameness in quality, capacity and value of the enemy (game). The hunted will sooner or later hunt us, and the eaten will somehow and at some point want to eat us (through illness for example). The Cashinahua share this perspectival view of being hunter to some, game to others, or hunter and game to the same beings but at different moments in time.

The Cashinahua extend this relationship with their respected/feared enemies not only to game, but also to plants and trees (as do the Achuar women in a much more radical way with their cannibal plants, Descola, 1987). All living beings are encompassed in the actions and counteractions of killing, eating and transforming living beings into materials for the production of proper life. The abstract idea that to create life one has to destroy another is quite concrete and alive in a hunter's and gardener's lifestyle, where one is constantly domesticating the wild hidden forces of the forest and conquering small parts of the cleaned and controlled human space.

I am of the opinion, however, that these fighting and interdependent forces can be better *not* be understood in terms of nature/culture. This understanding derives from indigenous exegeses of the world, which is considered to be imbued with all the possible or imaginable qualities of agency, intentionality and perspective. The following statement made by Agostinho Manduca illustrates this view quite literally: "The earth is alive, you know; one thing is always transforming into something else". And Augusto Feitosa: "The forest has its *ibu* (parent, creator, owner, caretaker,

planter), everything has its *ibu*.”

Otherness does not mean a lack of humanity, or subjectivity or agency for the Cashinahua, but rather unintelligibility and different ways of seeing things, implying the relational and never the substantial or essential. Thus, *Inka* cannibal Gods or White men or enemies are not seen to be intrinsically uncontrollable cannibals or wild beasts; they behave in this way not because of any inherent quality, but because of a certain kind of relation, the relation of too much otherness to self. Once again, to be able to deal with otherness, one has to learn to become or to mimic the other to the point of learning his/her view of the world and thus gain power over the interactive situation.

While expressing similarly reversible positions as those between prey and hunter for the Wari, the ontologically founding opposition for the Cashinahua nonetheless divides the world differently. The central theme here is still that of self and other, *huni* (we, human in a proper way) and *nawa* (other, potential enemy). However, the relation here denotes, not one of reversible positions of subject implying agency and object implying passivity, but one of a problematic intersubjectivity where both roles or positions display both agency and subjectivity. This explains why *nawa* can stand for both the most powerful predator and also for the humanised victim of a hunting expedition: the *nawa* is an enemy, which means both victim and aggressor. As a result, what is suggested is an ontology where all beings are always in a subjective state and position, the difference here being one between known or proper human (social) agency and, as yet, unknown and therefore unintelligible and most probably improper, asocial, agency. On a sociological level, the problem is, once again, that of affinity.

Another element present in any relationship, and this insight goes back to Lévi-Strauss (1991) and Dumont (1980), is that in antagonistic relationships between different beings (and all beings are different) there is always an imbalance in power, albeit usually hypothetically reversible. This view is expressed by the place occupied by twins in Amerindian mythology. For the Amerindians, twins are never thought of as

identical¹⁴. Difference between twins begins with the undeniable fact, a fact with its attendant ramifications, that one of the two is born first. All kinds of differences stem from this fact, and again the oppositions are not oppositional but gradual. Among twins there will always be a smaller and a bigger one, a stronger and a weaker one, a smarter and a weaker one, and also, my informants insisted, a lucky and an unlucky one. This logic of gradual difference, of older and younger, smaller and bigger, lies at the basis of moiety dualism and of the whole conceptualisation of complementariness in relations and in the world.

In Amerindian thought, the idea of doubleness therefore implies difference. Doubleness in oneness is possible, not doubled sameness. The idea is to create beings of a kind, this means, beings sufficiently similar to understand each other, not clones and not replicas. Perfect symmetry will never be found in the world. This idea is also expressed in their art. Symmetry in art is always rectified by a small asymmetric detail which conveys distinct identity. It is the detail, the dissonance, that gives life to the art work, as much as to life itself. In this way Cashinahua graphic style can be seen as visualising the social value of a personal autonomy that manifests itself in subtle idiosyncratic details, while hidden in an overall pattern of symmetry and equality. The *studium-punctum* effect of Roland Barthes (1980) applies well to this type of style.

The *studium*, or dominating discourse in this case would be the repetition of equal elements in a symmetric rhythm and the high value placed on the clean and delicate execution of fine parallel lines. Cashinahua graphic style is characterised by *horror vacui*: the whole surface of the painted body has to be covered with design and no lines can be left open. The pattern can be cut where the painted surface stops, suggesting a continuation of the same pattern over other bodies. This demonstrates the function of design as something which unites rather than separates. Design visualises the *yuxin* (animating force) quality that permeates the whole Cashinahua world and

¹⁴ The opposite happens in Indo-European imagination and myths about twins, where the fascination for twins derives exactly from their quality of hypothetical inter-changeability (Lévi-Strauss, 1991: 299-320). Indo-European speculation around twinship is puzzled by the possibility of split identity, while in Amerindian myth, the idea of doubleness already carries with it the idea of difference.

separates them from peoples without (eye for) design.

The *punctum* is a dissonant almost invisible detail, a surprise, necessary for the visual dynamics to give aesthetic vitality to the whole, which may manifest itself as a small difference in the repetition of a pattern, an asymmetric point within symmetry. There has to be a certain homogeneity in the visual elements for the little difference to be able to touch the eye. Cashinahua art elegantly explores the intertwining of *studium* and *punctum*. Thus, the first impression of a woven tissue as well as of a painted face will be that of a surface covered with a geometric pattern through the infinite repetition of equal units. While a closer look will show us that one diamond of the honeycomb pattern has one angle more than the others. This is the *punctum* and its occurrence in Cashinahua art is systematic (Dawson, in Dwyer, 1975). Another example are the necklaces. If a bead necklace, for example, is composed by alternating six red and six blue beads, somewhere in the middle of the string we will find one white bead deliberately disturbing the perfect symmetry and repetition of the pattern (see annexed illustration)¹⁵.

This subtle marking of the artist's personality in pieces so strongly marked by style seems congruent with the way Cashinahua experience life: creating community is the fruit of a strong desire to live together tranquilly with close kin, making sociality possible through one's own personal autonomy and respect for the other's autonomy.

Perspectivism as a style of thought implies a constant awareness of the possibility of changing points of view and thus changing the world to be seen. As is to be expected, perspectivism is also relevant for the understanding of Amazonian design

¹⁵ In the Cashinahua male art of headdresses, on the other hand, the play with imbalance and asymmetry is more explicit. Here the objective seems to be to achieve a delicate balance through imbalance, thereby suggesting the constant movement of the feathers. The feathers of the crown are purposely different in size in order to suggest a certain undulation, although they are all normally of the same colour and from the same bird. Tails composed of several different kinds of materials (shells, nails from different kinds of mammals, differently coloured feathers etc.) hang from the crown to enhance the idiosyncratic character of the piece and are called *dau* (decoration or "medicine" of the headdress). As a finishing touch, a few long macaw tail feathers are added on top. These long tails are made to bend and balance at the ends by means of pieces of beeswax which hold a beautifully cut feather decoration. The result is a subtle and mobile balance made of slightly different but similar pieces of material.

systems. The kinetic quality of switching perspectives between background and figure when looking at the typically labyrinthic patterns of woven cloth and basketry of many Amazonian groups, has been noted earlier in analyses of Amerindian “abstract art”.

Peter Roe called attention to the correspondence of this art style with a specific style of thought. He argues that the “visual ambiguity“ of Shipibo (Pano, Peru) design corresponds in their thought system to “a larger emphasis on mental ambiguity” (Roe, 1987: 5-6). Mental ambiguity is a slippery expression, but can easily be replaced by perspectivism without changing the meaning of such an analogy. For Roe, the significance of perceptive ambiguity in “abstract” indigenous art lies in what it tells us about the cognitive attitude of artists and the intended public. For Amerindians the universe is transformative. This means that vision can suddenly change before our eyes. The world is also understood to be multi-layered, several worlds are thought to be simultaneously present and always connected, although not always perceptible. The role of art is to convey a synthetic perception of this simultaneity of different realities.

Useful in Roe’s approach to indigenous design is also the fact that he pays attention to patterns of style more than to the pattern’s separate constitutive units. My own inquiries into the meaning of Cashinahua design resulted in similar findings. While an iconographic reading of isolated units was confusing and contradictory, a more Gestalt or structural reading of the pattern as a whole gave me a more satisfying understanding of its meaning and use. Analogies between this visual code and other verbal and non-verbal codes which together form the background for the emotional and cognitive significance of the art style, are also essential. This is why I am convinced that a specialised approach to art is unproductive and that aesthetics should be encompassed by hermeneutics in the study of indigenous art as well as in the study of our own art tradition¹⁶.

Another illustration of the presence of perspectivism in Amazonian art can be found in the study of Yekuana (Karib, Venezuela) myth, weaving and song by David

¹⁶ See Lagrou, 1995, “Hermenêutica e etnografia”. On the ongoing debate of the position of the study of “aesthetics as a cross-cultural category” by Anthropology see the edition of the debate on this topic held in Manchester, August 1994.

Guss (1989). After having almost abandoned his quest for the big myth of origin of the Yekuana (which he knew from old texts once existed), the author decided in despair to sit with the elders and to learn how to weave baskets. In so doing, what he discovered was that life for the Yekuana is like weaving, or, in other words, that weaving was the root metaphor for life among these people, and that bits and pieces of the myth of origin were woven, told and sung by the elders each day as they sat together in a circle at twilight.

Knowledge cannot be acquired out of context, since knowledge forms a constitutive part of the person, it has but one place of storage, that is, in the body: knowledge and memory are embodied and they are actualised only in so far as they make sense for the creation of present day life (see Gow, 1991 on embodied history for the Piro of Peru). That is why much of our most valuable insights in the field come to us as if by accident, whereas in reality, they do not come randomly at all. They come when our teachers consider us to be ripe for it, or simply when the right context happens to present itself, a context which is able to reveal not only the content, but also the significance and the practical, moral and emotional meaning of a certain piece of knowledge.

The result of Guss' initiation in the techniques of Yekuana weaving was a profound understanding of Yekuana ontology.

“With the abstract designs this simultaneous portrayal of a dual reality becomes much more complex [than in the case of figurative design]. Here image and counter-image are also shown. Yet what is really depicted is the dynamic relation between the two. Unlike the static images of the figurative designs, the kinetic structure of these forms creates an endless movement between the different elements, drawing the spectator into them. Perception now becomes a challenge, with the viewer forced to decide which image is real and which an illusion. The duality signified by the conquest of the baskets is perceptually incorporated into the structure of their design. Here all the oppositions in the culture (female and male, visible and occult, creative and predatory, poison and food) are visually resolved. But it is not a static resolution. It is, like the daily life of every Yekuana, a constant interplay between the physical forms and the invisible that charge them.” (Guss, 1989)

The Cashinahua general style of design, called *kene kuin* (true design) and used in body painting, basketry, ceramics and weaving, is similar to the Yekuana basket weaving style. The interplay between image and counter-image conveys the same idea

of doubleness and co-presence of the revealed and unrevealed images in the world. So much so that Cashinahua ontology, defining the conditions of being and non-being, is totally dependent on and tied to the actual perceptive process in which any particular agent might be engaged.

One of the reasons why my first attempts to link specific names to specific patterns or units were frustrated was this kinetic switching back and forth of images. Another was that the Cashinahua did not name separate units but whole patterns, relations between units, and the location of design on the body supporting it. Like a skin without a body to cover, a design without its support does not make sense in Amerindian aesthetics. Thus, we can see that what happens with design is the same as what happens with knowledge in general: knowledge needs a body and a proper context as support and as a reason for being, as does design. And it is the support as much as the graphism *in se* that conveys properness to the design. A proper design is proper (*kuin*) depending not only on its inherent qualities but also, more saliently, upon context: it is dependent upon who paints whom, on what is painted and when painting takes place¹⁷.

Another consequence of perspectivism in art and in perception in general is that the traditional opposition between appearance and essence, or between reality and illusion, no longer makes sense. Each perception has some kind of existence specific to itself. This does not mean that images and bodies occupy the same position in Cashinahua ontology, but that the distinction between different kinds of percepts is made within the frame of different states of being. I use “states of being” to substitute the more commonly used “states of consciousness” because in this way we avoid the pitfall of inadvertently opposing mind and body¹⁸.

The state of being relates the state of the body to the state of the mind. Thus when, among the Cashinahua, someone sees doubles or *yuxin* or other manifestations

¹⁷ Gow (1988) recovers in Lévi-Strauss a fundamental insight in the dynamic relationship between the graphic and plastic elements in Amerindian art. For further details and discussion see Lagrou, 1992.

¹⁸ The suggestion to use the concept of states of being in preference to the problematic concept of states of consciousness was inspired by Gonçalves (1995).

that do not belong within the sphere of everyday perception, no one ever questions the fact that he or she has really seen something, nor is it a point of contention whether this perception was or was not an illusion, in other words, a 'hallucination'. Etymologically, to have hallucinations means to perceive (through one or more of the senses) that which does not exist in "reality". The concept 'hallucination' does not exist in the Cashinahua language because the conception and perception of "reality" is different.

The concept closest to our notion of 'illusion' and 'hallucination' would be 'lying' (*txaniki*) and, depending on the seriousness of the experience, 'playing' (*beyuski*). When it is said that a person or a forest being was just 'playing', no dangerous consequences are expected to follow from the event. Lying on the other hand, could be more dangerous. It is strangers, tricksters and immaterial beings who lie and deceive. This is a common method used to distract and mislead lonely and inadvertent persons on paths that will lead them astray and make them lose their orientation and capacity to turn back to the known world.

It is important to note that in the case of perceptions which do not fit the everyday world of solid bodies, the one who is 'lying' is generally not the person who saw something and reports what he saw to his fellow people, but the agent who produced the phenomenon perceived. These agents are called *yuxin*, they are vague and mutable beings without a solid body but with the capacity to produce images and manifestations that scare and confuse humans.

Some of these beings, the most powerful ones, called *yuxibu* (*-bu* is a pluraliser of *yuxin*, signifying both multiplicity and magnitude, in this case in terms of power; see below), have so much potency that they can play around with images and transform them as and when they wish. They play tricks upon humans and thus capture and transport them to another world: a world perceived and experienced differently. One image used to express this crossing of a threshold is that the being "squirted the sap of a medicinal plant in the person's eyes and took him/her to his village".

From this follows that what needs to be determined in order to understand a case of extranormal perception is the specific state of being (both of the body and the 'soul') of the perceiver, as well as the quality of the being perceived, and also the

context of the event of perception. The person may be ill or sad, or he may be on his way to becoming a shaman. He may also be in a perfectly normal state, however the context is such that normally invisible phenomena are more prone to showing themselves, such as at nightfall or during a terrifying storm with heavy rain and lightning. Another context in which one is expected to be able to perceive normally unseen images is during the ritual intake of *ayahuasca*.

All these examples show us that different possibilities of perception are linked to particular states of being. Some of these states of being imply such a high degree of mimicking and entering into contact with otherness, including change of bodily form and action, that little of what we would call the “real” self, immersed in bodily activity, social intercourse and daily routine, is left. The call of the forest with its animals/*yuxin* longing to transform their seduced victim into one of them is equalled in danger and power by the call of the city with its inebriating *cachaça* (spirit made of sugar cane) and its fascinating variety of different inhabitants (*nawa*). In this sense, it should be no surprise that the spirits of the forest that appear in visionary journeys are by now challenged by exciting and dangerous visits to the cities of São Paulo and Lima, or to the more distant cities of the *huxu nawa*, white foreigners (Europeans and Americans).

Thus the life and being of a person is seen to be a dynamic process with several possible paths to be followed and identities to be assumed. In the face of these multiple possibilities of existence and the dangers of non-reversible transformation into uncontrollable otherness, it is the task of the community as a whole and of adults entrusted with the production of community life and of young “proper human beings”, *huni kuin*, in particular, to guide the multiplicity of possible perceptions, emotions and activities present in the surrounding world so as to model their own creatures into beings of a kind, *nukun yuda*, “our body”.

In this way Cashinahua adults work to bring up children with “thinking bodies”, who are always “thinking of their bodies (*yuda*)” (where *yuda* means the individual as well as the collective “social body” of close kin with whom one shares the substances of daily life). This means that their bodies carry thoughts and feelings of love and belonging because of food, care, memories and values shared during a lifetime. When far away from home, travellers will miss this food, the collective sharing of it and the

ways, stories and care of those with whom they lived during their childhood.

Cashinahua education is quite permissive and any use of force or aggression is strongly avoided. The autonomy and free will of any individual, even when only a child, is strictly respected. No fights, loud voices or commands are tolerated among adults. Conflicts are resolved through avoidance, and the strongest punishment one can suffer is ostracism (Kensinger, 1986b). An efficient weapon in imposing social values of sharing and reciprocity is gossip. Decisions are taken only when all parties involved agree and when agreement has become impossible, the dissident group decides to leave to let tempers cool or to try life elsewhere. This explicitly pacifistic and egalitarian social moral is common to many Amazonian people¹⁹ and is an important factor in the way these people define themselves as different from other peoples, not least from the *nawa* (non-Indians).

Thus the process of creation and permanent reinvention of a specific community life and lifestyle is carried out in continuous negotiation between young and old as they face the ever-changing contexts of new opportunities that arise and old ones that disappear as the world changes shape. This constant reinvention of Selfness in the face of surrounding Otherness is yet another manifestation of the Cashinahua specific conception of the notions of sameness and difference. If sameness implies otherness, perspectivism becomes the element to join these notions, turning sameness and otherness into interdependent and, at some point, interchangeable positions.

¹⁹ As examples we can cite the Piaroa (Overing, 1988, 1989), Cubeo (Goldman, 1963), Araweté (Viveiros de Castro, 1992), Pirahã (Gonçalves, 1993, 1995), Airo-Pai (Belaunde, 1992), Pemon (Thomas, 1982).

Chapter 2. Key concepts

The dynamic pairs or triads of terms that function as key concepts in the Cashinahua ontological framework, can only be sketched against the background of a perspectival style of thought that allows us to deal with the paradoxes and ambiguities in the naming of beings and non-beings. Although initially puzzled by contradictions in translation and understanding, I learned that these contradictions teach us something about a specific style of thought. The significance and purpose of, for example, an ambiguous distinction between self and other tells us more about the Cashinahua worldview than any literal translation of the word *nawa* ever could. The Cashinahua intentionality in their polysemy of key concepts is highly productive in conveying an all-encompassing ontological awareness of the doubleness and inherent mutability of living beings.

2.1. Yuxin/Yuxibu (Vital force, Double/Powerful being)

Yuxin is the broadest and most polysemic key concept of Cashinahua ontology and therefore impossible to be exhaustively circumscribed. We will encounter this all-pervading concept throughout the whole of this work and this first presentation of *yuxin* therefore is not intended to close the picture, but only to delineate its basic features.

One of the meanings of *yuxin* is that quality or energy that gives life to matter. In this sense, all living beings 'have' *yuxin*. It is *yuxin* that gives form and consistency to materiality and that makes it grow. That is the meaning of the quote cited in the first chapter: "without *yuxin* anything turns into powder, only shell, empty" (Antonio Pinheiro). As well as containing some *yuxin*, all embodied shapes in this world also contain water. Water, or liquid, is one of the vehicles of *yuxin*; another is the displacement of air, in wind and breath. Thus *yuxin* can be seen as the quality or movement that links all the interrelated bodies in this world.

Fire or heat radically transmutes matter. By drying up all the liquid contained in a body, fire is responsible for disconnecting *yuxin* and matter. What remains are mere ashes. It is the complete dehydration of matter to the point where it becomes white ash

that causes a body to be taken out of the circle of recycling of interconnected, living matter. This happens because, once totally dried up, the flesh (the word *nami*, meat or flesh, is used for human and animal flesh, as well as for the pulp of fruits) is emptied of *yuxin*. Rotting and decomposing bodies of plants, animals and humans, on the other hand, are considered to be not just entering death, but to also be in a state of intense mutability. They can be said to be more than alive because the condition inbetween life and death is one of inherent bodily transformation and thus of enhanced *yuxin* activity.

Yuxin, then, is the vital force and agency, the consciousness and intentionality of any living being. It is both unified and multiple and no-one will ever name this (these) ephemeral being(s) as long as it is (they are) fused with the body it (they) animate(s). In its embodied state, it is treated as a body. Thus it is the body of a person that thinks. It is its heart, its fingers, its skin that know (see Kensinger, 1995). *Yuxin* only comes into existence when it is separated from the living body.²⁰

a. Emergence of *yuxin*

Most productive activities require the cutting down and killing of living trees or animals. When life leaves the body, its *yuxin* emerges. Songs are used to address the emerging *yuxin*. When trees are cut for the collection of fruits, the song asks permission of the *yuxin* that is being released and asks it to be generous with its fruits. Inversely, when *nixpu*, a medicinal plant used for the blackening of the teeth in the initiation ritual for young children, is cut without the proper invocation of its *yuxin*, the blackening force will not accompany the dead juicy stalks and they will leave the teeth grey instead of sparkling black.

²⁰ The concept of *yuxin* is close to the Wari concept of *jam* as described by Vilaça (1992: 52). The word *jam* can stand for two different concepts. In the first sense *jam* signifies an image in the mirror, a shadow, a trace, while in the second *jam* means “double”. The translation is mine: “*Jam* is not something that these beings possess inside themselves, but is basically a capacity of action, of transformation to be manifested. *Jam* is not inside the body, but is a projection of it, a mark of its absence, something which insists and persists beyond the body and its death.” (1992:63) “A double is not a mirroring image – it can even possess distinct forms – or a material body, but reveals, basically, a power. The capacity to produce or to make manifest a double confers the power of transformation to a person or an animal, the power to turn oneself into something different than a physical signifier, or pure corporeal materiality.” (ibid.)

The songs address the *yuxin* of the being in question when that being enters a liminal state between embodiment and disembodiment, a state of disconnection between bodily form and animating agency, when the *yuxin* emerges. It is at this in-between moment that the *yuxin* of non-human bodies are able to understand and react to the messages directed towards them by humans in specific ritual songs.

Following the same logic, the *yuxin* of animals only attack humans once they have lost their bodies and are thus free to haunt the killer or eater of their meat as pure images, as “doubles” of the dead body, with vengeful intentions²¹. Thus, in order to be left in peace during his mental journey (*bai*), his vision quest, participants in an *ayahuasca* ritual will sing a song (or ask someone to sing for him) to the angry *yuxin* of the specific game killed or eaten during the day of the ritual.

Yuxin, however, emerge not only when bodies disappear. In huge trees, such as the lupuna tree (*xunu*) and the *cumaru* (*kuman*), and other, less impressive trees such as the *pau d'arco* (*nixu*), and the *copaiba* tree (*buxix*), *yuxin* are active even when the tree is left in peace. This is due to the fact that these trees house complete communities of disembodied *yuxin*. A village as big as a city is said to exist on top of the lupuna tree. Along with the *ni yuxin* (the *yuxin* of the trees, embodied in the “flesh” of the trees), there are the *yuxin* of the dead, who stay in the trees temporarily on their way to their final dwelling place in the sky village of the *Inka*.

The chief of these communities is a “monster” (*yuxibu*) called *Ni ibu*, master of the forest. I was told by Edivaldo, leader of Moema, that *Ni ibu* was “someone of the kind of (as powerful as) the president of Brazil”. *Ni ibu* is the “owner” of the forest, that means that as planter of all wild trees he is their father and will therefore continue to function as their guardian²². Songs are sung to ask permission of this master of the

²¹ The use of the concept of “double” in the context of Amerindian eschatology goes back to Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1978) and was inspired by Vernant’s (1965, 1990) description of the idea of “double” in ancient Greece.

²² The Cashinahua notion of *ibu* as a master, owner or guardian of natural species, reminds the Northwest Amazonian literature (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971; Hugh-Jones, 1979; Overing, 1975) on the Masters of animals. A crucial difference between the Cashinahua and Northwest Amazonian thought systems, however, lies in the relation between the animals and their masters. If among the latter only the masters of species have the power, implying agency and

forest, as well as of all its invisible subjects, the inhabitants of the lupuna tree, to pass by in peace. The lupuna tree is famous for causing dizziness (*nixun*) and even fainting to any unguarded passerby. In myths, this capacity is described in terms of a sudden transformation of day into night before the darkened eyes of the victim.

Songs are also sung when planting and harvesting peanuts and corn. In this way the specific *yuxin* of these plants are called by their name, to awaken or to keep it alive inside their seeds. The same ritual treatment is not given to other vegetables, the reason being the special status of ritual food accorded to peanuts and corn. These plants are said to be “truly human beings”. This means that their seeds will transform into humans, or to put it differently, their seeds, once eaten by humans, will contribute to the material out of which the human body will be created.

Another context for the emergence of *yuxin* is that of dreaming or having visions when the body is at rest. In this particular state of being a *yuxin* called *nama yuxin* (*yuxin* of dreams, one of the denominations of the “true” (*kuin*) *yuxin*) emerges and interacts with other *nama yuxin* of humans, of certain animals and of certain plants independently of the body. These interactions can have consequences for the person the next day, upon awakening.

The same phenomenon occurs when the body suffers a transformation and falls unconscious. Fainting, which literally means to die (*mawa*), frees the *yuxin* (in this case the *bedu yuxin*, eye *yuxin*, one of the *yuxin* (‘souls’) animating the body), and is a sign both of the vulnerable state of the body and of a switch in the order of reality, an inversion of the visible and invisible sides of the world that makes embodied, coordinated action impossible. Unconsciousness as a state is classified within the notion of dying because dying is not seen as a sudden event, but rather as a process of transformation in the relation between a body and its *yuxin*. At the end of this process, all the *yuxin* once linked to the person are disconnected from the original body, taking its power of consciousness, movement and growth with them.

intentionality, to inflict illness on human beings, while their animals lost this capacity of thought, among the Cashinahua the masters are but an augmented version of a power their animals possess in a diminished version.

b. Animals with harmless yuxin

Although the *yuxin* of many animals and some plants can thus acquire human agency and understanding when disconnected from their animal or vegetable body, some animals and plants are said not to possess this quality and to be ‘only’ animals (“*yuinaka besti*”) or ‘only’ plants. This means that the only *yuxin* (agency) they possess is the one belonging to their species, enabling them to act as their species acts. These animals do not have the capacity to assume other states of being. They are unable to make their voice intelligible to humans and are thus incapable of acting upon humans in ways other than through the direct effects of their bodily actions. These animals will never take posthumous revenge (*kupi*) on humans for aggressions suffered, and are therefore considered to be innocuous. In their quality as passive victims, they occupy the lowest level on the cosmological scale of the beings who have agency. Thus, it is said of the armadillo that it “does not take revenge, it has no *yuxin* (other than the agency of its own species), it is really totally smooth” (“*Yaix kupinamaki, yuxiumaki*”) (Antonio Pinheiro).

This does not mean that the only way in which animals with a human double manifest themselves is through revenge. Some animals with a lot of *yuxin* do not take revenge by sending illness when killed by humans. Thus, the tortoise “is a shaman, it always calls *ex ex*. It has *yuxin* (capacity to communicate), but does not take revenge” (“*Xawe yuxianki, ex ex imiski. Yuxiabia hatu kupismaki*”). The same is the case for the physically dangerous cayman whose meat is nevertheless much appreciated: “The cayman is *yuxian* (shaman), but he does not take revenge.” (“*Kape yuxianki, yuxiabia hatu kupismaki*”). In the case of the cayman, it should be understood that Antonio is referring here to the *yuxin* intention of revenge by sending illness, not to his capability, when disturbed, of physically attacking and killing careless swimmers or drunken travellers.

c. Animals who take revenge

Animals characterised as possessing a *yuxin* with the capacity to take revenge without using the body, belong to a class of beings with a double identity, that is, they are beings with a double. And it is only beings with a double who are said to ‘have’

yuxin. That these beings are able to take revenge on humans means that they become of a kind with humans. Revenge implies agency and intentionality, characteristics of human action. In this way, what was or seemed to be mere passive game can transform into a real and dangerous enemy.

The potential for revenge in certain animals, through the infliction of illness on close relatives of the offender, is revealed to human consciousness through their appearance in human form in dreams and visions. As we saw above, the opposite is not the case: agency and intentionality do not necessarily imply the taking of revenge through the sending of illness. What makes the cayman and tortoise have a strong *yuxin*, despite the fact that their *yuxin* does not take revenge, is the fact that there are myths about them, they have a voice and song, and they have a proper name. All these point to their humanity at another level of reality. Thus, it is not only a place in the chain of predation, but also the capacity for communication that accounts for the classification of animals as humans, those with a strong *yuxin*.

The native explanation for the anthropomorphic appearance of animals in dreams and visions is that they are human beings at the other side of reality. At the other side of reality, the mythic past is brought back to life through the nightly activities of *yuxin* (animated images). These animals and plants are classified as humans, "have *yuxin*", that is equals having *yuxin* agency. I suggest that, in this context, to have *yuxin* should be understood as to have "human *yuxin*". The human double is a *yuxin* with human agency and consciousness, who has the capacity to assume human form and language when perceived by the human senses at the other side of reality. In this world of images, both the perceiver and the perceived find themselves in a disembodied state of being.

An important factor in the classification of these beings who were humans in mythic time, is whether they once were *huni kuin*, kinspeople, or enemies of the *huni kuin*. When addressed in ritual language, the former will be called by kinship terms, while the latter will be called *txai*, brother-in-law. For example, if a cairara monkey approached, one could say "Look there! *Kakantaxu Bane*. That villain of a brother-in-law is coming!" (*Uinwe! Kakantaxu Bane. Txai itxakanika huai!*) In mythic time, these monkeys were enemies of the Cashinahua, called the *Xumani*. In its monkey

version of this time, the only way left to the *Xumani* tribe to take revenge on humans was by sending illness. The burning of body hair and skin of these monkeys has a strong smell that provokes dizziness (*nixun*, the same *nixun* as the tree *yuxibu* provoke), headache and possible illness. The meat of these monkeys should not be eaten by weak persons.

The majority of edible game belongs to the category of “*yuinaka huni kuinki*”, “game with the quality of a truly human being”, and can be classified on the basis of its name as kin or affine. From this follows that what is edible, good food, is fundamentally of the same kind as the human eater. This is the case for all monkeys (with the exception of those monkeys that are active by night instead of by day), and for most large land and water animals. All of these animals have personal names and myths that tell their own particular story of how they were once humans who transformed themselves, in the majority of the cases voluntarily because of some distress of the social order, into animals. Other myths tell of them being animals that suddenly present themselves in human form in order to teach or marry humans, and still another collection of myths tells of their interactions with other humanised animals. In these latter myths the protagonists are neither totally animal, because they talk and think like humans, nor totally human, because they never lose the bodily and related behavioural characteristics proper to their species.

It is not because meat is edible, good food, belonging to the class of “real” meat (*yuinaka kuin*)²³ that it is innocuous. Thus the capuchin monkey (*xinu*) and the spider monkey (*isu*) are terribly revengeful, although their meat is considered to be completely ‘healthy’ (*kuin*). The same happens with the tapir (*awa*), peccary (*yawa*), deer (*txaxu*) and agouti (*mari*). All these animals, and less valued game, send their

²³ See Kensinger (1975) and Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982), for the Cashinahua of Peru, on the classification of game, things and beings following the quadruple classification scheme composed of overlapping pairs *kuin/kuinma* (real or proper or belonging to the sphere of self/not real or not proper, not belonging to the sphere of self) and *bemakia/kayabi* (totally improper/good). Some food cannot fall under the category of totally proper and real (*kuin*) food, for example, but it can still be perfectly edible in most cases for most people. In this case, the food is *kuinma*, not *kuin*, but is still good and somehow proper, *kayabi*. *Bemakia* is found at the extreme end of the scale of impropriety, and in the case of food means it is inedible.

illnesses in dreams. While asleep, the baby or child whose parents ate a certain animal during pregnancy, temporarily “becomes” what they call a child of the animal sending illness. Thus the nightly convulsions and spasms that seize the victim are called *yawa bake*, peccary child, *xinu bake*, capuchin monkey child, or *amen bake*, capybara child, to cite only the most common and violent ones.

d. Illness as a process of “othering”

The diagnosis of illness is made by observing the grimaces and bodily gestures of the unconscious victim, but also by taking into account the history of the child. It may be that parents have neglected food taboos and they try to remember what it was that they had eaten; small incidents involving the child are remembered, such as frightening encounters or a dream; and finally, different herbal treatments are tried out. If a treatment does not work, the possibility of another agent causing the illness is considered.

I followed the case of young six year old Philomena, who had started to suffer from what seemed to me to be epileptic attacks six months before my arrival. The first hypothesis, given to me by her parents, was that *kuxuka*, the dolphin, transformed into a handsome man and had tried to abduct her when she was alone by the river. She fell in the water and almost drowned, but was saved by her father. That night she had her first fit. Eye drops, baths and smoking, all of which were deployed to ward off *kuxuka*, did not help however, and having observed several of the girl’s fits, the herbal doctor, Augusto, decided that the problem was “peccary child”. Antonio, who was middle-aged but still learning the art of healing with Augusto (his adoptive father and brother-in-law), described to me the phenomenology of the peccary child as follows:

“The peccary child bites its tongue and pushes us violently away, striking out randomly. Aah!, aai!, it screams, foaming at the mouth and trembling. She caught this illness because her parents ate peccary while her mother was pregnant or maybe when she was suckling.” (Antonio Pinheiro)

Augusto prepared a mixture of ten plants, all of which had the name of a part of the peccary’s body (peccary hair, skin, testicles, ears etc.) and told the parents to wash their child with it at night and in the morning. The problem eased and after several weeks the parents left the herbal doctor’s house and returned to their village. A month

later however, the problem started again. Two possibilities were proposed: Either the illness was not provoked by the peccary but by some other animal causing similar grimaces and spasms, or the parents were not obeying the prescriptions of sexual continence and fasting. Augusto was convinced that the parents had not kept the food and sex taboos during pregnancy or suckling, but he was equally sure that they were not able to keep the proper taboos during this time either. Only when certain that they were keeping to their fast, would he be able to cure the illness and exclude the other, more dangerous possibility of it being a capybara child “The capybara child’s teeth chatter, *xenx xenx*, they bite. Without medicine you die.” (*Amen bakeirã hawen xeta xenx xenx amiski hawen mestekinã dauuma mawamiski*) (Antonio Pinheiro).

The naming of the illness, such as peccary child, capybara child etc., as well as the diagnosis through observation of the bodily movements of the child, who is unconscious and possessed by the illness causing agent, suggest strong evidence for exploring an interpretation of illness as a dangerous and uncontrolled process of othering. The body mimics its invader in such a way that its human existence is put in danger. The *yuxin* could be taken away by the peccary to cause the body to die, or the whole person might disappear, as seems to have happened to several youngsters in the villages of Peru who, I was told, got lost in the forest during their becoming transformed into wild animals, and they never were seen again. Sad or angry people, unsatisfied with their relationship with close kin or spouses, are said to be prone to lend an ear to *yuxin* callings at night, and then disappear as they ‘sleep walk’ into the forest.

e. Yuxin Animals

Animals belonging to the category of “truly human beings” are still distinguished from other more dangerous animals who instead of ‘having’ *yuxin*, are said to ‘be’ *yuxin*, notwithstanding their obvious bodily or embodied existence. Their meat is poisonous and their cries predict future events, mostly death. One of the factors that makes for the distinction between normal and abnormal *yuxin* animals, is whether they are active during the day or during the night. Most animals active during the night are said to be *yuxin* animals, although there are exceptions. As we have seen, the tapir

and paca are edible, notwithstanding the fact that they are active at night. Although their meat is not poisonous, they do have the power to cause illness and death.

The ordering of time following the rhythmic alternation of day and night, light and darkness, bodily activity and *yuxin* activity, is at the root of Cashinahua cosmogonic dualism and those animals who transgress these boundaries, crying, singing or moving around at night instead of sleeping, are considered to be dangerous. They are mediators between two sides of reality that are normally kept separate for the sake of this worldly order and a healthy life.

Those who mediate between and belong to both sides at the same time are messengers or diviners (*duai*). Thus the *kuntxu maka*, "a rat that walks around at night" (*mexumedan kaimiski*) crying "*kuntxu! kuntxu!*" is a *yuxin* rat: "he prepares for you the pathway of the sky" (*mia nai bai waikiki*, Augusto Feitosa). This means that to hear his cry is a bad omen. And to hear the piercing scream of the owl, *pupu yuxin*, is a sign of the impending death of a close relative. The owl is said to be definitely more *yuxin* than body.

Birds in general, and to a lesser degree monkeys that live high in the trees occupy on the whole their own unique class somewhere along the 'human' and *yuxin* animals pole. High flying birds, in particular, are considered to be mediators between the sky and the earth, and thus also between life and death. Their cries and songs can announce the death both of people and of peccary. If the harpy eagle (*nawa tete*) predicts the impending death of humans, and the macaw (*xawã*) that of both male village leaders (*xanen ibu*) and female masters of design (*ainbu keneya*), other birds, such as the black bird (*bunta*), the woodpecker (*bui*), and the toucan (*xuke*), as well as the capuchin and spider monkeys, announce the killing of peccaries ("*yawa duaimiski*"). These songs of birds and monkeys are said to be a ritual wailing for the impending death of their kinspeople, the peccaries. High flying birds not only foresee death but also function as weather forecasters. A swarm of *piriquitos* (*pitsu*) is said to call the sun, while the highflying vulture drives the clouds away with its smell.

Other examples of *yuxin* animals are those animals who change form during their life, such as the *yuxin pudu*, the caterpillar which has the power to transform itself in a butterfly ("*xena bepukudu damimiski*", Antonio Pinheiro). I witnessed the

frightened reaction of a young pregnant woman, Laura Feitosa, who screamed upon seeing a caterpillar in her manioc garden. She killed the caterpillar while her older sisters giggled at the uncontrolled behaviour of their younger sister. They none the less confirmed the appropriateness of our hasty departure from the place. Laura assured me that the caterpillar could kill a person, although it is not poisonous. If you see the caterpillar in your garden, she explained to me, you run a great risk that you dream that night of its *yuxin* making love to you. Pregnant women seemed somehow to be under greater risk in the face of the transformative powers of this *yuxin* animal than other women. This can be due to the vulnerability and malleability of the still unformed or unfinished foetus. Any *yuxin* intervention, such as the sexual contact of pregnant women with *yuxin*, can lead to the deformation of the child. Children born with physical defects are therefore called *yuxin bake* or *yuxin child*²⁴.

Another outstanding boundary-crossing animal with transformative powers is obviously the frog. “Tadpoles transform themselves into frogs” (*Tukudu xakada damikainmis*). In addition to their power of bodily transformation during their lifetime and the capacity to move and live both on the land and in the water, several types of frogs have poisonous secretions on their skins and others have cries capable of seducing and abducting people to the other world. Thus the whole class of frogs is considered to be within the category of *yuxin* animals.

Some frogs, however, are considered to be so dangerous that Augusto classified them, not as ‘being’ *yuxibu*, because *yuxibu* are said not to belong to this world and not to have a body (see below for further explanation of this distinction), but as ‘having’ *yuxibu* (*yuxibu hayaki*). This means that they have transformative powers and that, although they can assume the form of a body, their abode is really elsewhere. They are the messengers of the real *yuxibu*. He mentioned the *toa*, *txaxux*, *panu* and *ixtinka*, all

²⁴ Also among the Wayana-Apalai (Van Velthem, 1995) and the Pirahã (Gonçalves, 1995), the caterpillar expresses the powers of transformation of beings. Thus the Pirahã use the image of the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly to explain the way in which a new God, *Abaisi*, is born, while the Wayana-Apalai chose the little animal as the epitome of the predatory behaviour that characterises all powerful beings. In this last vision the caterpillar becomes a voracious monster in miniature, an earthly image of the predatory capacities of the monstrous beings inhabiting the sky and water worlds.

frogs with cries capable of abduction. The most dangerous amongst them is the *tōa* whose cry at nightfall is especially loud and frightening.

At nightfall nobody should walk around alone because this is the time where the two sides of reality meet. Women and children never return from the garden or the river at twilight, but always well ahead of that time, and men rarely do so. If men have to leave at night, for example to try to kill a cayman seen in the river, to avoid twilight they will come back at noon, have a meal at nightfall, and leave again only when it is already totally dark.

f. The Snake

The paradigm of crossing boundaries is the boa constrictor, *Yube Xeni*, an animal able to live on the earth, in the high branches of big trees, in holes, and in the water. The Cashinahua consider the boa constrictor, *manã dunu*, and the anaconda, *hene dunu*, to be species of the same type. The fact that one of them lives on the earth and the other in the water is considered to be due to a difference in age and size and not to a species difference or a difference in inherent quality. That the snake in its varied manifestations is a key concept in Cashinahua thought will be demonstrated throughout this study, but let us start with the following quotes.

“It is like this. Say you want to copy a map. There are several rivers and several streams passing. You keep the drawing of this map. The same happens with the snake. There are many different kinds of snakes. There are the poisonous ones, those who kill people. But these snakes also transform themselves also into anacondas, you know? The same happens with the boa. When the snake sees that it is really getting bigger, it goes to the river. There it turns into an anaconda. It stays there and does not leave again. It is there that it produces and does what it wants to do. It does not go out again. You see *Yube Xeni*, the boa constrictor on land because it was killed there. That is why it returns to land. But it actually lives under the water, where it has its city, under the water. You know the tapir was also transformed into a water snake, and that is the story of *ayahuasca*. The man followed him and thus also became transformed into *Yube*.” (Edivaldo Rodrigues, leader of the village of Moema)

“On the slope, where the bank of the river is high, there are holes where the snake lives. The father (*ibu*) never leaves. He is unable to move because he is too heavy. He sends his children. He is the chief, a real chief. Like the government. It is enchanted. Chickens and dogs sing here on the slope. This is a very dangerous place where your canoe can be drowned in a whirlpool. When we pass this ‘still water’ (*remanso*) we are always afraid.” (Antonio Pinheiro, from Nova Aliança)

“Before, in old times, the *xanen ibu*, chief of snakes, was *Besan (salamanta)*, a big snake, very old. He no longer has any power because he passed it all onto *Yube* (boa constrictor). The same happened to the tortoise. It used to have power but now only *Yube* has it. Likewise for the tapir. The *cutiara* (big rat) passed everything to the tapir. It is the other generation of the world, as Jesus was to Moses, that is how it happened.” (Agostinho Manduca, from the Jordão river)

The boa is killed in private rituals by both men and women with the intention of speaking to its *yuxin* at the moment of its death, when the *yuxin* escapes the body. It is only at the moment of its death, or, more correctly, disembodying (because the boa, due to its capacity to change skin (a metaphor for changing body) is considered to be one of the few beings in this world that never really dies), that the *yuxin* of the boa will hear the secret prayer of its killer. The boa, however, is more than a ‘*yuxin* animal’ with ‘spiritualised’ matter or inedible flesh.

As one of the manifestations of the primordial shaman *Yube*, Master of the water world, with its various other manifestations in the form of the moon, the rainbow and the cosmic snake, the boa is not only an animal with *yuxin* but also has *yuxibu* (power to transform the surrounding world). The boa stands in a direct metonymic relation to this basic cosmogonic principle, that, in combination with *Inka*, the Master of the sky world, is responsible for the still ongoing creation of the world. *Yube, ibu* (creator, parent, Master, owner) of the water world, is the manifestation of the transformational, demiurgical power of *yuxinity*, the quality of *yuxin* inhabiting the world of embodied forms and disembodied images.

One of the water snakes, which is especially colourful and beautifully designed, is called *Inu munu bena*. Another darker one, but also with patterns on its skin is called *inu dunu*, the jaguar snake (Augusto Feitosa). The name, *inu dunu*, joins the complementary images of the jaguar, representative of the *Inka*, Master of the sky world, with the snake, Master of the water world. The quality uniting the jaguar and the boa is their patterned design.

The ‘real’ (or prototypical) water snake, which is much bigger than the boa and never leaves the water, is said to, originally, not have had any design. Water snakes with design are those that move between water and land. Design expresses the

knowledge and power of *Yube Xeni* (the old, fat boa) and is a result of its mediating function. When large, this boa receives the proper name *Badi Exeke*, and when small *Badi Sidika*. In these names we recognise the element sun (*badi*); it is sunlight that reveals its design. It is the boa that has been killed on land, rests high in the trees and puts its eggs in hollow trunks, that teaches humankind and gives people his knowledge through his body, heart, tongue and eyes. Its flesh is the only meat ever consumed raw by the Cashinahua²⁵. The specific context of this ritual consumption will be explained further on.

The anaconda is said to be not so generous. "It is the boa that teaches us; the anaconda only sends us dizziness." (Paulo Lopes). This is why *Yube* (the Boa) is called the biggest of all shamans, because he is a messenger, never restricted to one world, always travelling from the water world to the land and back, travelling and changing skin all the time, and transforming himself and the world around him.

Another manifestation of the linking and transformational quality of the Master of Waters, with his capacity to bridge complementary and normally separated domains, is a class of land snakes that are said to have once been birds. The signs of their previous identity are retained in the colour and patterns of their skin. These snakes are the *pitsu dunu*, *piriquito* snake, *kana dunu*, macaw snake, *bawadun*, parrot snake, and *xuke dunu*, toucan snake. A characteristic that unites these transformed birds is their capacity to speak (*hantxaki*) and to imitate the voices of other beings. This mimicking, creative agency is a strong indicator of "humanity" and is linked to "yuxinity".

²⁵ Erikson (1986: 195), however, mentions the ritual consumption by the Cashinahua of uncooked jaguar flesh in Peru. This ritual consumption occurs in the context of shamanic initiation (personal communication from Deshayes). It might be clarifying to link this information to the observation made in note 7. If, for the Peruvian Cashinahua, the *imu* (jaguar) moiety is linked to the interior ("our flesh") as the *dua* moiety (linked to the snake) is for the Brazilian Cashinahua, the apparent inversion can be shown to obey the same logic of consuming only that which is related or that which one wants to be related. But one should not forget that even if snake and jaguar can respectively be considered to be linked to the moiety defining the pole of self, they are first and foremost enemies. These enemies are then incorporated following the all-embracing 'cannibalistic' mode of the Amerindian ethos.

g. Yuxibu, disembodied beings of the other world

The multiple manifestations of the “snake principle” bring us to the difficult question of the distinction between *yuxin* and *yuxibu*. For a long time I was puzzled by this question, because these terms seemed to me to be used interchangeably. *-Bu*, as we saw above, is a pluraliser or magnifier, and therefore, along with other researchers of Cashinahua culture²⁶, I thought the word meant a collectivity of *yuxin* or a giant and powerful version of *yuxin*. Up to a certain point this reading still holds and is helpful in the attempt to organise the multiple and bewildering world of types of *yuxin*, and the sometimes apparently undifferentiated use of the term *yuxin* and *yuxibu* when referring to, for example, *yuxin* inhabiting huge trees or *yuxin* animals that abduct people. But the relationship between the two terms is more complex than that. Two clarifying descriptions of a difference more fundamental than one of degree in size and power, and less simple than the one-to-one translation (monster, devil) found in Capistrano de Abreu (1941), were given to me; one by Paulo Lopes, a young school teacher from Nova Aliança, the other by Agostinho Manduca, a much travelled Cashinahua of the Jordão river who I met in the city of Rio Branco.

“*Yuxin* has the power to become something else. If I were talking to you and suddenly became something else, I would be a *yuxin*. *Yuxibu* is a miracle. You are hungry and I am *yuxibu*. I give you food on the spot.” (Paulo Lopes Silva)

Following this first definition, we understand that what distinguishes both *yuxin* beings is the extension of their agency or creative power. While the first can transform himself before the eyes of the beholder, a capacity of disembodied *yuxin* as well as of animals and plants with a double, the second can do more. As a demiurge, creator, he can transform not only himself but also his environment, he can make things “as if by miracle”, out of nothing. The next quote gives us more information:

²⁶ The anthropologist Terri Aquino was the first person to call my attention to a possible difference between the two terms (personal communication). Another reference to the different quality of *yuxibu* can be found in the transcriptions made by Capistrano de Abreu (1941: 423) during the first decade of this century: “The *yuxibu* live in large lakes. They cultivate large amounts of vegetables. But the people do not go there to harvest because the *yuxibu* eat people.” Capistrano translates *yuxibu* as “devil”. McCallum also mentions *yuxibu* beings in 1996.

“The *yuxin* are beings. I mean, all beings have *yuxin*. But the *yuxibu* were never animals or people; they live in trees and in the water. There they have their family, their village, and their house. They feed on the persons of the earth, on their urine and their sweat. But they have to go back to their houses under the water and in the trees. It is the wind and the rain that brings them. Sometimes they travel very far away and they move very quickly. The earth is alive. That is so because of the *yuxibu* who live in it. *Yuxibu* is always from the other world, (the world) of *yuxibu* that nobody sees. The difference between *yuxibu* and *yuxin* is like the difference between the visible and the invisible.

The *yuxibu* kill the *yuxin* of the game. We kill the game, while the *yuxin* (of the game) is left for the *yuxibu* to kill. Those who kill *yuxin* themselves become transformed into *yuxibu*; we, people, only really kill flesh (*nami*). *Yuxibu* never becomes extinct, it always transforms itself.” (Agostinho Manduca).

The first part of this quote highlights the fundamental distinction in Cashinahua ontology between visibility and invisibility. This basic distinction orders the whole universe, both in spatial and temporal terms. The world as it exists today came into being with the separation of day and night and their complementary and opposed qualities of visibility and invisibility. This distinction is linked to another fundamental complementary opposition, that of embodied and disembodied form. Daytime is the realm of visibility of bodies (*yuda*), nighttime that of the revelation or visualisation of images and free-floating *yuxin*. That “the *yuxibu* were never animals or people”, “move very quickly” and are “always from the other world”, points towards their complete otherness in comparison to thisworldly beings, humans, animals and plants. While the former, *yuxibu*, are free, light and quick, the latter, *yuxin*, are characterised by movements limited by their belonging to heavy bodies, shapes fixed by the inertia of matter.

Yuxibu live their hidden lives under the water, in the trees, in the earth and in the sky (although this last place of residence has been omitted by Agostinho in this quote). Their embodied existence is not of this world and the Cashinahua have only access to them when visualising them in the darkness of the night through experienced dreaming or with the help of the hallucinogenic brew, *ayahuasca*. It is only the *yuxin* of humans, and not their bodies in a waking state, that have access to these pure *yuxibu* beings. Skilful dreaming is “*nixi pae keska*”, “similar to the *ayahuasca* visionary experience”, a reason why older people do not need the brew to access the invisible

world of *yuxibu*.

When teaching me about the topic, the song leader would wake me up in the middle of the night, at intervals of one or two hours and describe to us his dreams in songs. These songs tell about visits to the villages (*mae*) of the *yuxibu*. Dream songs are called *yamai* and are mixed with war songs (also called *yamai*). Both the dream and the war songs are the most melodic of all and, though this is a subjective personal impression, are the most emotionally charged songs I ever heard among the Cashinahua. The villages which Augusto and his wife Alcina visited in their dreams were located under water, as well as in the sky. In the sky they visited the houses of the moon and the stars, while under water the villages belonged to the anacondas and cayman. But the sky world also has its heavenly version of all beings living on the earth and in the water. Thus there are the *nai awa*, the heavenly tapir, whose tracks can be seen in the milky way, and the *nai nexuã*, the heavenly water turtle, laying its heavenly eggs in the summer, a phenomenon visible in the constellation of the stars around August, announcing the turtle eggs soon to be found on the beaches of large rivers below (on this earth).

It is only the *yuxin* of humans and not their flesh that the *yuxibu* are eager to consume. But if, as we learn from the quote, “they feed on the persons of the earth, on their urine and their sweat”, it becomes difficult to distinguish between *yuxin* and matter. Is urine or sweat *yuxin* or matter?²⁷ The paradox can be overcome if we consider that *yuxin* only comes into active being when separated from and acting independently of the body, following the logic of the double. In the same way, bodily secretions, especially those in liquid form, are or contain a high degree of *yuxin*. It is through their sweat, urine and faeces, that human beings feed the earth, the waters and their *yuxibu* inhabitants.

These eating habits of the *yuxibu* (otherworldly beings) can be seen to mark

²⁷ Also among the Piaroa, excessive fertility, belonging to the power of a person's thoughts, are concentrated in one's bodily excretions (Overing, 1986a, 1996). Among the Embera, who defecate in the river, humans are understood to thus feed the fish who will in turn feed them. Excrements are therefore explicitly associated with food and express the native ontological principle of mutual cosmic interdependence (Isacsson, 1993).

their difference with their smaller familiars, the *yuxin*. If both *yuxin* and *yuxibu* eat only *yuxin* (vital essence), they do not seem to do it in the same way. The quote above suggests that the eating habits of the *yuxibu* are harmless to the bodies of humans. They represent the circulation of vital essences between the different domains of the world. But there are exceptions: attributed to the *yuxibu* called monsters or devils. These monsters, like other *yuxibu*, are from the other world (that is a world where no human beings live), but their dwelling places are not so far away. They live in big trees and are said to be cannibals. Thus *Nibu baka piana* (a possible translation of this name might be: fish eating scorpion, or shadow eating scorpion), also called *nixun yuxibu*, a black hairy monster living in the lupuna tree, is said to darken the eyes of passers-by by sending *nixun*, dizziness.

h. Living with a yuxin being

The *yuxin*, on the other hand, used to have bodies and were once were of 'this' world. This is why they can be said to be jealous of the body of humans or to remain dependent on and desirous of it. When a human being lives in uncontrolled close contact with a *yuxin*, he or she becomes thin. This is explained by the fact that the *yuxin* living with or within the person eats with that person. By sucking out the *yuxin* of the person's food, little of nutritive value is left for its host and thus the host slowly fades away. Skinniness is synonymous with illness.

Another result of uncontrolled conviviality with foreign *yuxin* is the eruption of ulcers (*txuxix*, *peréba*) on the skin of the *yuxian* (the one who has surrendered to *yuxin*). These eruptions are not due to the above mentioned malnutrition that results from the insatiability of the guest/parasite, but to the excessive intake by the host of substances that do not belong to the category of food. The *yuxin* have sex with humans through the mouth. The sexual intercourse of a woman living with a *yuxin* was described to me in terms of a gang rape by a collectivity of *yuxin*, familiars of the *yuxin* living with/in the woman²⁸.

²⁸ It is worth noting the context in which I obtained this information. Augusto described to me this repulsive and threatening scene in great detail and with obvious amusement to warn me not

This excessive oral intake of *yuxin* semen, combined with a lack of sufficient intake of real food, leads to loss of health and life force and manifests itself in the disfigurement of the body. The inversion of proper sexual behaviour and eating processes thus slowly transforms the human person into a familiar and victim of the *yuxin* and after a while the sick person becomes unrecognisable. He or she loses consciousness and proper human talk, only eats leaves and flies, which are *yuxin* food, never bathes and is covered in his or her own filth. He goes about dressed in palm leaves and incorrectly applied achiote paint.

This kind of conviviality with *yuxin* needs to be healed by herbal specialists and song leaders. The person can either be treated with herbal drops in the eyes, or by baths and burning leaves. In either case the intention is never again to be caught and seduced by *yuxin*. Or, the decision can be made to take the challenge of initiation and become a shaman. In the latter case the victim, male or female, retreats to their hammock and begins fasting in order to learn how to gain control over a relationship with *yuxin* in a way that can be employed for the wellbeing, health and instruction of the community.

Such a person becomes acquainted with specific *yuxin* and *yuxibu* with whom he or she establishes kinship ties and who will guide the initiate through the *yuxin* world. These new ties also serve as protection from the predatory behaviour of *yuxin*. But cohabitation with *yuxin* always has its price in terms of this-worldly pleasures. The initiate does not eat meat, or sweet things and does not have sex, for as long as he or she is practising.

I have known one practising *yuxian* (shaman), a woman. Delsa, the first of two wives of the leader of Fronteira, became a *yuxian* following a frightening experience in one of the most dangerous places of otherness known to the Cashinahua: the hospital. The story she told me goes as follows. She was in town accompanying her husband while pregnant with her last child. When she was about to deliver, the doctors wanted to operate on her in order to sterilise her. They were acting in accordance with the

to go too far in my inquiry into this field of knowledge. "If you ask too much about *yuxin*", he told me, "the *yuxin* will come to get you!" Then he sent me off to accompany the women of

wishes of her husband. Delsa however, refused vehemently. She said that if she herself no longer wanted to bear children she could use her own methods to achieve this. In Cashinahua society it is women and not men who control fertility.

Thus, with the threat of control being taken from her while in the hospital and about to deliver, Delsa “went crazy”. She screamed and punched, not allowing the doctors get away with sterilisation. During her fit, Delsa also had visions. It seems that the hospital, the place where people go to die, has a big quantity of *yuxin* wandering around. After a certain period of time and later back in the village, Delsa learned to gain control over her visions.

She started first of all to receive the visits and teachings of her deceased father, who had also been a *yuxian* (shaman), and later on she “married” *Yube Xeni* (the snake *yuxin*). From that moment, he now came to make love to her at night. Because of this new *yuxin* husband, Delsa says she no longer has sex with her human husband. One of the signs of her alliance with the world of *yuxin* is her deformed mouth, people say the *yuxin* is eating her mouth away, whilst another sign is her successful healing of fever in small children.

i. Different kinds of *yuxibu*

But let us come back to our discussion of *yuxin* and *yuxibu*. The difference in feeding habits between the two is linked to a difference in places of habitation. For the *yuxibu*, the residences of this-worldly beings (humans and animals) are places to be visited only on hunting expeditions. Their own homes are “far away”, at the other side of reality (the unexplored forest, the depths of the lakes and rivers, the heights of the sky). The *yuxibu* are characterised by quick movements and their visits are always transitory. They feed on bodily secretions or, in the case of monsters, pure *yuxin* extracted from dead bodies. The parasitic *yuxin*, on the other hand, choose the human body as their dwelling place, within which they nourish themselves on human flesh, which is matter imbued with *yuxin*.

The three most powerful *yuxibu* are *ibu* (creator, parent, guardian, owner,

the household who were heading for the garden to fetch sweet manioc and bananas.

master) of the three interconnected levels of this world: water, forest, and sky. The term *ibu* describes a demiurgical quality of creation as well as an ongoing responsibility for that creation, and has therefore a connotation of leadership and also of paternity/maternity. In the social world, the term *ibu* means foremost 'parent', both male and female, and by extension, 'leader'. All the different kinds of leaders of the community are called *ibu*; the male and female head of a village, *xanen ibu* and *xanen ainbu ibu*, the male song leader, *txana ibu*, and the female song leader and Master weaver, *txana ainbu ibu* or *ainbu keneya* (literally 'woman with design'). On the cosmogonic level of the coming into being of the world, the owners and creators of the world are *Yube*/moon, the *ibu* of the water world, *Inka*, the *ibu* of the sky world, and *Ni ibu*, the guardian of forest plants.

Lesser *yuxibu* are the guardians, creators of certain species. Thus the term *yuxibu* is used when the speaker wants stress the fact that he is dealing with masters of collectivities of beings of a kind and not with the *yuxin* of a particular individual plant or animal. In this way cotton can be said to have a *yuxin* and to be human, but its *ibu* is *xapu yuxibu*, an invisible protective entity summoned to heal illnesses. The guardians of a species are giant (*nawa*) versions of the natural occurring animal. A fully fledged *mukaya* (shaman, "the one with the bitter") would, while sitting in his hammock at night, let these female and male owners of species, *yawa yuxibu*, *awa yuxibu* etc., come and present themselves to the audience, speaking through his mouth (or, as some say, speaking in his neck). Each of these entities has a proper name, his own song and a specific voice.

The water world is the place *par excellence* of *yuxibu* procreation. Among the water *yuxibu* we have a huge fish (*peixe boi*, *bakawã*), the dolphin (*kuxuka*), the cayman (*kape*) and the anaconda (*dunuã*). The *bakawã* lives where the river bank is high and the water deep. Its flesh is said, by the Cashinahua to be mixed. "It has real flesh and also the flesh of fish, it has the flesh of deer, peccary and tapir" (Antonio Pinheiro). If a woman eats this 'fish' when expecting twins it causes the body of the children to be born with a brilliant shine. The brilliance is a sign of belonging to another world and the child dies immediately after birth (*yuda txaxa kaini mawamis*, Alcina Pinheiro).

We have already encountered the dolphin, *kuxuka*, in Philomena's case. This being is held responsible for all deaths by drowning. Since everyone swims well, people mostly only drown when drunk or when they lose their senses. They fall unconscious and *kuxuka* is said to appear to them as a handsome man who calls to them softly, thus abducting his victims into the water world. The guardian of the cayman, *kape yuxibu*, called *Taratxamani*, is known and invoked for his unshakeable health and strength, and people try to capture his luck and protection against snake bites by using collars made of cayman teeth. These collars are called the owner's *dau*. *Dau* is a polysemic concept capable of signifying poison, medicine, charm and ornament all at once, with differences in emphasis depending on the context of use.

Leaving the water world and coming back to land, we find another *yuxibu* with the capacity to jump between species, changing its skin, that is body, at will: the squirrel, *kapa yuxibu*, guardian (creator) of cultivated plants. In myth it is told and in ritual song remembered, how this *yuxibu*, after having given the art of gardening to humankind, freeing them from the miserable state of having to cook and eat only earth, took the shape of a bat, *kaxi*, to take revenge on his unfaithful human wife and her lover.

The earthly manifestation of this *yuxibu* is the vampire bat, *nawa kaxi*, who used to be feared for sucking blood and cutting pieces of skin from people's noses and toes before the introduction of mosquito nets, when the Cashinahua still used to live in large longhouses at the headwaters of the rivers. The bat is said to be able to "plant *muka*", the bitter substance that transforms a person into a shaman, into the heart of a person ("*kaxin mikin muka mistukin*", Augusto Feitosa and Antonio Pinheiro). There the shamanic bitter substance will grow until its *yuxin* is ripe and whistles²⁹. From that

²⁹ The last practising *mukaya* (shaman) of this kind died in Conta more than ten years ago. His son is head of the village Conta, situated just across the border in Peru. He is an acknowledged *ayahuasca* singer with whom I had the opportunity to work only for a few days during his visit to his kin on the Brazilian side of the border. In conversations with him and other people who have known this famous *mukaya* while they were living in Peru, two distinctive features were stressed over and over again, features absent in healers today. These are the fact that the *mukaya* was unconscious when the *yuxin* came to speak through his mouth and that he had the power to suck out *duri*, the shamanic substance of the Kulina.

moment the shaman can use this bitter substance to attack his victims. The *yuxibu*, guardian of the bat sets a trap for its victim on a hunting trail, transforming the hunter into game.

“The bat will give you *pae*, his power. When you fall into the trap, he can transform you into a rat, in *kuntxu maka*, the *yuxin* rat who wanders around at night. While you are lying down, he opens your mouth. He waits for you to fall, ready to hit you with his club. You arrive and he hits you. You fall with blood in your mouth. You don't say anything any more. Maybe you will die there. You lay down, dead, and the *yuxibu* calls out, *haaa!*, for the others to come and look. Your kinspeople arrive and say that you are already dead and that the *yuxin* are already gone. They go to tell their kin. There you lie dead. They shake you to wake you up. They call you. They call you again and you start to wake up. Now you are already awake.

His kinspeople always cry. But he is already awake and the *yuxin* starts to sing *xei xei xei xei*. It is *yuxin* who sings *xei xei* inside his heart. The bat *yuxibu* always plants *muka* (the bitter shamanic substance) in the heart of his victim. He puts the *xeuxeu* singing *yuxin* inside, he puts the *muka*, the bitterness inside. Now it is growing already. While the *yuxian*, the one with *yuxin*, is sleeping, his *yuxin* always sings *xeuxeu*. And thus they speak to this *yuxin*, while he is sleeping. “You, who are you?” “Me? I am myself”, says the *yuxin*. “Father, is it you?” “It's me”, he says. “How are you?” “I am looking after you, son, so you won't become ill, be careful.” You can ask anything you want. You can ask whether visitors from far away will be arriving soon or if some game will be brought back from a hunting expedition next day. He will tell you. “You will kill deer”, “tomorrow you will kill a deer.” Thus they went hunting in the old days. You talk to them all, to all the *yuxin*. The *mukaya*, when he wakes up, never remembers anything.” (Antonio Pinheiro)

Here again we see how closely aligned initiation and illness are in native classification of states of being. The introduction of doses of ‘*yuxininty*’ can cause the victim to fade away and lose its own *yuxin*, but it can also signify the beginning of the growth of a new force inside the body, a power that, once ripe and fullgrown like a tree, will whistle to make its voice heard and can then be used by the fullgrown *mukaya* to heal or cause illness³⁰. Thus the body and power of the shaman are the

³⁰ Deshayes (in *Paroles Chassées*, 1992: 95-106) makes an interesting parallel between the ‘magic’ substance *yupa* that enters the hunter's body and causes him to become *yupa* (deaf for the sounds of the forest, becoming suddenly unable to decipher the signs of presence of game) and the substance of *muka* which also alters the hunter's hearing capacity, transforming animal cries into intelligible talk. At first, the result is the same, both men lose their capacity of hunter and provider. And both will normally try to get cured through fasting and herbal treatment. But if *yupa* makes a man deaf for the forest and as a result socially mute, *muka* does more. In the case of *muka* the loss of one capability (that of killing) is compensated by the gain of another:

result of an unsuccessful predation. The shaman is a warrior who conquered the enemy on a battlefield represented by his own body. The intrusive agents, once controlled, become his allies and, although obeying certain rules prescribed by the world and sensitivities of the *yuxin* beings, it is nonetheless the shaman who controls the interaction, using their power for his ends³¹.

j. The culinary code

Coming back to Agostinho's quote, we can see two defining factors that differentiate the condition of *yuxin* from the one of *yuxibu*. The first difference was the distinction between the visible and invisible, of this world and of the other world, a distinction linked to their dwelling place and to their linkage or not to a body. *Yuxibu* were never animals or humans, this means they never had their kind of bodies, while *yuxin* were or do. The second defining factor was that who you are depends on what you eat (an insight that goes back to Lévi-Strauss' culinary code in the *Mythologiques*).

This is a point that needs further elaboration. It is a classificational device that is perspectival in the sense that it is the predatory intention that determines how a being is to be perceived, as game or not. Thus, the difference between *yuxin* and *yuxibu* is determined, not only by the changeable quality of the visibility and invisibility of a being, but also by what they eat. In Agostinho's words "those who eat *yuxin* become *yuxibu*." We have seen, though, that *yuxin* (immaterial beings) also eat *yuxin* (vital essence). But the *yuxin* eaten by *yuxin* is *yuxin* that has not yet been separated from the body, flesh or vegetable it animates. The eating habits of *yuxin* and humans are symbiotic. Some *yuxin* also eat food never eaten by humans, such as flies and leaves, which is *yuxin* food. So does the *yuxian*, a human being on his way to becoming a *yuxin*. *Yuxibu* never eat *yuxin* (vital essence) that is still linked to its body,

that of talking to the strangers (*nawa*) of the forest: animals and *yuxin*. And this capability can be put to use for the well-being of the community when negotiation with the *yuxin* world is needed (for healing humans and attracting game).

³¹ The same logic of unsuccessful predation turned into creative power for the intended victim can be found in the Pirahã theory of conception. When a woman is frightened by some unexpected natural event assaulting her with surprise, she conceives. Thus, if a frightening event does not kill or hurt the intended victim, it will nonetheless not fail to cause a profound

nor do they eat flies or leaves. *Yuxibu*, superlative of *yuxin*, eats only pure *yuxin*, that is, the *yuxin* of secretions of a living body or *yuxin* escaping from a dead body.

It may appear that in this way hunting territories of thisworldly and otherworldly beings are clearly divided, but that is not totally the case. The hunting territories overlap, and the risk of crossing boundaries and switching viewpoints represents the real danger for the hunter who might become lost and transform into “other”, as animal and game for the *yuxibu* and *yuxin*. As the hunter pursues his game, intent only on the game’s meat, the *yuxibu* are pursuing their game, both the hunter’s *yuxin* and the game’s *yuxin* (Cf. Keifenheim & Deshayes, 1982). The overlapping of hunting activities occurs when humans are hunting birds to obtain feathers.

When a macaw is shot, for example, great care is taken not to let the bird fall on the ground. The bird must be caught when still in the air, in the process of falling down (in the process of the disembodiment of its *yuxin*). Otherwise the *yuxin* of the feather would be lost. “Its owner would take ‘it’ away and the feather would thus become fragile and lose all resistance” (Antonio Pinheiro). The owner or guardian who will take the *yuxin* away is *xawã yuxibu*, the guardian of macaws. Thus we can see that, when hunting birds for feathers, *yuxibu* and humans are competing over the same substance³².

As we saw above, some animals are said not only to have a strong *yuxin*, but to be more, not just an animal, nor a human disguised in animal form, and not even a *yuxin* animal with dangerous song and poisonous meat, but a real *yuxibu*. In Agostinho’s words such animals are “not from this world”. To be *yuxibu* means to possess extraordinary transformative powers. These animals can change shape at will and thus be seen not only as animals who are in reality humans, but as beings who are more than human. They are demiurges, masters of transformation. They are *yuxibu* because they are more *yuxin* (agency, potency) than body and thus do not have to be attached to one body that acts in an embodied form in the world. People and animals are more body than *yuxin* because they cannot change their skin at will; they are

transformation: escaping the predatory intention, she conceives a new life (Gonçalves, 1995).

³² See Crocker *Vital Souls* (1985).

confined to their bodily form for their whole life.

Because of their eating habits, bloodsucking animals and predators also have a special status. These animals are sometimes said to “be humans”, that is to have human agency and thought, and sometimes to be *yuxibu*. Thus the mosquito, *bi*, and bloodsucking fly, *xiiu*, are said to be *yuxibu*, named respectively *Taukanixetxantxa* and *Manexetunku*. The *mutuca*, black stinging fly, on the other hand, is a mutation of a human from primordial times, called *Ixan*, whose amorous involvement caused the most dramatic of transformations suffered by humankind in the early times of creation (see chapter four). The sign of potency here is the habit of bloodsucking. Blood is a vehicle of *yuxin* and therefore extremely dangerous³³. Following the logic that you become what you eat, a blood eating being acquires a lot of *yuxin* and approaches the state of a *yuxibu*.

The consumption by men of the uncooked heart and tongue of the boa constrictor and by women of its eyes never occurs in the context of food consumption, but belongs to the sphere of private ritual carried out secretly in the forest. The consumption of blood and uncooked parts of the body of a recently killed boa is undertaken to acquire the qualities of the boa, its knowledge, *xinan*, its powers for hunting, weaving, sorcery and fertility. The consumption of blood is close to the consumption of pure *yuxin*. Considering the fact that the primary purpose of alimentation is not to acquire the qualities of the consumed being (something that is, on the contrary, in most cases avoided through careful preparation and cooking), but to acquire substance, body and force, the consumption of uncooked organs and blood stands out as an activity that does not belong to the category of food consumption. If a human being were to eat, instead of ritually consume, raw flesh, he would not be considered human any more but someone belonging to the category of enemies and wild beasts who consume raw flesh, such as the jaguar, or the cannibal monster *Inka pintsi* (*Inka* hungry for meat). The logic of communion of substance with the boa is of

³³ It is interesting to note in this context that the Cashibo (Peruvian Panoans) consider blood and, by extension, bloodsucking animals to be so dangerous so as to impose a formal prohibition on the killing of the numerous bloodsucking insects that attack them in order to

another order, that of communion of power and knowledge through the sharing of uncooked bodily substances.

Another distinction to make in the culinary code is the distinction between predation and revenge. Humans prey upon herbivores and omnivores, but not upon carnivores, while carnivores can prey upon humans. That which is consumed is eaten for its similarity and not because of its quality of otherness. Within the class of edible food, the soft and tasty meat of the omnivorous peccary is much preferred over the tough meat of herbivorous monkeys. Cooked peccary meat resembles more than any other game the taste of cooked human flesh, an opinion mentioned to me by Augusto, the only Cashinahua with whom I personally spoke about his experience of eating human flesh (an endocannibalistic practice abandoned in the forties). This similarity in taste, texture and quality (because peccaries were not only humans (*huni*) but true humans (*huni kuin*), *nukun yuda* (our body, our flesh)) is one of the reasons why it is such a highly valued and relatively safe food. This example reveals a culinary logic of eating that implies that what one eats will become one's own flesh and that for that reason one should never eat that which is too different. As we will see, the same logic holds for the ancient custom of endocannibalism.

Bloodsucking animals and carnivores can consume human blood. For this reason the attitude of humans towards them is one of defence and revenge instead of direct attack. The relation of humans to jaguars is typically conceived of in terms of enmity, a potential but unrealised affinity, and in myth jaguar stories are related to *Inka* cannibal Gods stories³⁴. Humans will never prey upon these animals in order to eat them, because they are classified as having a strong *yuxin*, too strong and therefore too dangerous to be eaten. The quality of their meat is a consequence of their eating habits. Whereas human beings only consider a meal to be proper when vegetables are mixed with meat (*nai*), these wild cannibals only eat raw unmixed meat. The meat of the vulture is even more dangerous, for his body is made of rotten flesh. Because the

avoid the spilling of blood (Frank, 1983: 68, cited by Erikson, 1986: 196).

³⁴ In a comparative study of Pano myths, Melatti (1985, 1989b) shows how close the themes of the jaguar, the Incas and the possession of metal are interrelated. See also Cofacci (1994) who

process of rotting is one of high fertility and transformation, the meat of an eater of the putrid is imbued with this same quality of mutability, and thus to eat the liver of a vulture is believed to cause death.

completes this comparative effort with data on the Katuquina (Pano).

2.2. *yuxin/yuda* ('soul' and body)

“Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage - whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.”
Nietzsche, Thus spake Zarathustra.

A person is a living, thinking body (*yuda*). The same holds for animals. Meat (*nami*) becomes a body when imbued with 'spirit' or agency (*yuxin*). Or rather, it should be said the other way round. A body is always already a living, growing being from the start. Its origin is *yuxin* made matter, formless liquid hardened and modelled into the solid form of a human body. Female blood is made to coagulate through repeated mixing with semen; thus a *tunku*, ball, foetus is being modelled. This process is seen as a joining of male and female productive capabilities where the woman cooks (*ba*) the baby-to-be in her womb, while the man shapes its form and sustaining structure (*damiwa*). This modelling and cooking is considered to be hard work and when working (*dayaki*) on a child, the couple spends much time together in the hammock and in the forest (see also McCallum, 1989a, on this topic).

a. The gendered process of modelling a new body

Semen and blood are life-giving liquids. Although there does not seem to exist a word that conveys the general idea of liquid, this concept can nonetheless be considered to be an implicit category in Cashinahua thought. Liquid stands for free movement and pure potentiality of form. As water adapts itself to all possible forms and containers, so do blood and semen. As a category of thought, liquid stands for the multiplicity and constant mutability of shapes as well as for the absence of any durable embodied shape, a condition of the primordial water world which has an excess of unfixed *yuxin*. The fluidity of free-floating images of the time before creation is linked to the potentiality of form present in liquid, as well as to the threatening chaos resulting from the absence of any fixing and solidifying force.

For the world to gain embodied form, a proper fixing technique was needed. Cooking provided this method. The real human world gained shape through the introduction of cooking fire (and, on a cosmic level, of light and sun into the cold

world of darkness). This foreign element had to be stolen by the primordial beings from the 'big stingy stranger/enemy' (*yauxi kunawa* on earth, *Inka* in the sky). In this way the actual human world is a synthesis of complementary qualities: heat and cooking fire, belonging to the realm of the sky world are introduced into the dark water world to solidify and transform formless liquids into bodies. Light is introduced into the darkness to reveal its hidden colours and forms.

The gendered contributions to the creation of a new body are not only complementary in processual terms; where the one models and the other cooks; but also in terms of the substance they supply for the fabrication of the new body. This inherent duality in the origin of the body will continue to be reflected in its structure. Semen is vegetable in origin, built up within the young man's body of what was left of the maize soup consumed during a lifetime. This vegetarian substance will build up the bone structure of the new being. The female blood, on the other hand, is produced by meat and will, once coagulated, create the muscles and wrap them in skin.

A quote and a song³⁵ of the fertility ritual, *Katxanawa*, the dance of the hollow tree *tau pustu* (*paxiuba* palm tree), will illustrate that the transformation of vegetable food into semen is to be taken literally. The song is called *bake kenaki*, "to call the baby", and women who listen to this song are expected to become pregnant soon. This song is sung by young and middle-aged men, dancing in a circle along the hollow tree. The rhythm of the dance gradually grows faster and the sound louder as the singers become more aroused (usually with the help of spirit drink made of sugar cane). The song makes the explicit link between the production of semen and the drinking of corn soup, offered by the potential wives to their potential husbands, cross-cousins.

The song starts with corn and goes on with the invocation of soups (*Uma*)³⁶

³⁵ To show how much importance is given to the invoking power of this song, it is worth mentioning the context in which the song was taped. Because of the noise and general hilarity, it was impossible to understand the song taped during the ritual. Milton agreed to sing the song for me, but not without explicitly redefining the frame of performance: "It's all right, I will sing it again. You want to listen to "call a baby". I do not really know how to sing it, you know, but I will sing it to you in the form of a lie."

³⁶ *Uma*, I was told by my informants, is the ritual name for *mabex*, soup. Yet, the ritual singing over *uma* is said to make the soup 'strong', *pae* (*uma pae wakinã*). *Pae* is the term used to

made of all possible kinds of plants, not all of them edible but all of them cultivated in Cashinahua gardens (banana, sweet manioc, papaya, potato, sugar cane, achiote, cotton, chilli, palm and tobacco). Drinks are only made of manioc, sweet banana or corn, and optionally mixed with roasted and ground peanut. The invocation of other imaginary soups is intended to explicitly link human to vegetable fertility. Each invocation of a plant is followed by the phrase “put it into her belly”. A reduced transcription of the song goes like this:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>ho ho ho ho,</i> | ho ho ho ho (3x) |
| <i>Hidikan xankini</i> | putting it into her belly |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>inu banu uma</i> | <i>Banu</i> (name for women of the <i>dua</i> moiety) is making corn soup for <i>imu</i> (name for men of the other <i>imu</i> moiety) |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>nun haki maneni</i> | we are filling her up, inside |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>xeki hewan uma</i> | corn soup |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>name kame kidani</i> | filling her up, it's already turning into a baby |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>Hawen hadã hadanti</i> | fornicating, putting it way inside |

designate the alcoholic, the hallucinogenic, the toxic or the poisonous quality of brews and medicines. It is therefore suggestive to consider the possibility that the *uma* referred to in ritual song might have been fermented. In this case *uma* would mean beer instead of soup. This hypothesis is the more suggestive as we know the importance of strong maize beer in fertility and initiation rituals of other Panoans (as, for example, amongst the Sharanahua, Siskind, 1973; the Matis, Erikson, 1996; the Marubo, Montagner, 1985; the Yaminahua, Townsley, 1988). Beer is also a crucial ritual ingredient for the Cashinahua's closest Arawakan neighbours, the Culina (Pollock, 1985, 1992) and the Kampa (Weiss, 1969). Cashinahua women, however, do not prepare any fermented brew, be it from maize or manioc, and say they have never done so. This is also Kensinger's conviction. When he arrived among the Peruvian Cashinahua in the fifties, they did not prepare any fermented brew whatsoever (personal communication). Yet, nowadays, men do drink cane spirit bought from Brazilian or Peruvian traders during fertility rituals as well as during the initiation rituals. They say they need *xia* (cane) to become in the mood and to have the strength to dance the whole night. Women disapprove of this habit, and refuse to drink, saying they do not want to become Culina. Men under the effect of *pae*, drunkenness, become like *nawa*, the women argue; they become violent, like strangers. The same behaviour has been observed among the Yaminahua by Calavia (1996). Calavia suspects the female refusal to prepare fermented manioc beer to be recent. The author understands this refusal as a break in gender complementariness. A female answer to the failure of men to bring back game as they used to in old days. As we will see in the last chapter, this interpretation does not hold for the Cashinahua.

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>tama hewã uma</i> | soup of peanuts |
| <i>ho ho ho ho</i> | ho ho ho ho |
| <i>Hidikan xankini</i> | putting it into her belly |
| ... | ... |

(Milton Maia, Nova Aliança)

“The seed of peanuts is semen (*Tama bedu hudakin*). Its little ungrounded pieces become faeces, its liquid becomes urine, its *papa*, vegetable semen, its seed always transforms itself. It transforms itself into a real human being, it transforms itself in the womb. Manioc also has a seed (*bedu*). Its *papa*, its semen always transforms itself (*hawen huda damimiski*).” (Abel Nascimento)

Thus, not only do corn and peanuts have seeds, but so has manioc according to the quote. Seed here stands for semen, that which stays in the body and builds up the substance from which the bones of the baby will be built. This substance is built up in the body both of women and of men, although it is only in men that it will produce semen.

“A man needs to drink a lot of corn soup, mixed with peanuts to become strong. When a well-fed child is born, we know already this is so because of the food we eat. A child with bones made of manioc will grow slowly and stay small, whereas a child with bones made of corn will grow quickly and will be strong.” (Edivaldo, head of Moema)

The motif of *xeki xau*, corn cob, is painted with genipa on the forehead of a male baby, six days after birth, while a girl’s forehead is painted with the *xapu hexe*, cotton seed motif. The first design relates to strong bones and the production of semen, while the second refers to health and long life (‘to have a cotton *yuxin*’ means to be healthy and strong), as well as to spinning and menstruation (an aspect that will be dealt with later, when analysing the myth of origin of the moon, *Yube*).

b. The process of conception

In everyday life women are believed only to menstruate for the first time after having had sex. It is sex that causes them to bleed. I remember a young girl, Graça, being put under pressure to marry though she, as well as her mother, felt she was too young for that. Her mother told me that the twelve year old Graça did not even know how to cook yet, nor was she yet able to spin. “So”, I asked Maria Domingos, “why do

you want her to marry?" The answer was, "If she were not ready, she should not have been making love, putting herself at risk of becoming pregnant." "But was she really making love?", I asked. "Yes, she was. If not she wouldn't be bleeding now. I do not want my daughter to be a single mother!"

Contraceptive methods are used to allow girls to marry at an older age. In old times, I was told, girls would never marry before the age of sixteen. Contraceptive measures were used, aiming not only to prevent fertilisation but to prevent the necessary precondition for it, that is the first bleeding. This is why the ritual needs to be performed before the girl's first menses. It involves herbal medicine, three months of fasting and abstinence, as well as the intervention of the *yuxibu* of the boa and of the plant *dade*, a plant said to be as strong as the boa. This ritual, however, also needs to be performed before the girl starts to have sexual intercourse. This explains the mother's irritation. The girl did not wait, thus her menstruation had already started, and now she was doomed, in her mother's eyes to becoming a premature child mother³⁷.

A girl becomes an adult after having given birth to her first child. From that moment she will have a hearth of her own in the maternal household. As long as a young couple remains childless, they are considered to be part of the nuclear family that hosts them, much on the same grounds as unmarried adolescents. Their behaviour is playful and they don't take any initiative or guidance in productive tasks. They will

³⁷ There were other girls however, who were induced to marry at even younger age without this being against the will of their parents. This was the case of ten year old Francisca who married (this means went to live with) the village leader Pancho, already in his fifties. This was a political move, understood as such, but not approved by all, to reinforce the links of alliance between the village leader and the father of the girl in a period of turbulence and village division. The marriage would only last for few months. Pancho's wife did not like the move at all and treated the girl well but with extreme reserve. The girl was the same age as Pancho's daughters and had always been their playmate. As I was staying in their house at the time and watched the children, I could not notice any change in the status or behaviour of the girl other than an enhanced shyness toward Pancho and his wife. The girl was not menstruating yet and I was told that Pancho's role would be to gently and without sexual intercourse prepare her for menstruation. Thus, if there had been good reasons for Graça to marry, as was the case for Francisca, her age might not have been invoked by her mother as a problem. Graça's mother was single and much needed a son-in-law. The man who wanted to marry Graça, however, was a mature man, already in his early thirties, coming from a village far upriver, in Peru. The chance that he would stay in his young wife's and his mother-in-law's village, as he was

help whenever asked to but they have considerably more free time than adults of the same age with children and a household to run.

A young couple will often be seen playing, sexually teasing each other in public. They regularly disappear together to the garden or forest without much disguise or any obvious reason other than to 'work' at the child. People make jokes to cheer on rather than to control the licentious couple. Their situation differs much from other, younger or older couples who are so discrete that they are never seen to touch each other in public, the former because their *liaison* is secret, the latter because they themselves and others are already so used to the relation that ostentation has become inappropriate. Overt affection is now reserved for their small children.

It is only during the regularly held fertility rituals that teasing, sexual insults (disguised invitations) and playful fights between the sexes of opposite moieties once more become the norm. The whole community behaves like a young couple, jokingly and openly arousing sexual desire and invoking the *yuxin* powers of fertility. "When we ask for the fertility of plants and for abundance in our gardens," explained Milton Maia to me, "at the same time we are asking for the fertility of our people. A happy village is a village where many babies are born."

Conception is considered to be a process, an accumulative creation, not a single event. Both the mother and the father contribute with their vital fluids to the formation and characteristics of the child. As is the case for most Amazonian people, food taboos are observed during pregnancy by both the father and the mother, because the substances consumed enter/constitute both the semen and the blood and will thus influence the shape, behaviour and qualities of the child's self. The logic behind food taboos is one of similarity: qualities of the animal or plant consumed are passed on to the child. Thus I observed Laura refusing to eat paca and tapir, the former because it is nocturnal, the latter because it is too big³⁸.

ardently promising, seemed improbable to the mother.

³⁸ On food taboos see especially Capistrano de Abreu (1941: 122-123, 126-128); also see Kensinger (1981: 155-171 and 1995: 193-206); Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982: 94-95, 172); McCallum (1989a: 98); Lagrou (1991: 106-109).

c. Mixed children

A consequence of Cashinahua ideas of conception is the possibility of giving birth to two special kinds of children: the mixed child, *husia bake*, and the *yuxin* child, *yuxin bake*. The mixed child is fairly common and is due to the widespread custom of discreet extramarital affairs. The affairs are considered to be quite common and fairly innocent. What the Cashinahua disapprove of is not so much the affair in itself, but its ostentation and the associated vanity. A man is said to be vain when he tells his wife about extramarital affairs. The same holds for women. Cashinahua sexual morality says you should never talk about, and never compare your lovers. It is ostentation, comparison and lack of sexual generosity towards partners that provoke crises of marital jealousy. When a woman is healthy and fat, Antonio told me, it is said that her husband never talks about his affairs (*hawen bene txuta yusinmaki*).

A jealous husband is said to be *yauxi*, stingy, with his wife. *Yauxi* is a strongly loaded term in Cashinahua moral vocabulary and stands, in most cases, for antisocial behaviour. Here the meaning of the word is obviously ambiguous. It does not mean that a generous man judges it all right that his wife makes love to other men. A stingy husband is a paranoid, obsessive husband, a man who mistrusts his wife all the time, who follows her steps and beats her when he suspects unfaithfulness. Beating is always publicly condemned and can lead to major political shifts and village fissions.

A woman, in turn, can also be said to be stingy with her husband, when she wants to prevent him travelling, or when she refuses to accept his desire to take a second wife. She can also be considered to be stingy with her vagina (*hawen xebi yauxi*). This is said of women when they refuse to have sex. The first use of the expression refers to virgins who won't let men come close. The girl does not want to marry yet and is afraid of becoming pregnant. Another context of use of this expression is during fertility rituals, when male cross-cousins collectively provoke and challenge a group of women calling them stingy. The women, in turn, answer by ritually insulting, in a high-pitched song, male genitals (see also McCallum 1989b on fertility rituals). Another manifestation of the stinginess of the vagina is at delivery. When it takes a long time for a woman to deliver, her vagina is said to be stingy with

the child (for the use of the expression of stinginess during delivery see McCallum, 1996).

The child is said to be a mixed child when the mother's *liaison* becomes or is public during her pregnancy. In this case, if the lover assumes his role of lover and contributor to the child, the child will be said to have two fathers. It is not at all uncommon to come across *husia bake* (mixed children), especially when conducting a village census and learning that a child is said to belong to both moieties. Thus Edivaldo, head of the village Moema, was proud to be a *husia bake* and in this way he had to accumulate the qualities of both moieties.

d. Spirit children and twins

Yuxin bake, *yuxin* children, are another consequence of the concept of gradual conception. A *yuxin* child is born when, during the pregnancy, the mother not only has a human lover, but a *yuxin* lover. As we saw in the accident with Laura and the caterpillar in the garden, visits and lovemaking in dreams by *yuxin* is considered to be a real threat for pregnant women. Intercourse with *yuxin* provokes anomalies for two reasons. The first is that *yuxin* stands for excess and mutability of form, the second that *yuxin* beings are not humans, they belong to a different kind and the improper mixing of too much difference leads to deformation.

There is no such thing as an excessive amount of or too much mixture of human semen that could be held responsible for mutations of the normal human form. The only agents able to produce abnormalities through intercourse are *yuxin* beings. I saw two *yuxin bake* in the village of Nova Aliança. One child was born with a closed right ear, the other with a crooked foot. Another child I heard of was born with six fingers on one hand.

Twins, *tsupibu bake*, are also said to be *yuxin bake*, born of the union of a human father (or fathers), a human mother and a manifestation of *Yube yuxibu* called *Nubu pui keneya* ("faeces of a river conch with design") or *Puia pui keneya* ("faeces, faeces with design").

"To become pregnant with twins, you eat cotton seeds. You might do that. This is the cotton fruit, this is the cotton to be spun and you eat the seed. This is twin food. This is what happens if you swallow it. Small children always swallow these cotton

seeds over and over again. The little girl grows bigger and they (the girl and *Yube*) make love. Thus, *Nubu pui keneya* comes to have sex with her. Two are placed inside, one here, another there. He has two penises, one here, and one there. With one penis, he makes one *tunku* (ball, foetus), with the other penis and different semen, he makes another *tunku* (foetus). *Nubu pui keneya, puia puia pui keneya*. That is what he does to the girl who always eats cotton seeds. He takes revenge on her (*ha kupidiai*), he takes his revenge. Because cotton seeds are twins, look!: two. They are intertwined together. Aha. Thus it goes with a woman who wants two children at once. Does she want two girls or two boys? No. She wants a couple, a girl and a boy. That is how it goes for a twin to be born.” (Augusto Feitosa)

The logic of the cotton seed follows that of peanuts and corn. The seed is semen and stays in the body of the woman, waiting to be made into a child. The Boa *yuxibu Nibu pui keneya*, owner of cotton, takes revenge through sex, like its heavenly double, *Yube* the moon. What is referred to in terms of revenge is at the same time a gift, although an ambiguous one. In the case of *Yube* the moon, the revenge and perforation that provokes female bleeding is linked to finiteness and death. In this myth, female blood is equivalent to the blood lost by the dying head of *Yube* while climbing the sky, but it is also the lifegiving liquid responsible for female fertility.

The same holds for *Nibu pui keneya*'s revenge, which is responsible for the anomaly of giving birth to twins. In her dreams the pregnant woman is penetrated by the two snake penises at once, a consequence of the twinned seeds she insisted upon eating during childhood. On the one hand, the snake *yuxibu* is said to take revenge, while on the other hand, the mother is said to have been longing for twins. When insisting upon the strange habit of eating cotton seeds she might be said to have been calling *Nibu pui keneya*. Because of this complicity with the world of the *yuxibu*, the mother of twins is said to be powerful.

“Kin was a twin, he was very knowledgeable. His thoughts were strong (he would foretell everything). His talk was powerful. That is why nobody would dare to become angry with him. You have to please him. He blows on you. When the twin is small, he does not speak. He speaks only once he is big. When he tells you to, you die. When a twin goes to defecate, the other goes with him. When one of them goes to urinate, the other also goes. When one of them goes to sleep, the other also goes. When one of them cries, the other also cries. When one is hungry, so is the other. That is all.

When one dies, you cannot tell the other, otherwise the other also dies. He is like *Yube Xeni* (Boa). He has the power of *Kuxuka* (porpoise). He is like *Dade* (a

medicinal plant). Your mother is strong and she passed the power on to you. I am afraid of you! (laughs)³⁹.” (Antonio Pinheiro)⁴⁰

“You really have to bring up both. If one dies, the other dies. If you separate one body from the other, and keep it away from its twin and alone, the one who stays behind would keep thinking of the other (*hawen betsa xinai*), and always die. If you do not want them to die, well then, bring them up, both of them. Let both grow. If you wanted two, you bring up two. If not, they will always die.” (Alcina Pinheiro)

Twin children are called *Yubebu* (plural of *Yube*) or simply *yuxibu*, or *yuxian* (shaman). They are said to be born already healed, “*nasceu curado*” (Paulo Lopes), because they are considered to be immune to snake bites (immunity due to community in substance with the master of snakes who helped to produce them) and able to heal with their sweat, hands and saliva. The power of a protected life however is linked to the power of provoking death. Words spoken by twins, like those spoken to the *yuxin* of the recently killed boa constrictor *Yube Xeni*, become reality; their curses (*yupu*) are said to cause the inevitable death of their victims. The dilemma of keeping twins alive is easy to understand. Too much power in the hands of an uncontrolled being is dangerous.

The power of causing death with words (*yupua*), however, is not exclusive to twins. People avoid to irritate or to refuse gifts to old people for the same reason as they would be careful in dealing with twins. The old people’s power to curse is due to their knowledge of “how to speak to the snake”. The repeated ritual ingestion of a

³⁹ The Kin to whom this quote refers is the anthropologist and ex-missionary Kenneth Kensinger, the first Westerner to live with the Cashinahua, who has been working with the Peruvian Cashinahua since the fifties. Kensinger’s own memories of revelation to his hosts that he was a twin were of having to face, first of all consternation (one of the meanings of *tsupibu* seems to be “to have worms”), and then wondering: how could he know so little about the forest and still be a twin? (1995: 210) In Cashinahua ‘mythology’, however, Kin’s powers as a twin were unmatched. At the end of the quote, the narrator refers to the fact that the author is also a twin.

⁴⁰ “*Kin tsupibu bake unahaida, hama pae unanika. Hawen hantxa pae haida. Haki sinatamaki. Tua haida watiki. Mia xuanu. Tsupibu bake ixtadan yuitemaki. Ewatanai atiki yuikinã. Mi yuiadan mawamiski. Tsupibu bakedan puiayadan betsadan puidiakiki. Isunayanã idiaikiki. Uxaiya uxadiaikiki. Kaxaya kaxadiaikiki. Buniaya bunidiaikiki. Hatiski. Betsa mawaken yuitema yuiadan mawadiamiski. Yube Xeni keskadiki. Kuxuka paepadan. Dade keskaki. Min ibu ainbu paepahaidaki, mia bimuki. Miki dateai.*”

snake's heart and tongue, followed by a three month period of rigid fasting, builds up a communion in substance and identity with the boa causing them to become *Yube* (meaning both boa and shaman). The power of their words is indirect: it has to pass through the boa. A boa is killed and the curse is spoken to its escaping *yuxin*, who will then afflict the victim.

The Cashinahua believe that it is not uncommon for *tupibu bakebu* (twins) to present some kind of physical abnormality. One of the two for example, would usually be born a dwarf, while the other would be tall. Such a strong female dwarf is said to live in Peru. She refuses to be photographed and remains unmarried. If you tried to "take her *yuxin*" (to take a picture), Milton Maia warned me, she would attack you. When parted and far away, one twin is said to cause illness in the other, sadness being considered to be the principle cause. Their interdependence is also linked to the fact that one is considered to be lucky (and 'strong') while the other attracts bad luck (and is 'weak'), but their cooperation results in great feats like the mythic heroes *Iyô* and *Ipi*, cutting the huge *lupuna* that had been hiding the sun.

Different and complementary qualities in a pair of basically similar and almost equal beings produce a mutual dependence that is at the basis of Amerindian dualistic thought. The world as it works is made up of the mingling of difference and its separation would be the end of all movement and life on earth. This is why doubled sameness, an idea that seems to hold so much fascination for western thought (from ancient twin myths to the myth of representation and the invention of cloning), seems to be inconceivable in Amerindian thought, because as sure as one is always born before the other, two beings will always be unique and different, small though the differences may be.

Another special status defined by birth is to be born with the umbilical cord around the neck. These children are said to be born "*curado*", already healed from the start, like twins. Snake bites do not hurt them. Their having already been cured refers to the typical healing image of a *ayahuasca* vision. When healing someone who is sick, the snake (owner of the *ayahuasca*) in the visionary experience, is said to wrap its body around the patient's body and neck until the tongue licks its nose. It stays there for a while, looking into the hypnotised patient's eyes and "praying" with its licking

tongue. When it unrolls itself from the body, it is said to take all sickness with it. Thus a baby born with the snake-like umbilical cord around its neck and arriving alive is considered to have gone through a similar experience and is said to be safe from snakes for the rest of its life.

e. Delivery and first care

After birth, food taboos will differ from those during pregnancy. The child is now exposed, not only to the sexual bodily fluids of its parents, but also to all sorts of other influences present in its immediate external environment. If the father hunts a capuchin monkey, for example, the child is expected to become aggressive and bite people randomly. Most care, however, needs to be taken by the mother who continues to directly influence the interior contents of the child with her milk. While breastfeeding, the mother will only eat female and never male meat. But other close kin, especially the name-giving, name-sake grandparents (*xuta*), who are in close contact with the child, also take care not to expose the child to dangerous influences.

To counteract the influences to which the child becomes exposed once it leaves the mosquito net⁴¹, there exists a great variety of herbal baths and fragrant herbs to be burned under its hammock. Acting in this way, the Cashinahua seem to make explicit the continuity and persisting links between the body of the child and its human and non-human environment. Smells, fluids and sounds influence the child: its shape and bodily abilities (being a quick or lazy learner, a reason why parrot meat is given to a toddler learning to speak and why the meat of mute animals is avoided), the quality and texture of its skin (all sorts of eggs are held responsible for different sorts of pimples and skin problems), its dreams and the quality of its sleep. Because of their weak bodies and young unfixed *yuxin*, children are especially exposed to the nightly calls of *yuxin*, and babies frightened by *yuxin* get high fever and are inconsolable in their crying.

⁴¹ Traditionally, when people lived in longhouses and no mosquito nets existed to protect mother and child's privacy, small huts were build on the patio in front of the house for delivery. These seclusion huts were called *kene* (that which protects, marks off, design) (Capistrano de Abreu, 1941: 124).

“You gave him your body”, Laura playfully told me, looking at her baby’s face. “*Bedu nankepixa hayaki, hawen bu mia keskaki*”, “he has little blue-green eyes and his hair is the colour of your hair.” Although I had no experience whatsoever with deliveries, an ignorance that was soon to become obvious, I was asked to assist at the birth of Laura’s son, Augusto’s grandchild. To my own relief, I quickly understood that the invitation had nothing to do with a supposed whiteman’s knowledge. There were enough native specialists at hand.

The motivation for my inclusion in this private enterprise to which only close female and some male kin (husband, father, and, in exceptional circumstances, the brother of the woman in labour⁴²) are admitted, was personal and it profoundly changed my relationship with the family. It was not a specialised knowledge that they required of me but my involvement, my emotional and physical participation in the event. One of the reasons I figured was responsible for this inclusion was the fact that I had been living in the inner circle of their house for several months (visitors who become co-dwellers move their little tents, mosquito nets with hammock, gradually from the edges of the house to the centre where the nuclear families sleep), the other was the interpretation Augusto and his wife gave to the fact that I was a twin.

Along with the other women present at the delivery, I learned to sing the ritual song to smooth the child’s way⁴³. Laura’s labour lasted for twelve hours and the ‘prayer’ was repeated endlessly: “*Isku isku pui, nerun nerun kaini, min bati txuka menuikiki, menã kaindiwe!*” “*Isku bird faeces, Isku bird faeces; come this way, this way; your old clothes are burning; quick, be born!*”. The meaning of the prayer was explained to me as follows: “*isku pui* is to smoothen the way, and for the baby to be born quickly you tell it that its clothes are old”. The old clothes stand for the ‘dirt’ covering the baby’s body when it is born, while the tissue in which the child will be

⁴² The husband holds the woman in his arms, supporting her under the armpits. She can alternatively hold onto a hammock, but she only does so if there are no close male kin present to support her. When, during a long labour, the husband gets tired, he can be temporarily substituted by the parturient’s father, if he is not an old man, or by her brother. This is the only, though important, male role in delivery. Men do not sing, nor do they prepare the herbal medicines, which is considered to be women’s knowledge.

wrapped immediately after birth are its new clothes, substituting for the placenta.

While two women were massaging her back and two other women holding her legs open, I was told how to massage the belly of the mother with a lukewarm herbal infusion, strengthened with garlic (my contribution) and tobacco. Laura's labour lasted exceptionally long by Cashinahua standards and her mother left the mosquito-net at one point and softly started the ritual crying song.

The child, *Siã*, was finally born with the umbilical cord around the neck. It was my role to catch the child when it came out of its mother's body and to hold the baby until the placenta had descended. The placenta (*xama*) is immediately taken to the forest or can be buried at a well (*tatxa*) to provide the child with a strong heart (*huinti kuxiwa*), by giving it "the heart of a well" (*txatxa huinti inankine*): "The life of the child will be like a well that never dries up." (Augusto Feitosa)

The same person who picks up the child is expected to cut the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is dried to be wrapped around the child's father's bow for good luck in hunting. The first hunt after the child's birth will be with a bow protected by the dried umbilical cord (before that the father is not allowed to hunt). Afterwards I had to mold the child's face, flattening the little cheeks and straightening the nose. This was considered to be the final touch in the modelling of the child (*damiwa*) and that was the reason for Laura's playful remark about "giving him my body". After this the child was wrapped in a tissue by its grand-mother. The grand-mother helped her daughter climb into her hammock and placed the child on top of her.

It was the next morning before the child was washed with lukewarm herbal water, made of a mixture of more than ten different herbs, and then painted red with achiote. A possible interpretation for the use of the red achiote paint can be the fact that it neutralises, through imitation, the mother's blood that covered the child when born⁴⁴. The mother, in turn, is washed with herbal infusions and drinks potions to make her stop bleeding. When painted with achiote, the child's ear is also pierced. Other

⁴³ The transcription and translation of this song coincide with Cecilia McCallum's (1996: 21).

⁴⁴ This is also the interpretation given by Vilaça to the same practice noted among as the Wari (Vilaça, 1992).

perforations were traditionally made after initiation (*Nixpupima*).

The child and the mother will leave the mosquito net for the first time, only when the child's navel is dried up. At this time a hardworking and knowledgeable close relative, or the song leader himself in the case of a male child, will, while singing a ritual song, dye the child black with *genipa* and paint the forehead with a cotton seed or corn cob design. The song sung during the painting invokes the dark skin of monkeys and the feathers of black birds. The painting protects the body, making it invisible to *yuxin* predation.

The hands, sweat and words used in ritual are believed to pass on their character, their power, their *dau* (charm, medicine) and *dua* (brilliance, health and good luck) to the person receiving them. The ritualised speaking, the blowing and the touching also pass on an experienced person's thoughts (*xina*) and knowledge (*una*) to the recipient. Thus not only the body but all aspects of the person are simultaneously modelled. The body is not perceived as a bounded independent entity, separate from other bodies. Both its shape and state of being are the result of collective modelling and fabrication, and are of concern to all close-living kin.

This collective responsibility for the well-being and state of other bodies also explains why, once I had been accepted in their houses, the Cashinahua wanted my body to be in a desirable state of health and beauty to be shown to my real kin, once back home. I was repeatedly told, "We want you to be fat and healthy when you go back to your family", for the state of my body would be the most eloquent testimony of the way I had been treated. Someone who is sad loses appetite and someone who is socially excluded will not be offered much food. Thus thinness is almost always a sign of unhappiness. When a couple is fighting, for example, or when the husband tells his wife he is having affairs, she will become thin. Thus the size of someone's body is the object of social comments and concern.

As we saw above, thinness is also a sign of *yuxin* interference. *Yuxin* only interfere in the life of a person when his or her normal social links are not strong enough to prevent the parasitic *yuxin* from occupying the place of close kin or of taking their victim with them to live in the forest with the forest beings, *ni yuxin*. For example, when a close relative, a child, wife or husband dies and the mourning person

cannot recover; when a person is living in a village without close kin; when fighting, isolated, angry, or jealous, a person may start to spend most of their time lying down, and crying softly in their hammock or leaving the village for lonely walks in the forest. The *yuxin* hear their cries and understand that this person “wants to die” (*mawa katiski*), and that is the moment of their intervention.

f. Sensual knowledge

The definition of a body is to be alive, to be a thinking, social being that perceives, moves and speaks. When the *yuda*, the thinking body, is active and completely healthy, all its *yuxin* are with the person. *Yuxin* only exists as such, as a separate entity, that is, is only named and perceived, when separated from the body. This explains why knowledge is not said to belong to the *yuxin* (‘soul’) of the person, but to its *yuda* (body). Knowledge of how to bring about desirable effects in the world is embodied knowledge. The acquisition as well as the demonstration of knowledge, needs the right setting to be efficacious and meaningful. Words and deeds out of context are empty and without direction. They are ineffective or without sense of meaning.

The Cashinahua conception of knowledge does not base its method and justification in representation, distanciation and objectification of praxis to gain understanding of a phenomenon. On the contrary, for knowledge to acquire meaning, a familiarity with performance and the acting out of techniques that embody both content and purpose are necessary⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ The reluctance of the Cashinahua to speak about subjects out of context has also been noted by McCallum (1989a). In my case it determined the choice of the thesis topic. I was planning to study design and weaving and an initiation in the art of weaving (including the killing of a boa, fasting and seclusion) had been planned for after the *Nixpupima* initiation and *txidin*, the song leader’s ritual. Unfortunately, the song leader Augusto Feitosa suffered a stroke during the transcriptions of the first ritual and the accident forced me to leave the village to accompany him to the city. In the case of the *Nixpupima* ritual, I discovered that much of what I had gathered in interviews before I attended the ritual was contradicted by its performance (when everything suddenly started to fall into place). The same holds for all other experiences in the field, from child birth to body painting and the *ayahuasca* ritual. More than once I heard one of the older men claim: “What do you want to know this for if you do not intend to live here?” or “What does she want to know that for? She does not understand!”

The importance given to context, embodiment and the acting out of knowledge in the ongoing creation of a meaningful world that 'works' and fits is not unique to the Cashinahua nor specific to oral cultures. The association of concept and action and of concept and body has long been a topic for discussion and reflection in philosophy, the cognitive sciences and psychology⁴⁶. In these different fields of inquiry into the workings of the human mind the necessity to overcome the limitations of Cartesian dualism is often acutely felt and scientists are beginning to realise that as long as the role of the body and emotions in cognitive performance are not taken into account, we will continue to be under the spell of false problems. Non-western ontologies throw new light on old questions, and can thus be helpful in refreshing our reflection about the human condition through a change in point of view⁴⁷.

Kensinger (1994, 1995) identified a number of particular knowledges all linked to the body and the senses. He mentions hand knowledge (*meken una*), as well as skin knowledge (*bitxi una*), eye knowledge (*bedu una*), ear knowledge (*pabinki una*), genital knowledge (in the testicles in the case of men, the place for female genital knowledge was not elaborated on), and liver knowledge (*taka una*). A person whose

⁴⁶ In philosophy this discussion goes back to Heidegger, Gadamer and Wittgenstein. What hermeneutics, phenomenology and existentialism have in common in their critique of Cartesian dualism and Kantian Pure Reason is their critique of the decontextualisation of thought and, to put it in Heideggerian words, "an amputation of the being from Being". The undeniable primordial fact of the *Geworfenheit* (being thrown) of the human being into a world that pre-exists and surrounds him as a background constitutes the figure, requires that this pre-condition of existence be taken into account when judging thought processes and action. The pre-existence of a background that delineates the figure of the individual implies history, human and non-human environment, emotions, body, values and motivation. Thought processes and knowledge systems can only be understood when taking this background into account as a constitutive, intrinsic part of it. A clarifying account of the discussion of the importance of body and setting in the field of cognitive psychology can be found in Shanon, B., 1993. In the field of philosophy, Jacob Meløe, from studying the later works of Wittgenstein, developed, a praxiologic approach to knowledge. He applies the association of concept and action to fields close to anthropology (during his stay in Oxford the author was strongly influenced by Evans-Pritchard). With examples taken from the daily life of Norwegian fishermen and Saami reindeer herders, he demonstrates how an active participation in the landscape and the mastering of techniques mould the respective perception of the landscape and boat (Meløe, 1983, 1989).

⁴⁷ In relation to this question, Jackson (1996) chooses the Cashinahua case to illustrate new ways of approaching knowledge forms, as well as to demonstrate why and how other, non-western ontologies need to be taken seriously by scientific and philosophical thought.

whole body knows is a wise person, *unahaida* ("knows strongly"). "One learns about things like the sun, wind, water, and rain through the sensations they produce on the surface of the body. It is in this sense that knowledge of the natural world is skin knowledge, *bichi (bitxi) una*, that is, knowledge gained through and located in the skin." (1995: 240). Knowledge of the surrounding world, which is acquired through the eyes is said to be "knowledge about the jungle's body spirit." (Ibid.)

The body *yuxin* is called *yuda baka yuxin* (body shadow *yuxin*). It is the shadow, the person's reflection in the water or in a mirror, and the image captured in a photograph of persons and things. During the day as well as during the night the world known by the eye *yuxin* is a world of images. For something to become embodied and therefore adequate knowledge the other senses have to help root this perception of the surrounding world through the skin, the ears, the hands, the body.

Thus the capacities that make someone a good hunter are varied. There is eye knowledge to point the arrow, but there is also knowledge of the hands to control the technique of shooting, skin knowledge to sense the environment, the capacity to smell game and to produce the smell to seduce the game with herbs, as well as whistles and songs to attract the game (see Deshayes, 1992).

Hunters are said to imitate the hunting techniques and qualities of the boa much more than those of the jaguar. The Boa is famous for seducing its game, attracting them through the emission of a high-pitched sound, through the hypnotising power of its eyes and through its charm (*dau*) incorporated in the design on its skin. I was told by Edivaldo that other snakes and the tortoise too which shares in the boa's *dua* through its design, also attract game, but only the boa has the power to attract people. One knows that there is a boa nearby, explains Edivaldo, "when you realise that you thought you were following a path, whereas in reality you were walking in circles around the boa, the circles becoming smaller and smaller until you are within its reach".

Weaving, women's knowledge, is a knowledge of both eyes and hands, it is manifested in the capacity to visualise an unseen pattern while progressing thread by thread. As a knowledge of the hands, it is a knowing how to do it. To acquire such knowledge, the girl needs the patience to sit and look at a master weaver for hours.

After a while she is given the chance to try plain weaving, then she progresses to stripes and finally weaves simple designs by herself. While part of the method of the girl's initiation consists in observation and practice, another part intends to directly act upon the incorporated memory itself. Thus the girl will be systematically treated with eye drops to induce dreaming with design patterns and with the Master of Design herself. *Sidika*, the female boa, appears to her in the form of an old lady and shows her all kinds of different weaving patterns, each of them accompanied by the appropriate weaving songs.

g. Emotions as embodied knowledge

Emotions also belong to the sphere of embodied knowledge. The need for a beloved person is expressed in the same terms as thirst, the longing for water, is expressed: "*en umpax* (water) *manuaii*", "*en mia* (you) *manuaii*". Love is a mutual need : "*manu-name-aii*" (a thirstiness for each other). Desire is phrased in terms of "*mia xeakatis*" (wanting to swallow you), while hatred and rage against a person are phrased in terms of "*miki hantxaismakī*" (does not speak to you), "*mia pikatis*" (wanting to eat you), or the threat of cannibalism. Jealousy is expressed in terms of tiredness and laziness, while happiness provokes enthusiasm for work.

As among all Panoans (Erikson, 1996) and many Amerindians (Cf. Colson, 1976: 422-499) the opposition between sweet (*bata*) and bitter (*muka*), and hot (*ku*) and cold (*matsi*), is productive in speaking about bodily as well as emotional states and character. Someone with a 'sweet liver' (*taka batapa*), or a 'liver that knows a lot' (*hawen taka unahaida*), is generous and sociable, an internal state expressed on the surface by a sweet face (*besu batapa*) (Kensinger, 1995: 243). Sweetness is especially attributed to women, while generous and sociable men are more often said to be *duapa*, good, with brilliance, a shine on their face. If the first case associates a psychologically pleasant state to the palate, the next one associates it with an aesthetic pleasure for the eye. Although women are said to be warm, and men cool, and although coolness of the heart is recommended for men (to be hot meaning to lose one's temper), the bitter/sweet pair seems to be much more productive in Cashinahua emotional and corporeal discourse, as well as in their discourses on health and power,

than the hot/cold opposition. This is also the case for other Panoan groups (see especially Erikson on the bitter/sweet opposition among the Matis, 1996: 194-209).

Irrespective of this, there is always a note of ambiguity or relativism to such dichotomies. As happens with all cognitively important concepts in this style of thought, the meaning and value of a concept depends upon the context. Thus, people in general are said to need some amount of bitterness in their body because bitterness hardens the body. However, men need more of it than women because women feed babies and babies initially require only sweet and neutral food because their bodies are still soft, malleable and vulnerable. At the other extreme a shaman, *mukaya* (the one with bitter), is imbued with bitterness, and in this instance bitterness stands for power and is not to be understood in the metaphorical sense that we would attribute to a bitter heart. The shaman's heart is bitter, his blood and flesh are bitter and his palate has become so too. He is so imbued with bitterness that for him all meat tastes like wax (*bui*), a taste responsible for the shaman's loss of desire for eating meat. This is an example of a symmetrical relation of the inversion between speaking and eating (as in the case cited above of the refusal to speak being linked to the threat of cannibalism): those with whom you speak you do not eat, and vice versa. Thus the shaman, unable to eat and to kill animals (because they would speak to him before he was able to kill them) is nonetheless able to help his fellow hunters by playing tricks on the game, seducing them into his garden, through the promise of "plenty of rotting plantains".

The prolonged and systematic use of tobacco powder (*rapé*) combined with rigorous fasting (no meat, sweet food, salt, or spices) is another way of acquiring a bitter and thus strong body, the body of a shaman. The story of the mythical hero shaman *Tene kuin dumeya* ("Tene himself (the proper one) with tobacco") is an epic of his successive victories over *yuxibu* monsters, that made the forest paths unsafe. Tene's flesh became so strong that it was bitter like poison. When he dived into the water to take a bath, all the fish died as if they had been killed with fish poison (*puikama*). It should be mentioned, however, that he did this after killing his wife and her lover. Therefore, it is not clear from the myth whether the poisonous quality of his skin was only due to tobacco bitterness or whether it was also due to the state of the murderer,

who through his act of killing absorbs the blood and *yuxin* of his victims⁴⁸.

h. Human Souls, *yuxin*

In Cashinahua thought, as we saw above, the body is a person, a thinking self and a sensitive agent responsible for its acts. The living body works and produces results in the world in the form of artefacts, gardens, game and other people. The results of a person's existence and activities, however, are not always palpable phenomena. A person also leaves behind memories and images, untouchable shadows that are thought to assume an existence and agency independent of the body, thus becoming the body's doubles. These autonomous doubles, however, continue to effect their 'owner' through the logic of metonymy. It is these ungraspable by-products of a person's existence and embodied self that are called his *yuxin*.

Opinions about the quantity of these *yuxin* a human body is capable of producing vary. Most Cashinologists and informants, however, agreed on four⁴⁹. Only once did I hear Antonio Pinheiro mention that saliva also had or was *yuxin*. But, in general, only excrement, urine, the eye and the shadow are actually said to be *yuxin*. I never heard anybody speak about the existence of an independent blood *yuxin*, tooth *yuxin*, nail *yuxin*, or hair *yuxin*, although all of these bodily substances metonymically continue to affect the body. A first distinction to be made here is between 'to be' and 'to have' *yuxin*. The above-mentioned 'souls', those said to be *yuxin*, not only imbue the bodily flesh (*nami*) with life, but are also capable of independent agency once detached from the body. This is not the case for other bodily fluids (such as sweat, blood and saliva, nonetheless vehicles of a person's vital force) or for detachable parts

⁴⁸ For the Matis and Pano people in general there seems also to be an explicit link between blood and 'soul', especially when dealing with human blood. Erikson (1986: 194-197): "*Alors que l'on peut chasser et consommer quotidiennement avec très peu de précautions rituelles la plupart des animaux (en minimisant leur "sanguinité"), le meurtre d'humains, au contraire, est accompagné d'absorption d'âme liée à l'effusion de sang...Mais le guerrier pano, contrairement à son homologue jivaro ..., ne cherche pas à s'appropriier l'excédent d'âme acquis en tuant (ou consommant). Il se livre au contraire à des rites destinés à le débarrasser du sang-âme adverse.*"

⁴⁹ Although Deshayes and Keifenheim (1994) and Keifenheim (unpublished 1996) add a fifth soul, the dream soul (*nama yuxin*), I believe dream and eye soul to be the same, at least in the

of the body.

“There are four *yuxin* in a person: *yuda baka*, the shadow or body *yuxin*, *isun yuxin*, the *yuxin* of urine, *pui yuxin*, the *yuxin* of excrement and *bedu yuxin*, the eye *yuxin*. The *yuda baka*, the shadow, stays as beater: wherever the person used to pass, he screams. The *isun yuxin* crosses with the *yuxibu* of the water, the *pui yuxin* with those of the earth. The *bedu yuxin* is our thought. Our weight is due to the fact that we have eaten meat. If not, we would be light. You think about Belgium and you already are there. That is your *bedu yuxin*. But we, we have to walk to see. The *bedu yuxin* moves through the air. It is this that *cipó* (*ayahuasca*) teaches us.” (Agostinho Manduco)

From this quote we can deduce that only the body *yuxin* (*yuda baka*) and the eye *yuxin* (*bedu yuxin*) can be considered true “souls” in the sense usually given to the term of an animating and conscious self. The existence of two different and complementary souls which together animate the body is common in Amazonian literature and is another manifestation of the all-pervading complex dualism that characterises Amerindian thought styles⁵⁰. Before we consider the complementariness of these two ‘souls’ in Cashinahua mental life, however, let us have a closer look at the two other *yuxin* of the Cashinahua self, the *yuxin* of urine and the *yuxin* of excrement, somehow anomalous versions of the notion “soul”.

way my informants use both concepts.

⁵⁰ Examples of this phenomenon of double souls can be found in Overing (1993), for the Piaroa: “the life of the senses” and “the life of thoughts”; in Viveiros de Castro (1992), for the Araweté: the *ta’o we*, a cadaver’s double and the *i~*, the celestial soul; in Carneiro da Cunha (1978, 1991), for the Krahó; in Gonçalves (1993, 1995) for the Pirahã where the person has a body soul (name) and one or more celestial names, productive of souls (received from the Gods) and where each of these human souls is split in two at death, one soul becoming a cannibal, the other prey; in Gow (1991) for the Piro: bone soul (monster) and a heavenly soul etc. As we can see, each of these dualisms of souls plays out the complementariness differently. Some seem to play with an opposition of an animal (and mostly mortal) versus a heavenly (immortal) soul cohabiting the human body, while others stress the opposition between interior (bone soul) and exterior soul (mirror image of the person), and still other examples go back to the ontologically founding opposition of the position of prey to hunter. What is interesting for comparative purposes is that all these cosmologies stress the inherently dual character of human agency and consciousness without, however, falling back on the classic opposition between body and soul. The ethnographic case that is closest to the Cashinahua is that of the Bororo as described by Christopher Crocker (1985). The similarities between the eye soul and body soul and the Bororo *aroe* and *bope* are striking and have been noted earlier by Townsley (1988) for the closely related Yaminahua eye and body soul, and by McCallum (1989a) for the Cashinahua. See also Lagrou (1991).

i. The *yuxin* of urine and excrement and their destiny

The *yuxin* of urine and of excrement come into existence when separated from the body during the process of evacuation. Why this special status given to bodily waste, considered to be powerful and vulnerable (inseparable, as we saw, in Cashinahua thought) to the point of being capable of producing *yuxin*, replicas or doubles of the human being who produced them? Only recently scholars of Amerindian thought have started to pay some attention to the meaning of substances produced by a living body.

Among the Piaroa, excrement is understood to be excessive fertility (Overing, 1993). In mythic times, some of the first beings were given birth through defecation. Because the food of the creator Gods consisted only of drugs, all bodily fluids became highly potent and contributed to the creation of the beings of the world. Excessive power and creativity, however, led to promiscuity and violence and had therefore to be controlled for historical human time to become possible. Thus the power of the “life of thoughts” was separated from the power of the “life of the senses”. Gods went to live an ethereal and bodiless life in the sky without a “life of the senses”, while animals lost their “life of thoughts”. Thus the primordial omnipotent beings lost their uncontrolled fertility to become normal human beings, that is, beings who combined both “souls”, the life of thought and of the senses, with only small doses of the former. Because life of the senses became mastered by the life of thoughts, they no longer reproduced through defecatory but through constitutive means.

Among the Emberá too, defecation is considered to be productive, a contribution of humankind to the vital cycle of regeneration. The Emberá have the habit of defecating in the river. The faeces feed the fish, which in turn feed the humans. Thus humans and other living bodies are considered to mutually nourish each other, the former through their bodily waste, the latter through their own body. An essential communion of physical essence is the consequence of this recycling of energies (Isacsson, 1993)

An equivalent interpretation can be given to the sentence of Agostinho stating that “The *isun yuxin* (vital force of urine) crosses (goes to live) with the *yuxibu* of the

water, the *pui yuxin* (vital force of excrement) with those of the earth". During the lifetime of a person one's contributions nurture the earth and water worlds with faeces and urine imbued with human *yuxin* (vital force), while at death a real double is released, an entity called *yuxin*, a *yuxin* that will become transformed into (cross with) earth and water.

The significant role played by smell in the identification of objects and beings should be taken into account here, because the strength of smell is an indication of potency. As long as something smells, it still retains a part of its volatile *yuxin*. Faeces are therefore not considered to be dead matter, but, on the contrary, 'alive'. The same holds for rotting and fermenting material. A dead body is only considered to be really dead once it is totally dried out, without any liquid or smell left in it. This brings us back to the basic opposition of dryness designating real death and wetness implying some sort of activity denoting life. This complementary opposition organises Cashinahua ontology and will be dealt with in more detail further on.

Another consequence of the importance of smell is the role of smoke (*kui*) as a vehicle for the transmission of contagious influences. Some herbal specialists are said to know of a plant with a poisonous smell that, when burnt, emits a lethal smoke that erases all life in the villages it touches. Cashinahua informants compare the power of this smoke to that of bombs. Thus wind and smoke transport pathogenic volatile poisons and smell is the sign transmitted to the senses of this invisible power at work.

Excrement not only smells, but is also associated with the quality of bitterness. The only excrement ever eaten by the Cashinahua is that contained in the body of the small *bodó* fish. Augusto seemed to be particularly fond of them. He said, not without his characteristic sense of humour, that he liked *bodó* fish because of the bitter taste of their excrement (*hawen pui muka pehaidaki*). The excrement of this fish is black, associated to bitterness and is never eaten by small children. From Erikson (1996: 195) we learn that the Matsigenka word for bitterness, *chimu*, along with piquant, pungent and spicy, also means excrement. The same association between the quality of bitterness and excrement is found in Wariapano (a little-known Panoan group) where it is called *muka* (bitterness). Another association between bitterness and excrement can be found in the word *puikama*, the extremely bitter and dark fish poison, which contains the

word *pui* (excrement) in its name.

In this way we obtain an associative chain of relatedness between bitterness and potency, poison and excrement. Bitterness of flesh, smell and taste express a certain kind of *yuxin* power. We have already encountered the “one with bitter”, the Cashinahua shaman (*mukaya*), whose flesh and palate became so imbued with bitterness that he became unable to taste flesh or meat in any way other than as *sempa*, resin. It should be remembered that blood tastes sweet and that the bitterness the shaman tastes is that of the false ‘blood’, the life liquid of a tree, resin. Thus the shaman is a vegetarian not just by choice or praxis but also as a consequence of his distorted gustatory perception: he does not experience the sweetness of flesh any more (*nami*: the pulp of fruits as well as animal meat), he only tastes the bitterness that characterises the juice of vines and leaves, which are *yuxin* food.

For the Matis (Erikson, 1996: 194), the bitter pole of taste also includes spicy and sour tastes, while in the Cashinahua language sour is called *bunkax* and spicy/hot *xia*. But a similar clustering of taste seems to be at work among the Cashinahua as among the Matis who divide all things and beings into two classes, following the lines of taste that separate the field of bitter and therefore relatively dangerous substances from that of sweet and relatively innocuous ones. Thus the world of *yuxin* power, illness and shamanising is always associated with bitterness, while the world of raising young human bodies in a protected atmosphere is linked to sweetness, and also includes salt (this seems to be the rule among all Panoans).

It should therefore be no surprise that these fields are also linked to gender differences. Men absorb all sorts of bitter substances to ensure success on hunting expeditions. This category of “burning bitterness” includes insect bites and nettles to induce endurance and to harden the flesh, as well as strong emetics such as the toad poison ‘injection’ (applied on the shoulder on a burned blister). Women also need their quota of bitterness and can use the same toad poison injections to become pregnant, but their daily diet includes more sweet food than that of men. Men avoid eating papaya, sweet bananas and cane, whereas these sources of sweetness are much appreciated by women and children on their expeditions to the gardens.

We explained some aspects of the idea of contagious power associated with excrement by placing the concept within the broader semantic context of bitterness. But what about urine? If we agree with Erikson that in Pano thought acidity is semantically linked to bitterness, as saltiness is to sweetness, we understand why these and no other bodily fluids or products are given a special status. Through their strong smell, urine and excrement communicate to the senses something about their inherent power.

At the moment of delivery, the *yuxin* (vital force) of excrement is revealed and realises existence in a world of beings of its kind, the world of *yuxin*. This takes place at the liminal location on the edges of the forest, the abode of wild *yuxin*, and it is dangerous for human beings. It is a moment when the body produces a *yuxin* being that escapes its control but can nevertheless still affect it. Normally the *yuxin* thus released is hunted down and eaten by the *yuxibu* of the earth and the waters without any harm to its 'owner', its 'parent' (*ibu*), the defecating person.

But *yuxin* can also start to speak to the released *yuxin* of urine and excrement. Siã, a young Cashinahua from the Jordão river, told me that there are urine and excrement *yuxin* that do not belong to humans but which are free floating *yuxin*, who can come to speak to a person while in the process of relieving oneself. As long as the *yuxin* keeps talking, the person is not able to stop urinating or defecating. This can go on until the person dies. *Isun yuxin* (urine *yuxin*) and *pui yuxin* (excrement *yuxin*) can also abduct a person. Therefore, when possible, people (especially women and children) go to defecate in the company of another person.

People take considerable care in disposing of and burying the excrement, hiding it from eyes with potentially evil intent. Otherwise a medicine man (*dauya*, "the one 'with' (*ya*) medicine (*dau*)") might find it, mix it with poison and cook it in a banana leaf on the fire. If this happens, a person will first feel a terrible headache around midnight, and will then be afflicted by a deadly diarrhoea and start vomiting without stopping. In ancient times, I was told, many people died this way.

Most, if not all, adults know about these poisonous plants, because it is dangerous even to unwittingly touch them when coming across them accidentally. Few people, however, are prepared to handle them. Only knowledgeable medicine men

(*dauya*), under a strict regime, can do so without running the risk of dying.

j. Specialists in bitter and sweet medicine

“Not until another discovered through his own need that a real Master was at hand was it learned that the teaching had been imparted, and even then the occasion arose quite naturally and the teaching made its way in its own right...”

Zen Stories, 1978: 67.

“When people knew the use of poison and shamanising, kinsmen killed kinsmen. When people started to die from white man’s illnesses, we lost a great amount of people. We decided that we needed to grow, if not we would disappear. We had already diminished very much. Now our villages are growing. Many new children have been born and the Nation (*nação*) of the Cashinahua has become big again. In this new village, which is celebrating its third birthday today, eighteen children have been born and only two have died. This is so because our village is a happy village. Nobody should ever kill kinsmen again. Today the Culina still kill their own people with *duri*. They also kill our people with *duri*. Our old people still know the poison which can kill but nobody knows how to take away *duri*.”

Manuel Sampaio, leader of Nova Aliança.

In the case of the Cashinahua, one might doubt whether the concept of shamanism helped to clarify, or only served to obscure the analysis based on the data based on the use of native categories. Since matter and ‘spirit’ are inseparable, a distinction between afflictions of the body and afflictions of the soul will not do. Illness manifests itself within the body. A body, however, is a materiality sustained by *yuxin* activity, and one of the manifestations of illness is the latent or temporary detachment of the *yuxin* that inhabit it. To counteract these symptoms, different therapeutic practices are combined. One of the most prominent among them is the use of herbal medicine. The role of herbal healer or medicine man is an important one among the Cashinahua. Other additional treatments include food taboos, prayers directed to the wandering *yuxin*, to the *yuxin* afflicting the victim, or to *yuxin* whose protection or help in the healing process is requested, and also the use of tobacco to empower the healer’s saliva, and the ingestion of *ayahuasca* to discover the causes of affliction. Dreaming too plays a role in the identification of the illness-causing agent.

This variety of healing techniques, performed by different specialists, have been classified by Kensinger (1974, 1995) under the category of *dau bata* (sweet medicine),

administered by the *huni dauya* (the man with medicine), and that of *dau muka* (bitter medicine), dealt with by the *huni mukaya* (the man with bitter). The *mukaya* is the only healing specialist, or specialist in dealing with the world of *yuxin*, who received the title of 'shaman' in the literature. Since all Cashinologists, as well as my informants, agree upon the fact that there are no *mukaya* of the old times left, one might wonder whether we are dealing with yet another example of shamanism without shamans.

Yet, as we saw above, everybody is a specialist in his or her dealings with *yuxin* and "yuxinity", a category that permeates all aspects of Cashinahua daily life⁵¹. Song leaders sing to the *yuxin* and *yuxibu* in increase rituals, as well as on all occasions that require a special addressing of the *yuxin* forces. Hunters, weavers and young women preoccupied with fertility, speak to and obtain help from the *boa*, *yuxibu* par excellence. Other practices intended to enhance the bitterness of the body are also widely used. These practices range from the use of toad poison to the ritual consumption of *ayahuasca*. Dreaming is ritualised and specific songs relate the encounters of dreamers with all sorts *yuxibu* characters on their nightly journeys. In short, the Cashinahua universe is densely inhabited by *yuxin* and all adult members are trained in the proper dealing with their activities, their power and the potentiality of dangerous outcomes of excessive exposure.

We have also seen that certain persons assume the specific role of mediators between the realm of the *yuxin* and that of human beings. These specialists are called *yuxian*. The more exposed to "yuxinity" one becomes, the more one becomes associated with its bitter powers and medicines. But, say the Cashinahua, no specialists are strong enough to send into or extract from a person's body the shamanic substance called *muka* (bitter) in Cashinahua language, or to cure a victim of an equivalent illness-causing shamanic substance, used by the Culina and called *duri*. Thus, if the definition of shamanism is to be limited to the sending and extracting of shamanic arrows or substances such as *duri* or *muka*, the Cashinahua can be defined as a people

⁵¹ A similar "democratic" modality of the role of the shaman can be found among the Kagwahiv, where "everyone who dreams has a little bit of a shaman" (Kracke, W., 1992), as well as among the Pirahã, where all adult men are shamans (Gonçalves, 1995).

without shamans but with a strongly shamanic worldview. Yet, if we consider the presence of specialists in dealings with the invisible *yuxin* forces inhabiting the forest as a criterion, Cashinahua cosmology and practice can certainly be labelled shamanic.

Yet, in contrast to their neighbours, the Culina (who are said by the Cashinahua to have successful shamans), the Cashinahua seem to be much more in fear of their sorcerers (*huni dauya*), specialists in the use of poison, than of their shamans (*mukaya*). To clarify the distinction between these two types of specialists, a comparison with the classic Azande case might be useful (Evans-Pritchard, 1937).

The similarities, however, only hold up to a certain point. Among the Azande, as well as among the Cashinahua, the former (the sorcerer and the *dauya*) make use of material objects to cause illness, while the latter (the witch, the *mukaya*, or the shaman) do not. Sorcerers use fetishes (replicas), poison and/or bodily parts of the intended victim to cause harm (through direct contagion as much as through metonymy), in much the same way as Cashinahua sorcerers poison excrement or speak spells over a victim's strand of hair. The means by which witches and most shamans attack their victims, on the other hand, are immaterial. For a witch, his power only materialises through the illness caused in a victim (or, in some specific cases, through an autopsy on a dead witch), while in the case of the shaman his power normally can gain a material manifestation in the form of magic objects: phlegm, feathers, snake skins or stones can be exteriorised from his or his victim's body.

The most salient difference between Cashinahua shamanism and African (Azande) witchcraft, however, is the fact that the Azande witch is said to be unconscious of his power, being he himself a victim of his evil thoughts, while a shaman is totally conscious and responsible for his deeds and powerful words and thoughts. A shaman is a trained practitioner in the service of his kinsmen. This brings us to another difference, a consequence of the first, which is the fact that witches are never healers, while shamans are first and foremost healers, becoming murderers only of their enemies, and never of their close kin.

The sorcerer, *huni dauya* (the man who owns medicine), is not only capable of killing through poisoning excrement but can also hide poison in women's skirts with

the same results. At night the woman will first feel a headache, than start vomiting and risks death the same night. Sometimes the medicine man attacks his victims directly, scratching the forehead with the long nail of his right thumb. He hides his poison under the nail of the thumb of his right hand and within his earrings made of bamboo and closed with wax (*bui*). When a sorcerer has recently killed someone, his hands are said to be dyed black with genipa and the whites of his eyes are said to be red (he is 'full of' or contaminated by the blood of his victim). The *dauya* is, in Antonio's words, a furious person with no sense of humour:

"If you make fun of his bald head, because *dauya* are always bald, if you think it's funny, he puts poison on you. If you are stingy (*yauxi*) with him, he puts poison on you. If you refused to have sex with him, he puts poison on you. (Suddenly with a mischievous smile). If you were stingy with me, I could poison you. If you scolded me, I could poison you, if I were a *dauya*. A *dauya* never eats meat and does not smell any perfume. When he kills someone he spends a month without talking to anybody. He cannot touch a woman. I do not want to know about *dau*, I do not want to die."

From the following description one can see that we are dealing with the evil, powerful and dangerous version of the 'ideal' type of *dauya*, the sort of person most feared in the Cashinahua imagination (more than warriors (who never kill kinsmen any way) or shamans for reasons dealt with above). The description of this character is a caricature of antisocial behaviour and power abuse and this kind of man would never be tolerated in a village. Only once did I hear about suspicions that an old man might be preparing himself to put his knowledge of poisonous plants into practice. This happened in the context of a village splitting, in a tense and conflictive atmosphere.

During an *ayahuasca* session, the village head's son had a vision in which the father of the separatists' leader wanted to poison him. This vision worried the boy's close kinsmen seriously but once the secessionists parted and were left in peace, the fear and animosity calmed down again. This episode shows that in the case of the Cashinahua it is the sorcerer and not the shaman who took over the role of the warrior (although, as we will see, the vision quests with *ayahuasca* also have a strongly expressed warlike character)⁵².

⁵² Ayahuasca drinkers of the villages of Moema, Nova Aliança and Cana Recreio (population

The specialist in healing with medicinal plants, on the other hand, is called by the same term as his counterpart the sorcerer. The ambiguity of the term *dauya* (specialist in the use of *dau*) is linked to the polysemy of the concept *dau* that stands at its root. *Dau* can mean medicine and poison, as well as charm and decoration. Thus, a song leader's cloth can be decorated with feathers, who are called his *dau*, the *dau* of his cloth. When wearing his cloth, the song leader is called *dauya* (the one with medicine). This is due to the fact that he is literally walking around "with charm and spell" and that these adornments enhance the efficacy of the ritual in which he is acting. But it might also refer to the fact that the song leader is normally also a knowledgeable herbal doctor.

Pleasant smelling plants, body paint, bead necklaces and bracelets are also called a person's *dau*. As with all power, there are two sides to the power of *dau* and it can be used to embellish and to cure as much as to deceive and to kill. As an example of the ambiguity of *dau*, we can mention the role of smell, used to attract and to seduce as much as to conceal in amorous play as well as on hunting expeditions. Thus it was said of one village leader, who people resented for accumulating too much power and goods, that he used to bring back from his visits ("hunting expeditions") to the city, perfumes so strong that they could 'bewitch' all women of the village.

predominantly of 'Peruvian' origin), fear the weekly sessions of ayahuasca hold in the village of Fronteira, village inhabited by Cashinahua who migrated from the Envira river, where they worked in the rubber extraction until the seventies. My interlocutors affirmed that the ayahuasca of Fronteira was excessively strong and that ayahuasca drinkers of that village knew how to 'put sorcery' (*botar feitiço*) in the brew. The ayahuasca sessions of Fronteira evoke those described by the Yaminahua to Calavia (1995: 116), qualifying the traditional way of consuming the brew in terms of real 'warlike' competitions between different groups who used to gather in the forest to drink and 'see' who dominated better the knowledge of *shori* (ayahuasca). Nowadays, the same role of simulation or incitement to fighting seems to befall the ritual intake of *cachaça* (cane spirit). The author concludes that alcohol assumed the place of the *shori* sessions, provoking fights with a surprising regularity and counting with the same popularity reserved to *shori* in the old days (1995: 115). This situation is similar to that encountered among the Pirahã where the ritual ingestion of *paricá* (psychoactive powder ingested through sniffing) was substituted by the ritualised ingestino of big quantities of alcohol. As occurred with the *paricá* sniffing, only one person at once takes the substance. The resulting state of intoxication transform the user temporarily into an aggressive 'predator' who attacks, without discrimination whoever dears to come close. He persecutes kin and non-kin alike, although his preference goes to strangers (Gonçalves, 1997).

We encounter the same ambivalence with respect to the possibility of an accumulation of power by the shaman as we in relation to the specialist in herbal knowledge. Although the Cashinahua say their shamans were much more powerful in the past, observations by other Cashinahua and Pano specialists seem to agree upon the fact that the role of the shaman is a temporary and delicate matter among all Panoan people, and is much less stressed and institutionalised than among many other Amazonian groups (Erikson, 1986: 196, 205)⁵³. Among the Cashinahua, shamans (*mukaya*) were never leaders. Chiefship and dealing with the immaterial world were complementary roles linked to opposite moieties (Kensinger, 1975). The leader represents the supreme provider, the peace-maker, the one who knows how to talk to his people, while the figure of the *mukaya* was more problematic. He did not hunt nor eat meat and could not have sex with women. Not to partake in these activities which are constitutive of social behaviour placed him or her somehow on the fringe of everyday social intercourse. While the village leader speaks at dawn to call the men to work, the *mukaya* spoke at night with and in name of the members of the *yuxin* world.

The fact that the Cashinahua are extremely suspicious of any accumulation of power is an decisive factor determining the ambivalent and unstable function of shamanism as a social role. While the village leader is only accepted as long as he behaves in favour of the well-being of his community, a shaman will only be so as long as he manages to conceal his special powers. Since it is not only considered to be proper, but also strategically important to deny the possession of power and knowledge, the shaman will never exist as a socially accepted position. He only appears when the situation requires a strong healer.

⁵³ Among the Matis (Erikson 1996 and sd.) no specialists in the use of "bitter substance" have survived the trauma and demoralisation of contact with western society. The class of bitter substances includes *ayahuasca*, tobacco snuff, toad poison and the shamanic bitter substance *muka*. The author argues that after contact and after the loss of most people of the older generation nobody felt strong enough to handle these dangerous substances. Therefore the Matis seemed to have only specialists in the domain of sweet (*bata*) substances. The Matis argued that they were all 'children', having lost their old ones, 'those who know'. But this situation is seen as transitory by the Matis themselves who seem to have reintroduced the ethnically important but 'bitter' and dangerous practice of tattoo, as well as the use of toad poison. This after the author's last visit in 1982.

Power can just as easily be lost as the fading away of a dream. Power is dangerous not only for the victim but for the well-being of the owner's too. People are afraid of causing others to feel envy, anger and rejection because these feelings can cause them to seek revenge through poisoning or through 'snake shamanising', a resource theoretically accessible to all. As causes for death 'in ancient times', the same motifs keep returning: the lack of generosity or the excessive abundance of the victim's gardens, and the refusal by the female victim to accept the powerful one's sexual advances.

The Cashinahua are curious and self-critical, always ready to reformulate a question or to blame their own lack of knowledge as compared with that of the 'old ones', when there were no white people around and no illnesses. "In those days, nobody died of illness, only of old age, bewitching (shamanising) and poison." Diagnoses and healing methods are constantly negotiated and redefined in the light of new evidence and convincing hypotheses. Shamanism is a function, not a position.

Another factor for the lack of emphasis on shamanic power is a complementariness in the idiosyncratic elements of the Cashinahua on the Purus river in relation to their neighbours and 'alter-egos', the Culina, a difference that helps to mark the specificity of each one's identity. Thus the Culina specialised in shamanism, while the Cashinahua acquired a detailed knowledge of plants and poisons. But there is one problem: *dau bata* (sweet medicine made from plant extracts) does not cure *duri*, the Culina equivalent of *dau muka* (bitter medicine). This feat could only be achieved by the "real" shaman, the *mukaya*, and not by his lesser versions, who are all too "sweet" for the bitterness of Culina power.

k. The eye yuxin and the shadow

In contrast to the *yuxin* of urine and excrement, which are linked to the interior of the body, the eye *yuxin* (*bedu yuxin*) and body *yuxin* (*yuda yuxin*) or shadow (*yuda baka*) are linked to the senses and are both visible on the surface of the body: the eye *yuxin* is visible in the pupil of the eyes, while the body *yuxin* is visible as its shadow. The eye *yuxin* is responsible for vision, and the body *yuxin* is responsible for memory, speech and hearing.

The eye *yuxin* is also called the 'true soul' (*yuxin kuin*) and its origin is celestial, while the body *yuxin* grows with the body as does its capacity to speak and to act socially (McCallum, 1989a). The true *yuxin* is as a heavenly seed (*bedu*) or light planted in the heart and visible in the eyes. The seed is the *yuxin* and the heart is its nurturing wrapping. When the foetus is formed this seed creates roots in the heart. The metaphor of a seed growing into a tree is used to describe the eye *yuxin*'s quality of vital force (*yuxin*), which is rooted in the body and responsible for its growth. A human being will result from this act of planting when the seed (*yuxin kuin*) creates roots in the heart and makes the body gain weight and strength until it becomes a full-grown adult. As a tree it will 'know' how to live a long life, that is 'how to have a strong heart' (*huinti kuxi*), and when to die. We will come back to the metaphor of the 'tree of life' as it is, in the shape of the painted ritual stool, a key metaphor for the initiation ritual of young girls and boys.

The presence of the *yuxin kuin* (true *yuxin*) in the body makes itself felt in the heartbeat and in the light of the eyes. These are the places where the true *yuxin* dwells. The origin and destiny of the eye *yuxin* are celestial, and therefore the link of this *yuxin* to the body can be considered to be transitory. While for the body *yuxin* there is no existence without a body, because it is the *yuxin* of the body and incorporates its lived memories, for the eye *yuxin* there is. Without a body it becomes a *yuxin* who travels through the sky to go to live in the sky village of the *Inka* cannibal Gods.

During certain states of being of a person, the eye *yuxin* can temporarily abandon the body. For instance, the eye *yuxin* leaves the body at night when a person is dreaming or travelling in the *yuxibu* worlds as revealed through *ayahuasca*. It can also leave the body when the body enters an altered state of being caused by high fever or fainting, or when disoriented and captured by *yuxin* in the garden or on a hunting expedition. The absence of this *yuxin* is seen when the eyes remain white, without the pupil and without the images reflected in the pupil. At the moment when the *bedu yuxin* escapes, a whistling sound *xe! xe! xe!* is heard and the sleeping person's hammock shakes.

One of the reasons why it is sometimes said that a person has only two 'souls' or *yuxin* instead of more, can be this capacity of the eye and shadow *yuxin* to present

themselves independently from the body, not only as images but as real doubles of the body, as entities with independent agency and thought. The eye *yuxin* is responsible for the capability of sight. During the day this capacity is realised through the eyes, while during the night the *yuxin* perceives without the constraint of eyes, face or perspective.

“If we had no eyebrows and no eyelashes”, I was told by Antonio, “and if our forehead was not so high, we would always be able to see the invisible world of *yuxibu*.” This means that the finiteness of the shape of our body limits the originally (mythic or disembodied) unlimited capability of vision of the eye *yuxin*, the essence of holistic vision, now limited by the embodied eye, and framed in the case of the skull by eyelashes and eyebrows (traditionally pulled out but not any more) and by the forehead.

This capacity for unlimited vision is recovered during visionary experiences where the whole visual field changes due to the absence of a body, a horizon and a fixed point of view. Descriptions of this kind of vision depict the visual agent as being included in the object seen (several songs repeat the phrase “we are in the centre, totally inside”). In this way he sees what is behind as well as what is in front of him, being carried away by the waves of the interior vision of ever-changing forms.

The shadow of the body, on the other hand, is a social *yuxin* with earthly origin and grows along with the body, being almost absent at birth. As the body grows, its *yuda baka* accumulates memories, emotions, experience and speaking capabilities. Any transformation suffered by the body has direct consequences on the *yuxin* animating it. The meaning of the word *yuda*, ‘body’, expresses exactly this quality of being imbued with agency and capabilities to feel, think and act. The *yuda baka* (body shadow) is as inseparable from the body as a shadow. The shadow is actually one of its Manifestations. But when the body is at rest, the *baka* can leave the body and wander around to distant places where it can be perceived as a ‘phantom’ or as a frightening, undefined vulture appearing at nightfall. Such appearances are ominous because they

portend the death or serious illness of the owner⁵⁴.

In contrast to the eye *yuxin* whose nature and productive capability it is to travel during the night gathering hints, images and thoughts for the coming day, it is a bad sign for the body *yuxin* to be seen at a distance from the body to which it belongs. The eye *yuxin* is a conscious agent on its journeys, bringing back from nightly space novelties in the form of premonitions about arriving visitors, ideas for hunting trails to follow, and suspicions or hypotheses about possible enemies, thieves and liars. The wandering lost shadow, however, does not bring back any information from its loitering. But, through its mere appearance, it does communicate to its kinsmen that something is wrong with the body to which it belongs. The shadow is, however, but a shadow when it appears at twilight. Those who see it will need much talk and exegesis to discover whose shadow it is that has been seen.

The complementariness of the body and eye *yuxin* follows the basic cosmic ordering of time in the form of the sequence of day and night. Daytime is reserved for the manifestation and activities of bodies and embodied *yuxin*, while night time belongs to the disembodied *yuxin* and *yuxibu*. In dreams the person becomes what he or she, in a sense, already or also is: *yuxin*, because a human being is this duality fused into one: *yuxin* and flesh conjoined to become a thinking and acting body. Night provokes the separation and potentialisation of this duality. Whereas during the day they need to be one, acting in harmony for normal daily life to be properly carried out, during the night, the eye *yuxin* (*bedu yuxin*) leaves the body, leaving the sleeping body behind.

The interference of the body, making the person talk in his dreams, is a bad omen and has to be treated with medicinal herbal drops in the eyes⁵⁵. And if the

⁵⁴ Some informants say that what you see at nightfall is not the shadow or body soul of the threatened person, but his eye soul. This seems to be also McCallum's (1996) point of view, when she says that the *yuda baka* never leaves the body.

⁵⁵ I discovered the importance of this symptom early on during my first fieldwork (1989, see Lagrou 1991). After having spoken on three succeeding nights in what seems to have been my mother tongue, "a strange language nobody understands", my hosts decided to treat me with eye drops to keep the *yuxin* away. They explained to me that, if not properly treated with *yuxin dau*, I could disappear in the forest during the night, following the call of *yuxin* who would

dreamer starts to sleepwalk, the situation is even worse. As we saw above, grimaces made while asleep are interpreted as signs of specific illnesses. The grimaces and bodily expressions are identified as the bodily postures and expressions of certain animals who will then be held responsible for the illness.

What we can conclude from these examples is that night and day should always be kept separate. Improper mixing of day and night time behaviour signifies and brings about illness. Illness is here again understood in terms of chaos. Improper mixing signifies uncontrollable empowerment and produces a mutation of matter. Illness is a deformation of the body produced by excessive *yuxin* activity. To speak and act in dreams means that not only the dream *yuxin* (another name for the same eye or true (*kuin*) *yuxin*), but also the whole body is becoming involved in the nightly experiences. This is a sign of the nightly invasion of forest *yuxin* in the safe and domesticated space of the house. These *yuxin* do not only want to engage with the *bedu yuxin* but with the person, calling him or her to come and live with them.

I. Death and the destiny of *yuxin* and flesh

The body stops being a body to become only flesh when the animating life forces that shaped it at its origin escape; this is when all the *yuxin* leave the body, and no movement, no agency is left in the resulting dead matter. This does not mean that the flesh is thereby left totally without *yuxin*. As long as there is blood in the uncooked flesh, it carries *yuxin* and therefore signifies danger for potential eaters. To become edible, it must first undergo a transmutation of quality through the action of fire and cooking. As we will see later on, this fact is of relevance for the understanding of the rationale behind Cashinahua endocannibalism.

The forecast of death is announced when the patient falls unconscious. The *bedu yuxin* has already left, the eyes are open and white. This does not mean, however, that the whole 'true *yuxin*' (*yuxin kuin*) has already left, because part of it is still living in the heart and continues to animate the body. "*Mi bexuxai!*" (You are already blind!) "*Na en mia!*" (No! I am still here!). "*Yama uintã kaxamisbuki. Mia takakinã bedu*

come to take me with them.

yuxin kakinã” (When ‘that with which we see’ is no longer there, we (the close kin) always cry. It gives you an electric shock when the *bedu yuxin* leaves.”) (Antonio Pinheiro). Five or ten days later the person is said to ‘really’ die.

When an ailing person falls unconscious, “wants to die”, all close kin are called to gather around his or her hammock. Thus, when the song leader Augusto suffered a stroke in the middle of the night, children and adults, almost the whole little village, was woken to gather around his hammock, to cry and ritually wail. His son-in-law, the village leader Edivaldo, shouted in his ear: “Look father-in-law, listen! Here is your wife, here are your children, look at her, she is calling you!” Fragrant leaves were burned to send away the *yuxin* who had come to take him with them. Augusto told his audience what he was seeing: *pupu yuxibu* (owl *yuxibu*) announcing his death, his dead sister offering him corn soup, several of his dead relatives arriving and calling him. But this time the living cried louder and his eyes came back. His son-in-law was shaking him, he opened his eyes and could see again. “They were all there”, he whispered to his wife.

The *bedu yuxin*’s (eye *yuxin*) destiny is the land of the dead, the heavenly village of the *Inka*. The ill person’s *bedu yuxin* is said to know he will die and starts to explore the pathways that reach the *Inka* village in the sky. Sudden and unprepared deaths, like those of white men dying from shooting or knife fights, are problematic, Edivaldo told me, because these souls lose their way, while death from illness and ageing help both the dying person and its kin to prepare themselves properly for the separation.

Information about the destiny of the *yuda baka* (body shadow) is contradictory. A first understanding suggested that only the *bedu yuxin* (eye *yuxin*) would undertake the journey to the sky world, while the body *yuxin* would become transformed into a hairy monster (this is also the understanding of McCallum (1989a)). The fact that the body *yuxin* grows with the body, and incorporates its social feelings makes it much more difficult for this *yuxin* to become detached from the body and its place in the world. The monster is the manifestation of grief, a non-being, a double of the dead and not of the living (as is the *karõ* among the Krahó, Carneiro da Cunha, 1978). As soon as it no longer has a body, nor a place in the village where the person belonged, the

monster becomes an “unrooted being, a *yuxibu*, “not of this world”, an Other. It wanders around, frightening and persecuting the living, and is said to retrace the steps of its body back to the place where the body was born. But during my last stay, the Augusto insistently denied this interpretation, affirming that because of its ethereal character, being but a shadow, the *yuda baka* (body shadow) follows the eye *yuxin* to the sky. It has no substance to chain it to the earth. What stays on earth are the heavy bodily substances, those that contain liquid. Augusto explains it thus:

“When a man dies, his flesh is transformed, his blood is transformed, into *cabeça-de-prego* (ant), *formiga-de-fogo* (ant), *ixam pakeya* (big spider), *arriba-saia* (ant), *taiocã*, *pui mitidan* (ant that only eats faeces); the dead person becomes transformed; his veins become worms, worms that live in the earth, his blood, bleeding in the earth.”⁵⁶

The body is a signifying whole that is as much physical as it is mental and social. The decomposition of the body originates new beings, new phenomena in the world. In the quote above, Augusto was reflecting on the death of a body from a physical, transformative point of view. The elements that once constituted a body have to become something else. Blood being the transformative agent *par excellence* does not just disappear into nothing when buried under the earth: veins become worms, flesh into ants and the blood irrigates the earth. Thus blood is part of the constant flow of energies that constitute the chain of predation, plantation and transformation.

The eye *yuxin*, on the other hand goes back from whence it came. It disappears in the sky in the form of a flying bird (or beetle: McCallum, 1996). Clouds cover the sun and the *Inka* Gods prepare for its reception (Deshayes and Keifenheim, 1982). From the physical point of view taken by Augusto in this last discussion about death, a body’s shadow is as light as the *bedu yuxin* (eye *yuxin*) and it should follow it: when the fusion of the heavenly and water world is broken by the event of death, what is light goes up and what is heavy stays below. What was two became one in the animated body called Self. At the moment of death this Self becomes Other, and each

⁵⁶ “*Huni mawai, hawen nami dami, hawen himi dami, tsisa besui, mai humpux, ixam pakeyu, pui pisi, maisan, pui mitidan; mawa damia, hawen pumu dami muinã, muin maianu, hawen himi maeamu himei.*” (Augusto Feitosa)

element goes back to its separate origin. For a new human being to come into existence they will have to mingle once again.

But there is also a social and emotional interpretation of the body and its *yuxin* after death. The definition of the body is social to start with, because, as we saw above, the Cashinahua Self is inclusive of his close kin. People who have lived together for a long time have fed and have been fed by each other. Food is the root metaphor of sociality for the Cashinahua. Not to share food signals a lack or refusal of social relationship: someone who does not share food and words with you “wants to eat you”, is very angry with you; anti-sociality is expressed by the metaphor of cannibalism. The complementary opposite of sharing, feeding and care-taking is predation.

This explains the social existence of the monster growing out of the shadow: it is the mutual memory of the dead consciousness that is said not to want to bid its kinsmen farewell and of the living who miss the deceased one. As long as the social and personal place once occupied by the deceased person is held in memory, the monster will be around. That is why most people say that *baka*, the body’s shadow and seat of memory and speech, the social consciousness of the person, does not follow the *bedu yuxin* (eye *yuxin*). The shadow might seem light in a physical sense, but it is too heavy emotionally.

An illustration of the monster of an unacceptable death and difficult farewell is the insatiable and eternally thirsty head of the dead *Yube* (the mythical incestuous brother) haunting its living kin and asking them ceaselessly for water. Because he no longer had a body, the water could not be held within and thus the head could never be relieved of its thirst. This figure exemplifies in a dramatically evocative image the dilemma of death: a thirsty memory without a living body.



2.3. Symbolic dualism: Yube/Inka, dua /inu

a. Sections and Moieties among the Panoans

“The self gains its existence with the individual assuming the role of the other, viewing itself and responding as the other would.”

Shanon, B., 1993: 141.

From a comparative point of view, Pano social organisation oscillates between an emphasis on groups formed by name-giving sections (as among the Marubo who do not have a moiety system, Melatti, 1977: 83-120) and a stress on the complementary relation of moieties. Although the Cashinahua share with other Panoans the phenomenon of sections called *xutabu* (group of namesakes) as a result of their “Kariera”-like marriage rules coupled to a name-giving system where names return with every alternating generation, in ritual life as well as in their conceptual ordering of the universe they stress the complementary role of moieties.

A reason for this stress on moieties at the expense of the Kariera sections might be sought in Cashinahua social politics. Two moieties are ideally able to constitute together the closed whole of a ‘auto-sufficient’ society socially speaking. A Cashinahua village is preferentially endogamic. The marriage of kin (cross-cousins in the first degree) is preferred over genealogically distant or unrelated affines, constructing in this way a marriage system based on the prescription of marriage with a person of the opposed, although equivalent section.

This does not seem to be the case for other Panoan groups such as the Shipibo-Conibo and Cashibo of the Ucayali river, the various *nawa* groups of the Juruá-Purus river usually designated by the Cashinahua under the name Yaminahua, “axe people” (including the closely related Sharanahua, Marinahua and Mastanahua, but also the less related Amahuaca and the recently contacted Parquenahua, also called Yora or Nahua). Nor is this the case for the Katuquina (Cofacci, 1994) or Jawanahua, or for the Mayoruna (including Matis, Matses and Korubo) or Marubo of the Javari area. Most of these groups

(excluding those of the Ucayali area) are actually a mixture of a large number of smaller groups that disappeared as a consequence of the persecutions (*correrias*) by “forest cleaners” (*mateiros*), hired to make the place safe. These *mateiros* preceded the massive invasion of rubber tappers during the boom that lasted from the last quarter of the previous until the first decade of this century.

There is a factor other than non-indigenous interference however, that seems to be at work too. That is the “paradoxical contrast between drastic atomisation and considerable homogeneity of Panoan groups”. Erikson considers this to be a salient characteristic of the Panoans which is linked to the fact that “although ‘otherness’ and ‘violence’ objectively lead to war, emically, they are both above all a fundamental cornerstone of Panoan peoples’ ontology.” (1986: 185) Or, war and antagonism, leading to extreme differentiation between small communities of the size of extended families, would be the sociological language all Panoans share and would be responsible, by means of constant antagonistic exchange, for a homogeneity comparable to that observed in the Jivaroan or Yanomami language group (both in style and in size).

The Mayoruna were especially feared for their belligerence, they used to abduct their enemies’ (mostly Panoan) women and children, who they introduced and adopted into their own society. Their initiation into the group was marked by the imposition on their face of a tattoo, the principle visible mark of Pano ethnic identity. The Shipibo too kidnapped wives from the enemy and are said to have exchanged male prisoners for metal weapons with non-Indian traders (Keifenheim, 1990: 90). The Shipibo rule is always to marry someone genealogically as distant as possible within the ethnic boundaries, an inversion of the Cashinahua marriage rule. The Shipibo also incorporated the Conibo and the now extinct Shetebo, after conquering them. Thus the practice of marrying and incorporating the (related, Pano) enemy does not at all sound strange in the Panoan and Amazonian landscape.

This text will show that a comparison of this state of affairs with the Cashinahua endogamic and peaceful social moral reveals a sharp contrast of ideology and praxis. This

difference in style and value, however, does not necessarily need to be as old as we might think. Erikson, from a Mayoruna or general Panoan point of view, suggests that the actual isolation (“*un repli contemporain sur eux-mêmes*”) of the Cashinahua might be temporary and that the diminished emphasis on sections in favour of moieties might be linked to a self-imposed withdrawal.

Keifenheim, arguing from a Cashinahua standpoint, on the other hand, suggests that they and not their Pano neighbours might be the closest to a ‘Proto-Pano model’. All Panoans share a concentric logic of dividing humankind into three categories: “we”, “others” (similar to us), and (total) “strangers” (the white). Keifenheim argues that only the Cashinahua conceptual system identifies the pole of the Other in terms worthy of being called a category, while other less homogeneous groups (Matis, Yaminahua, Amahuaca etc.) subsume alterity under the only well defined pole, that of Self, qualified by the all-embracing category of *kuin* (‘proper’, ‘true’) and its equivalents in other Panoan languages (*kikin* in Shipibo, *kimo* in Matis, *koi* in Yaminahua etc.).

The pole of Other among the Cashinahua would be represented by the category of *bemakia* (‘improper’, ‘Other’, that is totally excluded from the field of Self) and in this way the absolute stranger (*nawa*) would be called *huni bemakia*, a human being with whom no relation whatsoever would be possible. Through the application of the two classificatory oppositions *kuin/kuinman* (totally proper/not totally proper) and *kayabi/bemakia* (good/improper) to the field of identity, the author obtains, on the one hand, a duality of Self/non-Self and, on the other, one of non-Other/Other⁵⁷. Both of these poles of reference to Selfness and to Otherness are said to be “*clairement défini*” and “*fermée et immuable*” (Keifenheim, 1992: 80). In the first opposition, the term of ‘Self’ is defined, while in the next the ‘Other’ is. Together they define the intermediate field of non-Self and non-Other, the field of transition between identity and alterity.

The “impoverishment of conceptualisation” of alterity among non-Cashinahua

⁵⁷ Categories previously identified and interpreted by Kensinger (1975).

Panoans, where the only qualification for alterity would be the fact that it is a 'non-self', would be reflected in a "dangerous permeability" of their ethnic boundaries (Keifenheim, 1992: 83). If we were to follow this argument, all Amerindian ontologies would run the risk of dissipation and disappearance, due to the widespread "cannibalistic" character of their cultural ethos, eager as they are to 'consume' alterity and novelty in the constant process of reinventing themselves.

The fact is that the Cashinahua, as well as their most closely related Panoan neighbours, the Peruvian Yaminahua (Townesley, 1988), do cultivate an elaborate moiety symbolism. A dualism good to think through. It is a dualism that allows boundary flexibility as well as an elaborate reflection on the constitutive role of alterity in the construction of society. In all their rituals one moiety plays alternatively the role of stranger, the interiorized enemy, while the other plays the role of host. Gender dualism and play with role inversion and antagonism between the sexes follows the same logic as the moiety dualism, especially during fertility or increase rituals⁵⁸.

The possibility of role inversion for both gender and moieties reflects a preoccupation with the meaning of alterity and a curiosity to reflect upon how it feels to be in someone else's place. And although in daily life gender roles are clearly expressed, this division is never represented by the involved parties as given, but rather as chosen. The stress is upon choice. The message seems to be that the possibility to transgress gender boundaries in myth and ritual, expresses also the real possibility of exceptions and inversions in daily life, a topic to which we will return later. To be able to engage in gendered productive activities implies a belonging to a group, a group with autonomy within its own field and proud of its achievements. To pertain to this group the young adolescent has to gain mastery over certain techniques and games, and it is within this group that he/she acquires an identity shaped through a specific style of behaviour and of talk, as well as a means of dealing with the other gender, the other indispensable half to be

⁵⁸ For increase rituals and gender symbolism among the Cashinahua see McCallum, 1989a.

conquered.

The parallel between gender and moiety complementariness cannot be taken too far, however, because if symbolic associations to moiety belonging exist, in daily life there is no de facto role differentiation between members of different moieties. All women, *inani* (the female part of the jaguar moiety) as well as *banu* (the female part of the brilliance moiety), cook, spin, paint and weave, while all men, *inu* (the jaguar moiety) and *dua* (the brilliance moiety), hunt, fish, weave carrying baskets and produce bows and arrows. Some specialisations seem to be associated with moieties but never in a rigid way. More than the association between, for example, the qualities of a *dua* person and the function of shamanising, and the qualities of an *inu* person and that of song leader (or village leader), there seems to be a necessary complementariness between both functions.

Thus, for a village to be considered complete, there needs to be a song leader and a political leader. Normally, a new village originates in the joining through marriage of two leaders with these complementary roles and capabilities. The type of alliance varies. Ideally (Kensinger, 1975) both leaders should be of the same generation and exchange sisters, however, more often (in the villages I observed) the nucleus of a new village was built around the joining of an older chant leader and a younger son-in-law. The former follows the latter to open a new clearing and to build another village. If the son-in-law "knows how to speak to his people, making them feel happy and full of energy for work" and if the father-in-law is capable of attracting people through the performance of rituals, other close kin will be enticed to follow. Since the alliance of two families through marriage is the corner-stone of a new village and since a proper marriage is contracted between persons of different moieties, there is a significant chance that the song leader and village head will belong to opposite moieties.

Depending on the personality, knowledge and experience of the leader's wife, she might become the leader of the women in the same way as her husband becomes the leader of men and she discusses with the women, organises and calls them for work. The female leader only calls meetings when collective work is needed to harvest and spin

cotton, and also when organising big festivities. Daily work is organised by means of informal invitations to closely related kin or friends to accompany the owner to her garden and share in the harvest.

Men, on the other hand, meet daily at dawn in front of the village leader's house to discuss the activities of the day of each male member of the community. Male activities like hunting and fishing, are mostly solitary, although some exceptional tasks, like the building of a house, the cleaning of a new garden or the preparation of rituals call for collective work. It should be noted that male formal meetings do not reflect a stronger social or collective life for men than would be the case for women, said by traditional anthropology (Collier & Rosaldo, 1979) to be universally confined to the 'privacy' of the domestic sphere. On the contrary, men need to compensate for the isolation that most of their daily activities impose upon them, while women perform all their activities, from gardening to cooking and child rearing, in the company of smaller or bigger groups comprised of kin, neighbours and occasional visitors. Also, Cashinahua houses are mostly open or partly open, and are built close to each other, making communication and visibility between houses almost as intense as when they lived in big longhouses. These longhouses are said to have housed whole villages of up to hundred people. This style of house-building was abandoned when the Cashinahua moved down from the headwaters to the navigable riverside.

Male specialities are split in several sometimes mutually exclusive roles of leadership: village leader, song leader, herbal doctor (there are several kinds of herbal doctors, each one specialised in different illnesses), *ayahuasca* session leader, teacher, and (when there is one) village pastor. Female positions of leadership too can be occupied by several prominent women. Thus, the wives of the head of a village (he normally has two) are supposed to have big gardens for the regular preparation of collective meals. It is the first wife who bears the responsibility to invite and organise. The role of prominent hostess, however, can also be performed by her mother (normally the song leader's wife). This is the case if the village leader's wife is still young. As long as the wife's mother's

logistic support is needed, the couple will share the house of her parents (due to uxorilocality upon early marriage). The position of mother-in-law of the village head seems to be a strategic one. While old men retreat from political discussion and become relatively silent in public, old women can become quite influential; they speak at women's meetings as well as at men's. A remarkable character of aged ladies' speech is that they speak much louder than young women who, when in public, prefer to make their voice heard almost by whispering.

Only if the village leader's or song leader's wife is a reputed weaver will she be the one to also organise the collective spinning sessions at cotton harvest time. There seems to be an association between weaving and the qualities of a *banu* person, on the one hand, and body painting and qualities of an *inani* person on the other, (this is information derived from ritual song and male speech, but is not part of daily female discourse). But, again, what seems to prevail is a complementariness in roles and abilities, more than a rigid link between certain roles and moiety adherence. The content of moiety symbolism seems to me to be used to conceptualise the mutual dependence of different elements in the world and the need for alterity in order for identity to exist, more than to define group prerogatives or to classify people in mutually exclusive categories through substantialist definitions of the specialities of each moiety. Thus beings and forms are considered to be the result of the proper mixing of difference. It is through this ontological root which holds that two are needed to make one that gender and moieties meet. Therefore it is not surprising to see that among the Yaminahua, as well as among the Matses and the Matis (Erikson, 1996: 90-108), one moiety is linked to femininity and the other to masculinity. A similar association between gender and moieties can be found among the Cashinahua (McCallum, 1989a).

Following Townsley (1988), the Yaminahua *Roa* moiety represents both the water and sky worlds, while the *Dawa* moiety represents the earth and the forest. The first moiety is qualified by the feminine and is linked to the interior of social space. The qualities of softness, rottenness, dampness, consanguinity, and chiefship also come under

the rubric of this moiety, and elders and small children are linked, like women, to the inside of the village space. The *dawa* moiety, on the other hand, is explicitly linked to the exterior, to those who come from abroad (*dawa* being the Yaminahua variation of the Cashinahua *nawa*), to hardness and dryness and to young male adult life and its quintessential expression through hunting. It is men who negotiate with the world abroad, with white people and with the beings of the forest. The forest is considered to be a male space and men should avoid taking domestic smells with them if they want to be successful on hunting expeditions. Therefore the male moiety of strangers (*dawa*) is said to be perfumed (as are the dead when living in their celestial abodes), while the female moiety of kin, the *dua* side of reality, is said to exhale the smell of organic perishable material and of bodily odours.

Among the Matses of the Javari area (Erikson, 1996: 90-108), one moiety is called *bedi* ('spotted', a metonymical designation for jaguar) and is linked to male predatory behaviour, while the other is called *macu* (ferment (Erikson) or worm (Romanoff, 1984)) and is linked to the female sphere of fermentation. In this way, moiety symbolism expresses a gendered complementary relation between male offerings of meat and female offerings of maize beer. The association of the *macu* moiety to female productivity is expressed through the fact that people of this moiety were responsible for keeping the worms away from the maize plants, while people of the jaguar moiety were not allowed to look at the maize for fear of causing it harm (Romanoff, 1984: 96). Another notable aspect of Matses (as well as Matis and Yaminahua) dualism is that, although marriage with cross-cousins is recommended, moiety exogamy does not seem to be obligatory. This dualism can therefore be said to be more 'metaphorical' and less 'practical' than Cashinahua moieties who serve not only to conceptualise cosmological forces at work in the universe or to designate the belonging of human beings to one of these two dimensions dividing all beings on earth, but also to organise social life on the practical level of choosing marriage partners.

There is, however, still another interpretation for the flexibility of moiety systems

in relation to marriage, an interpretation that derives from the fact that moieties are linked to the complementary poles of interior and exterior. If, as we saw, the Mayoruna as well as the Yaminahua used to reproduce their atomistic societies through the introduction and adoption of captives, we can understand why real alterity became more significant than the symbolic division of society into those from the inside and others from the outside. But if for the Yaminahua the moiety associated with alterity is qualified as male, with women belonging to the inside, among the Mayoruna, the opposite seems to be the case. Women are captives and men are captors. In this way it is women and not men who are associated with alterity, the outside and enmity.

The Matis only have latent dualism. Erikson (1996: 90) suggests that this might be due partially to the drastic reduction in number suffered by these people during the last few decades. There seem to have existed two moieties, one called *ayakobo* and another *tsasibo* (*tsasi*: hardened), and two recurrent motifs, diamonds and circles, would have been traditionally linked to them. By means of deduction and association with data obtained among the closely related Matses, the author concludes that *ayakobo* must be related to the feminine, the perishable, 'sweetness' and weakness, while *tsasibo* would be related to the jaguar, male predation, 'bitterness' and hardness. Nowadays, however, no Matis seems to claim membership to the *ayakobo* moiety, and all *ayakobo* are said to be strangers: *Matis utsi*, 'other people', "more or less ridiculous (or dangerous) like the Marubo and, above all, the Korubo", their enemies and 'bad and lazy hunters' (Erikson, 1996: 94). The Matis custom of piercing several long, thin spines through the nostrils of both men and women evokes in a strikingly successful way their visual identification with the jaguar's whiskers. Thus, instead of identifying one moiety with the outside, the Matis seem to have emptied one of their moieties, the one linked to alterity, and projected it onto the exterior. The same consciousness of the indispensability of otherness and the vital need for incorporation of exogenous powers for the existence of society persists, however, and this seems to be the dominant rationale behind the great variety of Amazonian dualisms. In this way, the typical Panoan permeability of the frontiers that separate inside

from outside seems to be understood by the natives themselves as vital for and constitutive of their identity and survival.

Here again, however, we have to keep in mind that when we speak of dualisms we are dealing with gradual and not with mutually exclusive oppositions. Because, to use a Cashinahua example, a human being is comprised of male and female substance (bones and skin respectively) and of bitter as well as of sweet food, in the same way as everybody shares in the *dua* and *inu* qualities. Human beings and all embodied phenomena in the world were created through the mingling of these cosmic qualities. The state of primordial 'purity' was that of non-being, it was a time of extremes, of paralysis in the sky world on the one hand, and of excessive fluidity of form in the water world, on the other. It was the time before the terrestrial world acquired the form and substance it has today. This form and substance is a consequence of moiety and gender interdependence.

b. Yube the ancestor, Inka the inescapable affine

"In the tension between dark and light lies the power of the universe."
Tibetan proverb.⁵⁹

On the ontological level, life is seen by the Cashinahua as a consequence of the existence of distinctions between different qualities: the cavity of darkness remained separate from that of dawn, that of coldness separate from that of heat. The primordial beings joined and ordered these qualities of coldness and heat, and darkness and light into a rhythmic sequence so as to alternate day with night, as well as to compensate for heat with coolness. This happened in a time when the sky world was not yet separated from the earth and the water world. Life on earth, on the other hand, resulted from the parting and subsequent linkage of the worlds above and below. The earth is a synthesis of and transition between them, while humankind is a temporary form of solidity (the embodied existence), in between aquatic fluidity and solar eternity.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Lindsey Crickmay, paper 1997.

This dual origin of life on earth is reflected in the moieties. The *dua* (brilliance) moiety is linked to the water world and to its *Ibu* (father, owner or master), the primordial anaconda *Yube*, owner of all life-giving liquids from rain to blood and drugs. Such fluid associations link *Yube* with excessive softness and malleability, with potentiality of form as well as with all that is perishable. The *inu* (jaguar) moiety, on the other hand, is linked to the sky world and its Master the *Inka*, owner of gold, beads and metal (*mane*), fire, stone and ice, each bearing the quality of excessive hardness and imperishability. *Yube* reigns over the night through his moon incarnation, while *Inka* reigns over the day through his cooking fire, the sun.

Although the emblems of each moiety, *Yube*/Moon and *Inka*/Sun, are both seen as epitomes of alterity (which implies enmity and predatory behaviour), in myth, *Inka* characters seem to be considered to be more exterior than *Yube*. This can be explained by the fact that the *Inka* is associated with dead, while *Yube* is linked to life. The *Inka* are the eye *yuxin*'s destiny. As masters of the dead and of the sky domain, the *Inka* figure in Cashinahua mythology as potential affines. This potentiality will be only realised with the definitive departure of the eye *yuxin* at death.

In ritual song, however, terms are inverted. Instead of expressing the frustrated attempt at sociality dealt with in myth, the *Nixpupima* initiation songs invite the *Inka* people into the village. The people of the sky world are asked to be generous with their gifts and the hosts are rewarded with *Inka*'s generosity. The *Inka* bring with them their fire and their maize, while the song leader himself dances and is dressed like an *Inka*. In this ritual context, humans, who in myth were more explicitly associated with the water domain, become allies of the *Inka*, and knowledge that in mythological times had to be conquered from the enemy is given to them freely by the master of the sky world when properly invited.

The myth of origin of humankind (see Chapter three) expresses the idea of other-becoming or *Inka*-becoming in eschatological terms. The journey of the primordial mother *Nete* is a movement away from the rejected otherness of the water domain, in the direction

of the longed for but dangerous Otherness of the sky domain. This journey represents the journey of life that ends with its arrival in the land of the dead. The basic ontological idea expressed is that humankind's origin lies in the water world, while its destiny is situated in the sky world. This is the reason why one of the poles of Cashinahua dualism is conceptualised as more alien to humans than the other.

The primordial mother *Nete* was one of the only survivors of the great deluge, sent by the masters of the water domain in revenge for the humans' lack of social reciprocity. *Nete* creates her four children in a gourd at the root of the sky, and travels with them upstream from wetness to dryness. At the end of her journey she arrives in the highlands, *mawan*, meaning both highland and death. There she intends to visit her 'brother'. She is looking for hospitality and generosity from her host and his wife, but what she finds instead is death. Her 'brother', in the figure of a giant ally of the *Inka* kills her.

This myth states that the relation of the Cashinahua, people who rose from the water world to live in the intermediate realm of the earth, to those who live in the highlands (standing in this case for inhabitants of the sky) is one of potential but deadly and therefore as yet unfulfilled affinity, at least as long as life lasts. Because of an incestuous infertile marriage, the potential father-in-law created pets instead of children and had no daughters or sons to give his 'sister's' children in marriage. While the proper behaviour of a brother towards a visiting sister would be to offer her drink and food, he sends her an icy wind that freezes her to death. There is no reciprocity with the sky world, a world seen in this myth as one that takes but does not give back. This is also the image of death, a one way journey into alterity from whence no return is possible.

Yube and his wife *Sidika*, the mythical anacondas, on the other hand, are considered by the Cashinahua to be kin instead of affines. This ontological information also derives from myth: during the great deluge, an intertwined couple lying in a hammock covered in design was transformed into the big anaconda. This is one of the explanations for the recurrent statement: "*Yube* is our flesh, our body". Because of this sharing in 'essence' or 'substance' the anaconda is said to be capable of transforming into

a person when wanting to abduct someone into the water world, a world parallel to this one.

The following is how humankind learned to prepare and drink the mind-expanding or psychotropic brew *ayahuasca*, called *nixi pae* (strong vine) or *nawa huni* (the stranger, a person). A hunter, seduced by the appearance of the beautifully designed body of a (snake) woman emerging from a lake, made love to her and followed her to live in the water world with her. Because of the sharing of liquids and substance (sex, banana drink, *ayahuasca*, children), and through the emotions and memories entailed in the experience, the man gained the name *Yube* (snake). Because of his dual citizenship of both land and water domains, he acquired shamanic capabilities. He died and his body was buried. From his legs and arms four different kinds of vine were born: these are different kinds of vine, capable of inducing the drunkenness (*pae*) of *Yube*, Master of the water domain.

The four different kinds of vines born of the dead body are said to provoke visions with different predominating colours. The first vine, born from the left arm was called *xane huni* (people of the blue *xane* bird) and gives bluish visions. The vine that grew from the right arm was called *xawan huni* (people of the red macaw) and shows reddish visions. One is said to see a lot of blood. From the legs sprouted *ni huni* (forest people), a vine that gives dark visions, and *baka huni* (fish people), a vine with visions with tones of pastel. From one body, explain Agostinho and Edivaldo, sprout visions of different colours because just as the body has “four different movements”, it has four different substances: the blue vision comes from the dead body’s gall, the red from his blood, the black from its putrefied intestines and the white vision from the bones. Thus each different preparation of the brew, taken from a different part of the body of the plant, reveals a distinct aspect of its owner’s life. And since one is never able to drink the liquid prepared from a whole plant all at once, one will always only have a partial vision of the worlds owned by the master of the water domain.

By ingesting this vine, humans would acquire the capacity to visit this hidden reality, a world of *yuxin* images as opposed to this earthly world of bodies. *Ayahuasca*

produces moving images and a constant pulsation of free floating forms, a world of pure potentiality of otherness. These other-worldly images are characterised by the presence of design covering bodies, utensils and houses of the *yuxibu* of sky, water and forest. This reality needs to stay hidden from daylight, but it continues to live behind (and inside) the controlled shape and movements of bodies. At night men who drink the brew gain access to knowledge inaccessible to the consciousness of the everyday state of being. Visions also allow for the exploration of known or imagined worlds. In their visions, hunters trace paths they intend to follow the next day in their search for game, and young men visit big cities like São Paulo, Rio, New York, Lima and Belgium, the 'city' of the anthropologist.

The first experience with *ayahuasca* is that of death. The initiate is crushed and subsequently swallowed by the strong grip and mouth of the anaconda. The anaconda is experienced as a predator cannibalising its game. The novice experiences blackness and white fear. He thinks that he will die, that the snakes are eating him, and screams. If he does see something in the blackness inside the snake's body, it is coloured chaos and whirlpools of design: taking on the appearance of the snake. When he listens to the songs, however, he will hear the far away voices of his people calling him back, and showing him the way. The chaotic whirlpool of Escher-like patterns swallowing and disorienting him will make way for a more ordered and recognisable set of labyrinths, which characterise the graphic style of his own people. He will follow these lines as a lost hunter follows paths that cut through the forest. Finally, the visionary anaconda will vomit him onto a white beach and he will see the light of a day dawning at the riverside where his kinsmen sit singing and waiting for him. The kinsmen he sees are not his real kinsmen but his kin from "the other side": the people of *nixi pae* (vine people), or the people of *Yube*, having taken off their snake 'clothes' to reveal themselves as people like himself.

The two following quotes are heuristically interesting attempts by two Cashinahua men with an extensive knowledge of Brazilian society, to translate the knowledge of *ayahuasca* into terms that would be intelligible to outsiders.

"*Dunuan isun*, urine of the anaconda (name of the brew), is the same vine as *huni* ('person'). The thing is that it is the Snake who called it this. He explained to the man that

this brew was his urine. In our language we call the vine by different names, we give it the name of different things, *dunuan isun* (anaconda's urine), *dunun himi* (snake blood), *huni* (human being). We drink his blood because it permits us, because he has already been resurrected like Jesus Christ who is in the Sky. We take this to clean ourselves from the illness we have inside. And to see him, *Yube*. In this way he shows us his life." (Edivaldo, Village Leader of Moema)

"When we drink his 'blood' (the brew), he shows us everything he did in his life, his village and his 'science'. *Yube* transforms himself into many things, into different kinds of snakes, plants and vines, into people, into water and birds. All the patterns on its skin can transform themselves into a vision. This is his *kene* (design) presenting (revealing) himself to us. *Dami* (the figures) are just like *yuda baka* (the body *yuxin* or body's shadow). You see it but you cannot hold it. It goes away after the *nixi pae* (after the effect of the intoxicating brew). It is the transformation (*dami*) of the strong vine (*nixi pae*) of the demiurge (*yuxibu*). He died but he is not dead, because his body was transformed into a vine. *Yube* is our God. He left this brew behind for his kinfolk so that they wouldn't cry anymore and in order to quell their nostalgia for him. Because he is really here, showing himself to us. The same will happen to your son who will see everything you did in your life, because he came from your inside. The vine, when it is inside you, will show you everything that belongs to him." (Agostinho Manduca)

Both quotes explain independently the same concept of consubstantiation, of how the sharing of living substance (blood or *yuxin*) makes a sharing of thoughts and knowledge possible. This concept supports the Cashinahua concept of the body as a knowing, thinking entity and of physical intervention on the body as having mental consequences. The same rationale lies behind the ritual initiation of small children (Chapter four) where it is explicitly stated that while modelling the young children's bodies, adults are at the same time modelling the children's thoughts⁶⁰.

In this way, the quotes bring us back to the culinary code discussed previously, where we saw that the process of eating and being eaten not only creates identity between the eater and the eaten, but also presupposes some degree of sameness. We will see, however, that here too, the quality of otherness of the eaten in relation to the eater is preserved and is obviously of crucial importance. Only someone as 'hungry for meat' (*pintsi*) as the tragic figure of a lonely *Inka* in the myth of the *Inka pintsi* (d'Ans, 1993:

379-381) would deliver himself to the ridiculous and self-destructive act of autophagy.

This said, the Cashinahua do prefer to eat beings considered to be, on a mythic level, relatively close to themselves (like peccaries who are said to have been their kinsmen in mythic times), and they refuse to eat those considered to be too different and therefore dangerous like the jaguar, the vulture or the harpy eagle. These animals are dangerous predators and the last two are animals who cross the boundaries of earth and sky. The fact that one prefers to eat that which is close is also the explanation for the traditional endocannibalism that was totally abandoned by the Cashinahua in the forties, but that used to be one of the possible ways of disposing of the dead. In deciding whether to eat or not, the rule applied was first of all, that people closest to the deceased had to request or agree with his or her consumption, and secondly that the eaters could only be close kin. Cashinahua never seem to have eaten enemies or distant kin.

Yet, no matter how close the consumed being might be, it needs to undergo a profound transformation before it can become edible. For food to become proper food it has to be processed on fire. The cooking process transforms a living being into dead matter. Proper food is always cooked and mixed. To make sure that eaten meat is really dead, the Cashinahua cook it well and wash it until no blood remains. Human beings never eat blood because blood is considered to be a potent vehicle of *yuxin*. *Yuxin*, on the other hand, do eat *yuxin* and do suck the living blood of living beings. Their multiplicity of form and their capability of transforming it at will is a consequence of this *yuxinity*, and the resulting excess of agency. What they lack however is the real experience of embodied existence, a solidity only acquired through the acceptance of limited form, space and time: the mortality of the human condition.

In the quotes above, the brew made of the psychotropic vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*, Der Manderosian, A., Kensinger, K. et al. 1970: 7-14; Kensinger, 1973) is called *Yube's* 'blood' or 'urine'. As in the case of the actual ritual consumption of the uncooked heart,

⁶⁰ A similar approach can be found in Belaunde (1992) on the Airo Pai.

tongue and eyes of a 'real' boa constrictor, described above, this exceptional act, here a ritual consumption of living blood, is not included within the category of food consumption but is understood to be a consubstantiation with the consumed entity, a process of becoming (temporarily) of a kind with the Other in order to 'know' his 'science' (*sua ciência*), that is his power and knowledge, his thoughts.

This ritual activity calls to mind the Desana myth of origin of the use of *yagé* (the name for the vine *Banisteropsis Caapi* in the Northern Amazon). In this myth the mother of *yagé* enters the longhouse with her new born *yagé* child, wrapped in an iridescent, glittering, and beautifully designed towel. The men do not resist this vision and, intoxicated, jump on the child, pull off its arms and legs and devour it. What these men devour is not 'real' food, or a 'real' child, but the immaterial matter or substance of the *yagé* child, a substance that provokes a state of marvel and elation in them because of the psychotropic power of this flesh of a God (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1972, 1978)⁶¹. The Cashinahua compared the Catholic Eucharist and the ayahuasca ritual, both of them based on the ingestion of transsubstantiated bodies.

In ritual song, *Yube*, guardian of *ayahuasca* is invoked in order to obtain a quiet and successful vision. *Yube* is qualified as *ibu* (owner or father) of the *nixi pae* vine. This is so because it is the demiurge *Yube* who planted the vine and continues to look after its growth. The juxtaposition of the myth of origin, alluded to in the quote above, where we learn that the *nixi pae* vine grew from the dead corpse of a man who lived with the snake people, with the information of the identity of its planter, superimposes two ways of relatedness between different beings. The first one links a mythical person through his

⁶¹ In Conklin (as in Clastres (1963) on Guayaki endocannibalism), we find a similar explanation of the crucial operating difference between cooked and uncooked flesh. "The assertion that eating corpses involved no transfer of biosocial substances or energies is consistent with the logic of Wari' ethnomedicine, conception theory, and shared substance concepts, in which attributes are transferred among individuals only by blood and its analogues (breast milk, semen, vaginal secretions, and perspiration), not by ingesting roasted flesh..." (Conklin, 1993: 96).

rotting corpse to the revelatory powers of the vine, while the second links the planter and his product in a direct and metonymic way, expressing their ongoing interdependence as long as the plant lives. We will find the same logic at work when dealing with the maize plant.

The myth gives substance to the sentences of the songs “he, *Yube*, is the owner, because he planted the vine” by specifying that “he, *Yube*, is our father because he has our body”. The juxtaposition compares the relation between the planter and what he planted with that of a person whose corpse transformed into a vine with the living plant. The relation is stated as one of intrinsic and essential relatedness, of a sharing of physical substance and therefore also of thoughts and knowledge. It should be noted how far this interdependence of mind and matter goes in native thought. It is an interdependence that explains much of the care taken in the manipulation of bodies and manufactured objects. But another link should be noted too, and that is the similarity between the relation between planter and plant, and that between progenitor and offspring. Be it a plant, a baby or an artefact, native thought conceives of the same sort of intrinsic link between the person and the product of his work⁶². This fact also explains why at death a person’s belongings are buried or destroyed. Since they remain related to their deceased owner, they must be removed to help people forget the owner of the objects.

Through this example of consubstantiation and the regular visionary visits to the world of *Yube*, we can see that the close relatedness with the Snake, *Yube*, and the water world is lived in a concrete way and that this alterity of a world of abandoned origins is less strange to the Cashinahua than the unknown world of destiny. By means of the ingestion of the vine the parallelism between the microcosmos of the body and the macrocosmos of the universe is ritually lived and expressed. Vision is experienced as coming from within one’s own body and takes on the dimension of a swallowed sky, pregnant of new worlds. This visionary event is invoked in the following *nixi pae* song:

⁶² See David Guss (1989) on the Yekuana and Van Velthem (1995) on the Wayana-Apalai for a detailed study on this congruence between the fabrication of the body and that of artefacts.

"My adopted son, let us the vine warm up, the power of the vine, dry up. New in man's belly. Let us walk, it's a long time since we took the powerful and it doesn't pass by, the force is rising, breaking twigs to find the way. The power illuminates like light, my adopted son, the sky is red, the power is red. The man swallows (it) into his belly, into his insides, swallows the red sky. It's a long time since we took the force of *nixi pae* but it's still strong. Scrape the power of *nixi pae* and drink it. Time has passed by since you scraped the power. Turn into a woman, stretch the woman, the stretched power of *nixi pae*. My body is singing, turning like a piece of burning wood. The man will become a woman. He will prepare food. The woman wants to prepare food, she stretches herself and is gone... There in the sky is a little boy *nambuã*. The honey of the sky is sweet, he drinks all of it. It's sweet now in our belly, scrape it and drink it. In our root, you in the root of *nixi pae*, another world is coming out, people coming out of my belly..." (Leôncio from Conta, translation Antonio Pinheiro from Nova Aliança).

Aside from the inter-penetration of micro- and macrocosmos, another inversion happens in the vision described by this song, and that is the radical gender inversion where the man drunk on the vine becomes 'pregnant'. First, through the action of fire, he is transformed into a woman, then he drinks honey, an image for semen; he then gives birth to 'new worlds'. In this way, male "menstruation" and fertilisation become possible through the anaconda *Yube*'s uncontrollably fertile beverage, his blood, an 'enemy's blood' (*nawan himi*). To absorb this 'blood' means to expose oneself to an excess of *yuxin* activity inside one's body, soon to be felt in a violent transformation of perception of both the inside and outside world. At the same time there is a temporary transformation of identity: a man becomes a 'woman', pregnant with a multiplicity of people and worlds. This is one of the multiple processes of 'Othering' a man undergoes while temporarily imbued with the enemy's blood.

It is revealing to read the data contained in this song together with what we learn from the myth on the origin of the moon and of menstruation. This myth is well known and widespread in the region⁶³. It is the story of the incestuous brother *Yube* who decided to become the moon after having been discovered as a clandestine lover by his sister who

⁶³ Lévi-Strauss (1968:67-88) on Cashinahua moon myths; Cf. Lagrou 1991: 122. See also Roe, 1982.

stained his face with genipa paint. When he climbed up into the sky, *Yube* asked to be remembered by his sisters. Yet, when they saw his face rising in the sky, his sisters pointed to the new moon and, instead of saying “look!, *Yube*’s head in the sky”, they said, “look! The new moon.” As revenge for his sisters’ forgetfulness, *Yube* caused the women to menstruate at new moon. Some versions of the myth say he comes down these nights of the new moon to make love to the women with his red macaw tail (penis). Thus women received menstruation in the form of ‘revenge’, a revenge we should remember, that is at the same time the supreme gift, because menstruation is the precondition for fertility. As we saw in Cashinahua theory of conception, it is only after having been penetrated that a woman is considered to be capable of losing the blood that will make her fertile. Without sex, the Cashinahua say, a woman’s womb will dry up. The role of men is to keep women ‘wet’ and fertile.

While Cashinahua women receive from *Yube*, the moon/snake, his blood which gives them the creative power to bring forth bodies, men receive from the same demiurge the *ayahuasca* drink, called *Yube*’s ‘urine’ (*dunuan isun*) or ‘blood’ (*nawa himi*). This drug enhances their creative power to bring forth the images in which they see themselves as cosmic women who deliver worlds instead of people, in nightly sessions of cosmic fertilisation. Thus the androgynous primordial power of *Yube* (who originated from the primordial joined couple) is distributed in a gendered and thus limited way to both men and women. This is the secret of their interdependence: in the myth of origin of the anaconda, as well as in the nightly peace of a hammock (also one of the anaconda’s incarnations), the husband and wife are “two in one”.

As much as men are complementary to women, so too are images to bodies, and night time in relation to the daytime. However, for the world to gain shape more was needed than the excessive fluidity of *Yube*’s imagery and the fertility that emanates from his bodily fluids (blood and urine). Something else was required to give structure, to harden the softness of the ephemeral products of this nightly water world. This complementary quality belongs to the *Inka* and his attributes of hardness, dryness,

coldness and heat, his association with metal and all that is imperishable.

A human body is composed of bones, associated with the *Inka*, and skin, linked to *Yube*. So too the terrestrial world is made of the encounter between these two antagonistic principles. The world came into being when the sun (*Inka*) revealed what was hidden in the darkness (*Yube*). This revelation of the forms hidden in darkness happens again at dawn. The event of dawn is described in the song of dawn (*xabaya*): the light filtering through the slits of the roof is said to be the sun's design: "dreaming the pattern of dawn, looking at his dawn (*pena kene namanun, hawen pena uinai*)".

The same idea of the sun as a drawing hand, cutting up the darkness of the forest into coloured streaks of light filtering through the trees or through the roof of the longhouse is expressed in the songs sung by women to obtain design. The song can be sung to the dead skin of a ritually killed boa hung high up in the roof, or, I was told by Augusto, to a domesticated little boa, kept in a small vessel. The woman who wants to learn design asks the snake to give her "the design of the sun (*badi kene*)", "design of the *Inka (Inkan kene)*".

The association of *Inka* with the sun is also linked with the power of the gaze of his fiery eyes. In contrast to the realm of *Yube*, which is frequently visited on nightly journeys with *ayahuasca*, *Inka's* realm is not for human eyes. The shine from these eyes is so strong that it is blinding to humans, for his eyes are pure fire. When the human eye *yuxin* crosses the eye of the *Inka*, he is lost. It is through the *Inka* eye (or his fire) that the human *yuxin* is consumed and reintegrated into the world from where it came. The principle of unity in duality that constitutes all being in the Cashinahua understanding of this world is therefore also reflected in the doubleness of the human *yuxin*, where the eye *yuxin* belongs to the *inu* moiety of the *Inka*, while the body *yuxin*, a skin *yuxin*, is linked to the *dua* moiety and *Yube*. And whereas the eye *yuxin* never grows, staying the same in size from birth to death, as do his cosmic familiars the sun and the *Inka*, the body *yuxin* grows during a whole life-time, accumulating memories of love and desire, in the same

way as the body of the snake grows without respite.⁶⁴

Although that which gives life to a body is the eye *yuxin* which belongs to the sky domain of the Inka, and that which gives structure to the body are the bones, equally belonging to the Inka domain, the “*Inka*”, emblem of the *inu* moiety, continues to be considered as more exterior than *Yube*. *Inka* is said to have no ‘paternal’ relation with the world of the living and instead of father, *ibu*, he is called “*txai*”, meaning both ‘brother-in-law’ and ‘far away’. This expression is used to refer to all non-kin with whom one desires to establish friendly relationships. Thus in the Jordão region, the Cashinahua established the custom of calling all NGO workers (women, not without discrete irony, included) *txai*.

The same term turns into a kinship term when referring to the possibility of male affinity, and has an eschatological meaning when used to address the mythical figure of the *Inka*. In mythic language, *Inka* women are addressed as *tsabe* (sister-in-law) by their female visitors and as *xanu* (sister-in-law, potential wife) by their male visitors. At death, one marries an *Inka* person, who, for living human beings, is none other than the quintessential stranger, a cannibal monster or God. Thus one can understand the irony of the interesting misunderstanding that befell the missionaries who, following the suggestion of a helpful Cashinahua translator, rendered the Christian notion of God into Cashinahua, using the expression ‘*Inka* our father’ and *Diosun Inkan, Inka* God⁶⁵.

The myths about the *Inka* people speak of nothing but admiration for their culture. It is said that they were knowledgeable, beautiful people, and knew how to live. Their gardens were abundant, their villages clean and big. They had plenty of food rotting in their gardens but the *Inka* were stingy. They never gave the people anything nor would

⁶⁴ Roe (1982: 179): “Indians have noticed that anacondas, like the other reptiles and amphibians with which they are identified - such as lizards, cayman and frogs - never stop growing until their death, although the rate of growth does progressively slow down as they age.”

⁶⁵ After having been used for the first time by Cashinahua translators in the context of the Summer Institute of Linguistics’ translation of the bible in Cashinahua, the use of *Inka* with the meaning of ‘our father Jesus Christ’ has also been registered by McCallum, (1991).

they teach them how to plant: this was a total refusal of kinship. *Inka* men and women were beautiful to people, for they used woven clothes with design and their faces were delicately painted. The *Inka* invited them to dance. But whether they danced or not, the people were killed by their hosts. However, those who danced were not eaten, while those who did not were (Capistrano de Abreu, 1941). They did help women give birth (at the time, humans had not yet learned the use of medicinal plants for childbirth), and though they would give these babies back to the Cashinahua, they ate the mothers.

In mythology, the *Inka* as a people were cultivated, social and moral with their own kin. Their behaviour, however, was monstrous in relation to the Cashinahua. The Cashinahua stress the relativity of the practice of the morally good and bad that takes into account the similarity or difference of one's alter. The *Inka* considered the Cashinahua too different, while the Cashinahua dreamed of becoming closer to this beautiful, knowledgeable and cultivated people. At some point, the Cashinahua changed their minds. They gave up their desire to enter exchange relationships with the *Inka*, killed them and moved away.

Myths on the early times of creation also deal with the *Inka* figure, but here he is a different personage from the *Inka* people with whom the Cashinahua tried to intermarry in 'historical' times. The *Inka* of creation time is not described as belonging to the category of people but as a solitary god. He lived in the sky and owned the periodicity of time, day and night, cold and heat. He was stingy towards the vulture (belonging to the *dua* moiety) because he detested his smell, but generous with the harpy eagle (belonging to the *inu* moiety) with whom he shared his power over the sky. Again, we have the example of *Inka* selective sociality.

This *Inka* god can come down to see and to be seen by a human. But if this were to happen without ritual protection, the *Inka* takes the human *yuxin* forever, never to be visited thereafter by another human *yuxin*. In short, one never returns alive from an encounter with the *Inka* (which is why nobody ever sees the *Inka* in his or her dreams or when under the influence of *ayahuasca*). *Inka*'s gaze consumes the eye *yuxin* from the

moment he sees it, and he takes it with him to live with him. This conception of the process of dying recalls that of the Araweté humans who become the eaten spouses of the gods (Viveiros de Castro, 1986). When the *Inka* descends to earth to take the eye *yuxin* of the dead with him, he follows a large, straight path through the forest, free from thorns. The path is adorned with red, blue, black and white feathers. *Inca hawendua*, the beautiful Inca, wears a blue feather crown and a woven *cushma* covered in design and comes playing the flute. "He is perfectly beautiful", the Cashinahua affirm. The dead person's parents sing:

"Go to the sky, go to stay with Inka, go and don't come back, go and put on Inka's clothes, go and put on the yellow cloth, go, don't stop halfway, go, never come back." (Moises Kaxinawá).

The sky *Inka* does not live totally separate from people. Although too dangerous to be visited by the eye *yuxin* in his own territory, he can with safety to the people himself visit the Cashinahua during ritual. In fact it is this *Inka* of the sky who is called and invoked in ritual song and acted out by the chant leader during the *Txidín* ritual, in funerals, and in the *Nixpupima* initiation rite. The *Inka* people also can play a part in masking parties called *damian*. The *damian* are a kind of comic theatre, where through caricature, fear of the *Inka* is transformed by laughter. In the *damian* parties I attended in 1991, drunken rubber tappers had replaced cannibalistic Inkas (See also McCallum, 1992: 14).

We have seen above how both powerful 'monsters', *Yube* and *Inka*, each one occupying the opposite locus of alterity above and beneath the world, are also emblems of beauty. In Cashinahua imagination, excessive beauty is linked to excessive power. In this field of dealing with otherness beauty always plays the part of visualising the desire for and fear of the powerful stranger. Thus it was the beauty of her skilfully painted skin that attracted the human visitor to follow the *yuxibu* of the water world, and it was the same beauty that initiated him into the secret knowledge of the owner of these designs. This adventure, the belonging to two different worlds, and the accumulation of more knowledge than he could possibly bear without going (temporarily) crazy cost him his

life⁶⁶. Similarly, it is the seductive flute music and radiant and fascinating appearance of the elaborately decorated sky *Inka*, with his yellow skirt, blue feather crown and shiny eyes that abducts the eye *yuxin* into death.

There is a danger of excessive exposure to the qualities of *Inka*/jaguarness, where the body can fall prey to various forms of weakening. In vulnerable states a person can dry up or get high fever because of too much sun on the head, while to look directly into the sun causes temporary 'blindness'. This is explained by the fact that the sun is much stronger than the eye *yuxin*, and mutual glancing can therefore be dangerous for the health of the person, provoking dizziness and headache. Eyes, like liquids and smells, are vehicles of transmission of *yuxin* power and a person must therefore be careful whom to look in the eyes and in what way⁶⁷. Another cause of illness and weakness of the body that is linked to the *Inka* modality of power is the loss of blood through cutting and biting. As noted, in Cashinahua imagery both the *Inka* and the jaguar are linked to hardness, thus to the cutting and ripping of the skin with metal and teeth.

Victims of jaguar (*inu*) or *Inka* kinds of attack lose too much blood and dry up so much that they die whereas victims of a *Yube* attack suffer from the opposite evil: an excess of blood and of water retention. In this case the body swells up and enters a dangerous state of excessive mutation and retention of *yuxin*. This state, that of a *yuxin* substance being spread throughout the body of the victim, as long as the materialised *yuxin* stays in the place where it entered, it can be sucked out, but once it spreads, it becomes fatal (Antonio Pinheiro, Cf. Lagrou, 1991: 47). Death or illness caused by poisoning or the excessive presence of multiplying *yuxin* activity is associated with the domain of *Yube* and its various manifestations in the form of poisonous snakes and insects, as well as poisonous plants and drugs.

⁶⁶ This understanding of the dangers of uncontrolled knowledge can also be found in Piaroa social philosophy (Overing, 1985: 244-78).

⁶⁷ The same has been noted by Erikson (1996: 201) among the Matis: "*le canal oculaire semble constituer une autre voie de circulation de sho* (illness inducing power)."

As we saw above, there is also 'jaguar medicine' and 'anaconda medicine' to treat these different afflictions. Thus the medicine belonging to the domain of the jaguar, *inu moiety*, is called *dau bata* (sweet medicine) and includes all kinds of herbal treatments. In myth, a human wife was cured by the jaguar from excessive exposure to the *Yube* domain by means of a herbal bath. Both her healing process and her illness were linked to sex with beings belonging to the non-human domain of animal otherness, associated respectively with the *dau* (worm) and the *inu* (jaguar) domain. The story is as follows:

While living at home with her parents, the young woman would sit on her mat for hours, spinning without rest. Suspicious, her mother took a look at her daughter's mat, she discovered a hole in it and underneath a huge earthworm, which she killed with boiling water. The daughter, mourning for her lover, fled into the forest, crying and calling the jaguar to kill and eat her. Instead of ending her life, the jaguar decided to take her as his wife. But soon he discovered the repulsive activity of worms in her vagina. The girl was pregnant by her previous lover. The jaguar husband cleaned his human wife with herbs and made her pregnant, this time with jaguar humans.

While 'jaguar medicine' is sweet and pertains to bodies, bitter medicine (*dau muka*) is attributed to *Yube*, to the realm of images and therefore to *yuxinity*. The shamanic substance, *muka*, is the most acrid of all substances. Close to this, both in power and in bitterness is the plant *dade*, also called *muka*, and used only in occult and protected rituals, accompanied by severe dieting where everything sweet is strictly prohibited (along with meat and water). The logic behind this abstinence is that bitter substances are rich in *yuxin* agency and have the power to induce bodily mutations. Sweetness and pure liquid (water) would fertilise this process to the point of an uncontrollable distension and consequent metamorphosis or multiplication of the body. *Nixi pae* (the hallucinogen prepared with the vine) also belongs to this category of bitter medicine, as well as tobacco snuff, toad poison, and the burning astringent juice of certain leaves squeezed into hunters' and weavers' eyes.

We can see an inversion of fields at work, one that expresses again the mutual

dependence of opposites. If the body *yuxin* is, by means of the image of skin and blood, associated to the realm of *Yube*, and the eye *yuxin* through the eye and its celestial origin to the sky realm of *Inka*, their medicines have an opposite association: the bitter medicine of *Yube* heals and 'educates' eyes and all 'psychological' afflictions linked to the eyes (nightmares, the frequent visualisation of *yuxin* etc.), while sweet medicine heals skin affections caused by a variety of stinging insects (vehicles of *yuxin* activity and poison), infestation with worms, and snake bites, all these being afflictions adhering to the *Yube* domain. Thus the sweet *inu* medicine is linked to skin, guts and body *yuxin*, and is 'made of' *Yube* matter, while the bitter *dua* medicine is linked to the eye and its *yuxin*, 'made of' *Inka* matter.

Human beings are the arena where these antagonistic forces fight out their differences, and health is achieved through the temporary maintenance of a balance between bitter hardness and sweet softness. Life on earth, the intermediate realm between these two forces of alterity who share the quality of eternal life (circular in the case of *Inka*/sun and cyclical in the case of *Yube*/moon), is nonetheless characterised by a limitation that both the world of *Yube* images and the *Inka* world of pure light lack, and that is the inescapable limit posed by death. Mortality is what makes humans human, and it is also mortality that gives meaning to time.

The image of time, and of human life as a process of growing and dying, is expressed through the lupuna tree, *xunu*, from which the initiation stool is carved. Like a tree that creates roots to stand firm, a human being is only considered a real person if he has a place where he belongs and where people are looking after him. A real person is someone who "does not wander around anywhere", but stays firm as a planted tree, looked after by his *ibu* (parents or planters). A person, like a tree, grows until strong and ready to bear fruits, but also knows when to stop growing, "a true person knows when it is time to die". People do not, like snakes and other reptiles, change their skin, and this fact, as discussed in myth, is the origin of ageing and therefore of death. Thus the tree that links the water world below where it has its roots, with the sky world above where it

stretches its branches, is a metaphor for life on earth in general and human life in particular, a temporary transition between two extremes. The theme of the *lupuna* and its associated meanings will return at the end of this work, because of its central role in the rite of passage of children to adolescence.

In the natural world, the belonging of animals and plants to the *inu* (jaguar) or *dua* (brilliance) moieties depends on their size. Smaller species or kinds within a species are *dua*, while bigger ones are *inu*. Thus of the two kinds of jaguars, the bigger one *inu keneya* (jaguar with design), is *inu*, while the smaller *txaxu inu* (deer jaguar) is *dua*⁶⁸. In the case of the harpy eagles, the largest type is called *nawa tete* (harpy eagle). The *nawa*, the biggest version of a species always belongs to the *inu* moiety. Thus the harpy eagle is *inu*. A smaller kind of eagle, such as *maspan txaipaya tete* (eagle with the big crest), on the other hand, is said to be *dua*. The same logic of classifying animals applies to plants. Thus big trees are classified as *inu* (jaguar) or *dua* (brightness) according to their volume. The *lupuna* tree *xunu* is the biggest of all trees and is classified as *inu*, and is called *nawan xunu*. The second largest Amazonian tree, the *cumaru*, is said to be *dua*. Although the *lupuna* tree is shorter than the *cumaru*, its branches are wider and its trunk broader. In the evaluation of size, what counts is mass and strength, not height.

The Cashinahua description of the quality of *dua* (*banu*) and *inu* (*inani*) when applied to people, uses the same relational distinction as that used to classify animals and plants. Those belonging to the jaguar (*inu*) moiety would be bigger, and they would have

⁶⁸ The colour of animals is linked to moiety dualism too: red (the intermediate and mediating colour of blood and fertility) belongs to *dua*. The *txaxu inu* is so called (deer jaguar) because of the red colour of its skin is reminiscent of the red deer. While white (the non-colour of light, of bones and of the white feathers of the harpy eagle, messenger of the *Inka*) on the other hand, belongs to the *inu* moiety and to the spotted jaguar, which has black and white patterns on its skin. During the *katxanawa* increase ritual, people belonging to the *dua* moiety paint their mouth red with *achiote* to imitate the red jaguar, while people of the *inu* moiety paint their face with black patches of *genipa* to evoke the spotted jaguar.

bones made of maize, while people belonging to the moiety of brilliance (*dua*) are said to be smaller (although sometimes taller, but thinner) and have bones made of manioc. Moreover, *Inu* people are said not to emit bodily odours and have smooth and hairless skin, while *dua* people have a strong smell and are hairy. This last quality attributed to the *dua* people can be explained by the fact that moiety is associated with the processes of rotting, growth and decay, while the *inu* moiety is associated with permanence.

These qualities could only be detected in humans if people were completely *inu* or completely *dua*, with none of the other quality, however, given the constitutive need for constant mixing, this is impossible in this life. Thus again the complementary opposites are to be understood relative to each other, in terms of more and less, older and younger, stronger and weaker, and not in terms of mutually exclusive qualities.

It is worth noting, in relation to the moiety qualities of hairiness and smoothness of skin, that the Cashinahua act and think as 'frontier people', considering themselves as being a synthesis of extremes. Thus, if they conceive of their own people as a mixture of hairiness and smoothness of skin, they situate themselves inbetween the so-called riverine and interfluvial Panoans. The first group, represented by the Peruvian Ucayali Panoans (Roe, 1982), detests all kinds of bodily hair, and associates it with savagery, animals and enemies (especially with the bearded white), while the latter group, represented by the interfluvial Mayoruna (Erikson, 1996), cultivate the spare threads of beard and moustache and positively value them as a sign of ferociousness, experience and maturity, relating to the quality of *xeni* meaning old, fat and strong.

Despite the Cashinahua placing midway on this continuum of bodily hair, their cosmetics does not appreciate the presence of too much bodily hair. This aesthetic has a social semantic: since body hair is plucked by a person's spouse or lover, and never by oneself, the presence of hair on a person's body is a sign of loneliness and abandonment. The slight discomfort provoked by pulling out hair is part of sexual foreplay between lovers, as is scratching a lover with pointed objects such as a bird's beak and an anteater's claw. Smooth skin stands therefore for a sociable body, a body touched by lovers and by

close kin. The latter do not pull out hair but can be seen to always be busy keeping a close relative's skin clean, by squeezing out insect bites and picking fleas from the hair, whenever there is a spare moment.

2.4. Nawa/Huni (stranger/human)

“The first time the white men met an Indian, he had no clothes on and was playing with a bat. (...) The white asked the Indian who he was and he, not understanding Portuguese, answered in his language: I am killing (or playing with) a bat. We call a bat *kaxi*. Thus the white man gave him a name: “you and your tribe are called Cashinahua (*kaxi-nawa*).” Cashinahua myth.⁶⁹

This myth, written by a young Cashinahua on a training course for indigenous teachers, expresses in a humorous way the logic and meaning of ethnonyms among the Pano. An ethnonym always comes from the outside, given by a stranger, a *nawa* who calls his interlocutor *nawa* of a certain kind, for example *kaxi-nawa*, “vampire bat people” (Cashinahua), or *yami-nawa*, “axe people” (Yaminahua). And moreover, according to the myth, the name always results from a misunderstanding, from the fact that the *nawa* does not really understand (or want to understand) you⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ In Lindenberg Monte, Ed. 1984: 29.

⁷⁰ Most ethnonyms given by Panoans to other Panoans were offensive. Thus, we find in Torralba (1986: 12-13) another explanation for the name Cashinahua. The Yaminawa would call them *kaxi-nawa* (vampire bat people), because they accused their neighbours of having the habit of walking around at night like bats. The ethnonym for the Cashibo (*kaxi-bu*) tribe of Peru, given to them by their neighbours the Shipibo, is also said to mean “vampire bat people”, in this case because the Shipibo intended to call their enemies cannibals, bloodsuckers, like vampire bats (Erikson in *How crude is Mayoruna Pottery*, s.d.). The Culina in turn (and it should be noted that here we are dealing with an Aruakan and not with a Panoan group), are called *pisinawa* (stinking people) by their Cashinahua neighbours, while, in the beginning of this century Tastevin (1925: 24, 415) wrote that the Cashinahua in turn were called *pisinawa* by the Paranawa (a group that no longer exists under this name). With respect to the Yaminahua, Townsley seems to corroborate the view expressed in the epigraph, that these names became ethnonyms only with the arrival of non-natives: “It was actually extremely difficult to know who, precisely, the Yaminahua were... It also became clear that names such as Yaminahua or Sharanahua were of relatively recent invention and had become accepted ethnic labels only as a result of non-native immigration to the area. All

If there had been no communication problems, the stranger would have called his interlocutor *huni kuin*: a “proper human being”, as all Pano refer to themselves. The proper human being is someone who behaves, speaks and understands things the way he himself does. *Huni* means ‘person’ and *kuin* constitutes a reference to the Selfness or similarity to self of the thing or being referred to. Therefore it has also been translated as ‘real’: ‘real people’ (*huni kuin*), ‘true language’ (*hantxa kuin*), ‘true design’ (*kene kuin*). This translation, however, suggests an ethnocentrism on the part of the Cashinahua and other Panoans (who use dialectical variations of the same word) of which they can hardly be accused (see Erikson 1995: 7; and Keifenheim, 1990: 80).

Just as true weaving, called *tema kuin*, is closer to the idea of weaving in itself than the weaving with design, called *tema keneya*, a true or proper human being, *huni kuin*, is closer to its reference, the Self of the person speaking, than a person, *huni* considered not to be *kuin*, without therefore being more or less human than any other human being. I use the example of weaving to show that the use of the qualifying *kuin* does not necessarily need to convey any evaluative judgement. In the case of the difference between *tema kuin* and *tema keneya*, the most valued product is the one with design, given the complexity and beauty of the work and not the weaving called *kuin*. (Several examples of this sort can be found in the taxonomic system of Cashinahua material culture proposed by Kensinger, 1975).

The criteria used by the Cashinahua for including a stranger in the category of *huni kuin* are similarity of language and the correct use of proper names (linked to the Kariëra system of their transmission), as well as physical appearance and clothing. Thus Augusto classified the Yaminahua, Katuquina and Shipibo (Pano people he personally met during his life) as well as the recently contacted Yuda of the Manu Park in Peru (whose photos⁷¹ stroke him as extremely similar to the image of his ancestors) as *huni kuin* (people like us), but qualified this inclusion with the term ‘*betsa*’ (other): “*huni kuin betsaki* (they are

Yaminahua also answered to a variety of other *nahua* names...” Townsley (1988: 8)

'other' *huni kuin*), *nukun nabu betsaki* (they are related to us (kin) but 'others' (*betsa*))⁷²."

This quote reveals a difference between the classificatory logic chosen by my Cashinahua informant from the Purus river on the Brazilian side of the border, and that used by Keifenheim's informants on the Peruvian side of the same river and its affluent the Curanja. We are, however, dealing more with a slight nuance of style and emphasis than with a real difference in discourse on ethnic identity. Because of the intense visiting and moving of people and families across the Brazilian/Peruvian border, no real frontiers can be drawn between them, all the Cashinahua have close relatives living on both sides of the border.

The difference in terms and logic used for ethnic classification to which I am referring, becomes meaningful if we place it within the broader context of Panoan ethnography where a much greater flexibility and ambiguity has been noted in the ascription of ethnic identity and alterity than that suggested for the Peruvian Cashinahua by Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982 (1994)). As we saw above, their application of Kensinger's conceptual scheme of *kuin/kuinma* (Self, non-Self), *kayabi/bemakia* (non-Other, Other) to the tripartite model of ethnic identity (Self, intermediate domain, Other), results in a clear demarcation of ethnic boundaries. Thus all Cashinahua would be included in the category of '*huni kuin*' (people belonging to the ethnic Self), while their Panoan neighbours would be called '*huni kayabi*' (non-Self and non-Other), and all non-Panoans '*huni bemakia*' (Others).

⁷¹ Photos published by Verswijver, 1987.

⁷² When the Cashinahua refer to non-pacified Panoan groups with whom they have had frequent conflicts over the last years (in the region of the Jordão river), they call them Yaminahua. In this context it is interesting to note an information given by Calavia (1995: 150), who mentions a similar use of the name Cashinahua by the Yaminahua, who encountered a non-pacified Panoan group and called them 'vampire people', Cashinahua. Part of these Cashinahua were incorporated by the Yaminahua. The Yaminahua affirm that those who are called Cashinahua nowadays are in reality the *Shaindawa* (numerous people).

In order to explain better the contextual meaning of *kayabi* (good without entailing the proper) and *bemakia* (improper), I will apply both terms to the domain of design. When a Cashinahua graphic body painting is properly executed, following the stylistic rules without mistakes or loose ends, it is called *kene kuin* ('true' design). A more or less successful attempt by an apprentice painter, which adheres to the rules of style but falls short of perfection by Cashinahua standards, is called *kene kayabi* (good but not proper). But there is more. The design can be fairly well drawn but by the wrong person. Thus an attempt at producing *kene kuin*, which is a female prerogative, by men will always be disdained by a knowledgeable woman's comment: "*Na kene bemakiaki!*" ("This is an improper design!") or worse, "*kenemaki, damiki!*" ("This is not a design, it is a figure!", which means that it does not obey any graphic rules at all). In the same way, a rather successful attempt by a non-Cashinahua (such as the anthropologist) to imitate the *kene kuin* will be interrupted by an unfriendly specialist wiping out the result with the words "*kene kayabiki!*" (this is just a design, not a 'true' or 'proper' one), while a more generous teacher might encourage the anthropologist's attempts by showing others how she finally produced the real, *kuin*, thing.

As mentioned above, Augusto did not use the qualitative *kayabi* (non-Self) for his Panoan neighbours, nor did he call white people by the term *huni bemakia* (Others). As extremes of both poles he used *huni kuin* (really people like us) for those considered to be related and *nawa kuin* (real strangers, enemies), for those considered unrelated. Who would be included in one or other category, however, was not always clear and depended on the context of the discussion. Moreover, the qualification could be adjusted by the term "*betsa*", other. If the topic were the difference between Indian and non-Indian habits, alimentation or politics, for example, even the Culina could be included in the "we" (*kuin*) category. But when the topic was more specific, dealing for example with names and language, the Culina would immediately be excluded and called not-*huni kuin*: *huni kuinma*.

The use by Augusto of the term *betsa* (other) to differentiate the Cashinahua (*huni*

kuin) from other Panoan groups (*huni kuin betsa*) follows the general Panoan pattern of naming the intermediate domain of close others. Thus, following Erikson's comparative research on Panoans (1986: 185-209), the Amahuaca (Dole, 1979:35) call themselves *namivo* (those who share our meat) and other Panoans *yoratsa* (equivalent of *yuda betsa*, other body); the Sharanahua (Siskind, 1973: 49-50) call themselves *noko kaifo* (ours, having grown together, an equivalent of the Cashinahua *nukun nabu*, close kin) and their neighbours *yura futsa* (other body); while the Matis call themselves Matis (people, equivalent of *huni*), while they call their Panoan neighbours *Matis utsi* (other people).

"...Therefore, the image used is that of individuals, linked by means of a relation of alterity, some defined as *utsi*, *futsa*, etc. in relation to others. But, when looking at the question more carefully, one notes immediately that this so-called alterity defines an identity instead of a difference. Actually, in all Pano systems, the use of 'other' as a kinship term insinuates that one is dealing with another self. My 'others' are before anything else those of my section, of my sex, and in most cases of my own generation. This means that they are those whose position is equivalent to mine in the kinship system." (Erikson, 1986: 189)

Thus in Cashinahua kinship terminology (as among other Panoans, Erikson, 1986) *en betsa* (my other) is used to designate a brother or sister or parallel cousin of the same sex as self, and means someone like me, occupying the same place, but different. The difference comes with the body, since, although the body is also similar to other bodies, it is always unique. *Betsa* is also used to qualify a relationship as different from the 'proper' one: like *ewa kuin* (real mother) and *ewa betsa* (other mother, that is mother's sister), while in the case of qualifying *betsa*, the term *kuin* is used: *en betsa* means 'parallel cousin', while *en betsa kuin*, means brother for a male self or sister for a female self. When these terms of "similar others" referring to people who could hypothetically occupy one's own place (as in the case of twins) are extended to other Panoans, a flexible and relativistic conception of ethnic identity results, conscious of the possibility of interchangeability.

A less inclusive auto-denomination than *huni kuin*, used by Cashinahua to refer to themselves, speaks of the sharing of a body and alludes to the process of growing

together, a historical uniqueness that is not interchangeable. Thus *nukun yuda* (our body) does not include other Panoans, who are considered to have a body 'fabricated' in a way similar but not identical to their own. An even more restricted definition of belonging holds for the expression *en nabu*, my close kin. *En nabu* refers to a consubstantiality only achieved through a *de facto* living together and sharing of food and bodily contact; through working, growing and living together in a community life construed around sharing and exchange.

Thus other people also have a body, constructed and cared for in a way similar to "ours", but it is a different body. From the point of view of the body, the absolute other is a being without a body and also without a place to root. Thus the dead are the real others, as well as the *yuxin*, familiars of the dead. Because the *nawa* (real strangers) do not live in their bodies the way the *huni kuin* do (there is no sharing, no living with close kin, no corn or manioc, no banana drink, no game), their bodies are considered to be different and indeed they are not referred to as bodies. Real strangers are not called *yuda betsa* (other body) and not even *yuda bemakia* (improper body); the reference to a growing process, to the flesh and body disappears, and they are considered as *yuxin*, wandering around alone and living on manioc flour and black coffee⁷³. These people are called *nawa*, enemies, a word connoting both difference and antagonism. Therefore *yuxin* and game can also be called *nawa*, when their dangerous character of enmity is invoked in ritual song.

The importance of the body and of the embodied memory of caring for each other's body that leads to a consciousness of shared identity created by the simultaneous circulation of substance and of experience is crucial not only for the Cashinahua but for the Amerindian conception of kinship in general. Thus Seeger (1981: 283) suggests calling Amerindian groups "*corporeal*" instead of "*corporate groups*", and Viveiros de Castro called attention to the importance of the "social fabrication of the body" by the

⁷³ It has been suggested by several Panoan specialists that the real identity defining opposition for Panoans might well be that between 'spirit being' and human being (with a body). See Calavia (1996), Erikson (1996), Deshayes (1995).

Yawalapiti from the Xingu, where interventions on the body are seen as the simultaneous modelling of body and social personality (1979: 40). The original formulation of the social value attributed to the body and its importance for the constitution of a *socius* can be found in a text that associates, directly, corporeality and the construction of the person:

“Every ethnographic region of the world had its moment in the history of anthropological theory, leaving its stamp on characteristic problems of periods and schools. Thus Melanesia discovered reciprocity, Southeast Asia alliance through asymmetric marriage, Africa lineages, witchcraft and politics... The originality of Brazilian tribal societies (and more generally South-American) resides in a particularly rich concept of personhood with reference to corporeality as focal symbolic language. Or, in other words, we suggest that the concept of personhood and a consideration of the place of the human body in the image that indigenous societies have of themselves are basic pathways to an adequate understanding of social organisation and cosmology of these societies.”(Seeger, Da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro, 1979: 2-3).

I hope to have shown through the analysis of my data on the Cashinahua, that these seminal ideas are still alive in Amerindian ethnology today. The consequences of this focussing on the role of the body in reflections on the concept of Amerindian society, have only recently started to be taken to their logical ends, leading for instance to a revision of the meaning of history for Amerindians in terms of an incorporated history (Gow, 1991: 264), and to the questioning of the consecrated dualisms of culture/nature, body/mind in a transformational Amerindian universe (Overing, 1996, Arhem, 1993, Isacson, 1993).

Another ethnographically recurrent fact is the use of the body as metaphor for and orientation in the world. Thus in a region stretching from Western to North-eastern Amazonia, from the Colombian Emberá (Isacson, 1993), passing by the Panoan Marubo (Montagner, 1985: 470-482, and Melatti, 1989a, Montagner & Melatti, 1986) and Matis (Erikson, 1987, 1989, 1996), to the Yekuana (Guss, 1989), the Wayana-Apalai (Van Velthem, 1995) and the Tukanoan Barasana (Hugh-Jones, C., 1979; Hugh-Jones, S., 1979, 1995), to cite only a few examples of a widespread phenomenon, the metaphor of the body is used in the orientation and description of the house. The house is seen as an organic being and its different parts are given the same names as their equivalent body

part: the entrance can be a mouth or a vagina, the roof its hair, the exit its anus. The house in turn stands as a metaphor for the shape and functioning of, or actually becomes the cosmos, where new worlds are entered in the same way as one enters a house. We will come back to this theme, as it is of crucial importance for understanding the concept of 'interior' shamanic vision, a vision where micro and macro-vision are superimposed and where both kinds of vision contain and can be turned into each other's dimension.

2.5. Design, Image and Yuxin and their relation to the human body

a. The ethnography of taste

“*Le style c'est l'homme.*”

Buffon in Bateson, 1977: 168.

“If we are to understand the ethical rules of a society, it is aesthetics that we must study.”
Leach, 1954: 12.

“The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system.”

Bateson, G., 1977.

The specificity of Cashinahua visual experience reveals the same fundamental categories that determine the cognitive processes encountered in other fields of experience and action. In this section, I want to demonstrate that we have in the dynamic trilogy constituted by *kene* (graphic, patterned design), *dami* (figuration, modelling, masking, transformation) and *yuxin* (agency/immaterial being) a key to the understanding of Cashinahua visual experience and particular artistic practice. The interplay of these three closely related concepts constitutes a field of highly abstract reflection on the fabrication, mutation and disintegration of the human body and person. This means that in the classification of visual phenomena and in the complex relationship that exists between its terms, we can unveil clear-cut ideas about the structure of being: the dialectics between identity and alterity, between visible and invisible, perishable and eternal, between life and death, male and female, wrapping and wrapped-up, creation and destruction.

What I intend to show with this overlapping interconnectedness of fields of reflection and action is the impossibility of dealing with the aesthetic as a separate domain. When realising this, the submersion of creative, sensitive and perceptive qualities of personal and collective experiences into the whole of the anthropological *fait social*

total becomes justified. This does not translate as an intention to reduce the 'aesthetic' to the 'social' or to deny its idiosyncrasy and originality, but to give the aesthetic experience its voice (although a silent one) in the polyphony of other voices and discourses that constitute a *societas*, understood as an interconnection of discourses about or visions of the lived world, and reflecting possible experiences of the world that make sense through repeated inter-subjective interpretation and ongoing communication within a group of people who recognise each other as being of a kind.

This approach can be called social or cultural, as well as inter-semiotic. The term inter-semiotic has the advantage of allowing for dissonant voices, and of recognising distinct though related (mutually 'translatable') discourses in one interlinked whole, while the terms 'cultural' and 'social' carry with them a too 'totalitarian' connotation. An inter-semiotic approach to ethnoaesthetics is an attempt to analyse the organisation of the visual reading capacities of the people who produce these specific aesthetic expressions, and for whom they are produced, in their interdependence with other discourses or practices (non-visual perceptions, ritual, myth, social organisation, eschatology etc.) which all reinforce, contradict and compensate for each other in the playing out and constant reinvention of community life.

The reading of visual elements depends on the 'period eye' (Cf. Baxandall, 1972) as well as on the specific 'eye of the place'. The distinction between certain kinds of forms and relations between forms is receptive to mental categories that structure the perception of forms and colours, associating them to specific semantic contents which enhance relations and contrasts that are cognitively significant for the group. In Geertz's words such an approach "looks for the roots of form in the social history of imagination" (1983: 119), while in Wagner's words (1986: xi) (See epigram for the chapter on Perspectivism) we are working with the "form of perception that we call 'meaning'". In this way aesthetics is embraced by hermeneutics:

"Instead of limiting... aesthetics to a description and determination of the characteristics of the object of a particular mode of experience, the aesthetic, the hermeneutic questioning challenges the very notion of a purely "aesthetic" experience.

The encounter with an artwork is a project of interpretative understanding, not merely a passive, distanced reception and appreciation of an independent object... The philosophical task in thinking about art is no longer to explain the eternal beauty of nature but to clarify the conditions for the process by which art comes to be understood and interpreted." (Hoy, 1978: 137)

This philosophical endeavour comes close to what good anthropology of art, of aesthetics, or of 'taste' ought to be, that is a project of interpretative understanding of the meaning of sensitive qualities in native perception, expression and cognition. This understanding progresses by means of a spiral moving between the global and the particular without the lens or grid of possible methods or preconceived concepts placed between the perceiver and the perceived. Thus concepts and preconceived ideas that determine and make our perception possible are systematically subjected to doubt whenever careful observation and listening do not reflect their original meaning (Gadamer, 1982).

Proceeding in this way, the first obstacle we encounter is the fact that most non-western societies, the Cashinahua included, do not have a word for 'art'. They do not even have an underlying concept equivalent to that of 'art' that might exist without being named as such. Only a small acquaintance with these people's lives, however, shows us that this does not mean that they lack the idea of 'beauty' or aesthetic judgement, or that they are not interested in 'beautifying the (their) world' (Witherspoon, 1977). One might even say that instead of nothing, everything is aesthetically judged, not only physical things produced, but also actions and states: the way one speaks as much as the way one eats or sits, a gesture, one's social behaviour, a person's smell and body texture, a person's health. The whole field of interaction and production is subject to aesthetic judgement, so much so, we might say, that it ceases to fall under the category of what we would call the 'purely aesthetic'. This is so because nothing is produced or appreciated merely for the sake of the one and only purpose of being 'beautiful' (as is the case with 'pure' western art which obeys the motto of *l'art pour l'art*). Beauty does not exist as a separate field of appreciation but is linked to other fields of perception, cognition and

evaluation⁷⁴.

Beauty is also not considered to be something external, that exists in the world of objects unrelated to or independent of the perceiver, but as something that belongs to the relation between the world and a capability to see, based on acquired knowledge. The importance of the intersubjective relation of co-presence between the perceiver and the perceived, as well as an understanding of perception as an active instead of passive process, come close to phenomenological approaches of perception, such as those already expressed by Heidegger when he noted with respect to auditory perception that "only he

⁷⁴ Modern art has been emphatic in defending its independence from other realms of social life. "Art for art's sake" is a creed of both artists and those who pretend to take art seriously and reflects our western difficulty of thinking about an individual's creativity and personal autonomy as belonging to the realm of life in society. In our post-enlightenment tradition the artist stands for the disengaged individual free from the constraint of sociocentric "common sense". Western thought associates collectivity with coercion and in so doing has to project the power of creativity outside society. A result of this lonesome status of genius is that the modern artist loses, through an idiosyncratic use of signs and symbols, his capacity for communication: there is no language outside society. Charbonnier (1961: 63-91), *Entretiens avec Lévi-Strauss* is a first attempt to analyse, from an anthropological point of view, the difference between modern and "primitive" art. Lévi-Strauss states that our western thought tradition is responsible for three differences of "academic" and "primitive" art, differences that modern art tries to overcome: 1. The individualisation of western art, especially of its clientele, that brings about and reflects a rupture between the individual and society in our culture - a problem alien to indigenous thinking about sociality; 2. Western art would be representational and possessive while "primitive" art only pretends to signify; 3. The tendency in western art to close in on itself: "*peindre après les maîtres*". The impressionists attacked the third problem through "fieldwork", the cubists the second, recreating and signifying instead of trying to objectively imitate, they learned from the "structural" solutions offered by African art; but the first crucial difference, that of art disenfranchised from its public, could not be overcome and resulted in a "language academicism": each artist inventing his own incomprehensible "languages" and styles.

who already understands can listen” (Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, Ed., Sections 31-34 from *Being and Time* ((1927): 237), while he stated about vision that it was a process where meaningfulness had priority over passive reception:

“By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding (the circumspection of concern is understanding as *common sense* [Verständigkeit]), we have deprived pure intuition [Anschauung] of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology.”(219).

The ‘present-at-hand’ is Heidegger’s definition of Nature, not seen as something that exists out there without any relation to human consciousness and embodied action, but something that exists because of our involvement with it:

“That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its *serviceability*, its *usability*, and its *detrimentality*. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorial whole of *possible* interconnection of the ready-to-hand. But even the ‘unity’ of the manifold present-to-hand, of Nature, can be discovered only if a *possibility* of it has been disclosed. Is it accidental that the question about the *Being* of nature aims at the ‘conditions of its possibility?’” (217).

Along with the world out there, the human being in the world (*Dasein*) is a project of becoming:

“(A)s Being-possible... *Dasein* is never anything less; that is to say, it *is* existentially that which, in its potentiality-for-Being, it is *not yet*. Only because the Being of the “there” receives its Constitution through understanding and through the character of understanding as projection, only because it *is* what it becomes (or alternatively does not become), can it say to itself ‘Become what you are’, and say this with understanding.” (218)

The phenomenological understanding of Nature and human existence in terms of possibility and becoming might be closer to the Amerindian view of existence than our classic idea of nature in terms of an objective reality out there to be unveiled and discovered in its ‘pure’ being, an abstraction being made of our own involvement with it. This might be one of the ways for us to understand the deeper meaning of the reasons why natives understand nature as *physis*, an interconnected whole of non-human beings with intentionality and agency similar to our own, all of them capable of a point of view. If the realities to be perceived change with the embodied agency which sees and acts

accordingly, all beings acquire multiple identities, although they all are related and interlinked into the same meaningful field of perception guided by the intention of mutual predation or nurturing. In this way nature, the sum of this interweaved whole of beings and things, becomes multiple too (on the concept of Amerindian multi-naturalism see Viveiros de Castro, 1996). And we might say with Goodman (1978), Overing (1990) and Schweder that “When people live in the world differently, it may be that they live in different worlds.” (Schweder, 1991: 23)

What we examined above is directly related to the Cashinahua theory of perception and aesthetic creation, because the whole question of perception and creativity can only be understood if we grasp how native thought regards reality. With such an ontologically fundamental stress on the constant transformation of one being into another in the Amazonian conception of the world, we are also forced to reinterpret the relation between, on the one hand, perception and creation (with perception already somehow being creation) and on the other between appearance, illusion and reality. This last question brings us to the issue of states of consciousness. Since consciousness is inconceivable without consideration of the state of the body; states of consciousness become states of being.

Therefore, the classic question in western theories of perception about the relation between illusion and reality ends up being substituted for a consideration of the relation between different states of being of humans as well as of non-human beings. This problem will be explained in more detail in the next section by means of the triad *kene* (design), *dami* (transformation), *yuxin* (immaterial being, image in a mirror). For the moment, I only want to situate the question into the broader frame of theoretical reflection on the topic in other Amerindian societies as well as in other geographical regions. Thus, we find in Schweder’s (1991) reflections on states of mind and how they are interrelated, questions related to our problematic:

“Some argue, for example, that imagination is opposed to perception... Some argue that perception is a form of imagination (for example that visual perception is a “construction”), while others argue that imagination is a form of perception (for ex., that

dreaming is the witnessing of a plane of reality). Still others argue both ways, and dialectically, for imaginative perception and perceptive imagination.” (Schweder, 1991: 37)

An example of the relation between imaginative perception and perceptive imagination can be found in one of the most striking stylistic features of Cashinahua woven design: since patterns are interrupted immediately after having started to be recognisable in the woven cloth, the imaginative capacity is forced to see the rest by means of an interior vision. This technique suggests that the beauty to be perceived out there is as much or even more present in the invisible world or world of images yet to be visualised by human perceptive creativity, as it is in the externalised beauty of artistic production.

This stylistic device reveals an important element of the meaning of design in Cashinahua ontology: the role played by design in the transition between imaginative perception and perceptive imagination, or the transition from images perceived by the eyes in everyday day states of being to images perceivable only to the interior eye or eye *yuxin*. Design is a sign hinting at *yuxin*. So much so that the only precious information Maria Sampaio, almost blind and therefore now unable to produce designs, was willing to convey me when I kept asking her about the meaning of design, was that “design is the language of the *yuxin*” (“*kene yuxinin hantxaki*”). We will return to this enigmatic sentence later.

The related Shipibo go one step further in the fundamental importance they attribute to imaginative perception when they state that all human bodies can be seen to be always beautifully painted, at least if you have the capacity to see. The invisible painting functions as a harness (protection) against the invasion of illness. Gebhart-Sayer (1986) understands the transition of visibility to invisibility in the manifestation of Shipibo body painting to be a protective device used by the Shipibo after they came into close contact with non-natives. Illius (1987), on the other hand, doubts body painting ever to have been used outside of ritual context. Non-Shipibo have access to the outer manifestation of the Shipibo patterns only through the beautifully painted pottery and

through paintings on cloth (Roe, 1982).

The Shipibo themselves however are able to visualise these culturally significant designs before their eyes also without needing them to be present in the outer world. Women with knowledge of design can dream of them (sometimes with the help of plants said to induce dreaming with design (Illius, 1987), as do the Cashinahua women), while men, and more specifically the Shipibo shaman visualises, with the help of his songs, the invisible design covering the skin of his patients, when under the influence of *ayahuasca* (Gebhart-Sayer, 1986). Both Illius and Gebhart-Sayer suggest that the synaesthetic relation between song and design in the drug experience has more to do with melody than with words. We will explore this complex relation between the senses in the holistic experience of imaginative perception later on.

The North American Navajo too attribute great importance to the occult side of beauty. So, Witherspoon writes:

"For the Navajo beauty is not so much in the eye of the beholder as it is in the mind of its creator and the creator's relationship to the created (that is, the transformed, or the organized). The Navajo does not look for beauty; he generates it within himself and projects it onto the universe. The Navajo says *shil hózhó* 'with me there is beauty', *shii hózhó* 'in me there is beauty', *shaa hózhó* 'from me beauty radiates'. "Beauty is not "out there" in things to be perceived by the perceptive and appreciative viewer; it is a creation of thought. The Navajo experience beauty primarily through expression and creation, not through perception and preservation." (1977(1997): 151)

A well-known manifestation of this Navajo philosophy of life and associated attitude towards art are their sand paintings, destroyed after or during healing rituals. The Navajo do not only see no sense in trying to fix or keep them (by means of photographs for example) but consider such activity to be potentially dangerous. This danger is linked to a basic ontological principle that associates life with movement and death with the absence of movement. Navajo aesthetic pleasure lies in the act of creation, not in its contemplation and conservation. Therefore, says Witherspoon,

"Navajo society is one of artists (art creators) while Anglo society consists primarily of nonartists who view art (art consumers)...The nonartist among the Navajo is a rarity. Moreover, Navajo artists integrate their artistic endeavors into their other

activities. Living is not a way of art but art a way of living.” (153)

In general, and returning to the discussion of the concept of aesthetics, I believe that, in the broad sense of the word, all people cultivate their ‘aesthetics’ or theory of taste linked to some sort of value and therefore judgement. Pleasing visions, tastes, smells and sounds will always be opposed to ugly ones and this perception implies interpretation and value, presupposing frames of meaning that precede the mere possibility of perception. Perceptions of the senses are classified and judged according to what they are understood to mean. Groups differentiate themselves from others in terms of what they like, but the criteria vary as does the social or political use of aesthetic judgement.

In modern western society ‘taste’, the cultivation of aesthetic judgement, has been used as a means of social distinction and is linked to the phenomena of class-belonging and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1984; Gow, 1994)⁷⁵. Taste has been cultivated as the specialised field of refined judgement. Taste is difficult to change because it implies a slow process of learning and the ‘incorporation’ or ‘embodiment’ of attitudes, it is the sort of bodily knowledge that one acquires only by means of shared habits and living together. It is because of this that taste is so important in the communication of a belonging that expresses a social philosophy and a life history. Someone’s taste guides actions, perceptions and liking without the subject’s having to think about it.

Seen in this perspective, taste becomes of crucial importance for personal and group identity. It should therefore be no surprise that when asked about their close ‘others’, it was exactly this kind of aesthetic judgement and value that was expressed most strongly by my Cashinahua interlocutors. The questions that preoccupied them were whether their ‘others’ (people occupying a position equivalent to theirs) used beautiful clothes and decorations, whether they smelled good or not, how they fed themselves, etc.

⁷⁵ See Weiner, J., ed. 1994. “Aesthetics is a cross-cultural category”. A debate held at the University of Manchester, Oct. 1993, with the participation of Howard Morphy, Joanna Overing, Jeremy Coote, Peter Gow.

The quality of things produced also fall under this category, but did not seem to be the most commented upon.

More meaningful than the way this knowledge was stored in external objects, seemed to be the way people incorporated knowledge, social knowledge as well as the art of living well and without illness. As much as knowledge and memory, art is embodied among the Cashinahua and objects are but extensions of the body. This explains why the most elaborate aesthetic expressions of indigenous groups are linked to bodily decoration: body painting, feather work, bead work and woven cloth and hammocks. The Cashinahua neither keep nor store their artistic productions. Like the Navajo, they consider that ritual objects lose their meaning and beauty (and *dua* power, radiance) once they have been used. So while during the initiation ritual the beautifully painted ritual stool *kenan* can only be used by the initiate child, after the ritual (with its decoration gradually fading away) it simply becomes a stool used by any man who wants (women do not sit on stools, they sit on mats).

Indigenous people vary enormously with respect to the value placed on material production⁷⁶, but in general it can be said that technical productivity and accumulative innovation do not have the same value as in industrialised society. In general, indigenous populations, and the Cashinahua in particular, desire industrialised products as if thus affirming a technological superiority of the 'whites'. This question occupies a central place in their reflections about their relation with the whites. Most mythology referring to

⁷⁶ Compare for example the ritualistic Kayapó-Xikrin (Vidal, 1992), Bororo (Dorta, 1981) or Wayana/Apalai (Van Velthem, 1995) with their exuberant feather work and elaborated basketry, with the extremely poor material culture of the Pirahã (Gonçalves, 1995). What is interesting in the last case is that the Pirahã see their Gods as possessors of all sorts of techniques (know-how) while they are at the same time unable to put them into practice because of their imperfect (mutilated) bodies. To put things into practice they need the help of humans. Humans, on the other hand, 'know nothing' but have a perfect body and are sophisticated and skilful fishers who, with the use of simple instruments, obtain infallible results.

this question considers the difference in technological power to be the consequence of a choice made in the past: the explication that 'we chose arrows while the others chose guns' is a recurrent conclusion in Amerindian mythological reflections on this topic. Hereby they stress the importance of their own agency in the process of decision making, without however defending it as the best decision that could have been taken.

We perceive an obvious political and social meaning to this mythological reiteration of the role of choice in the determination of their actual condition. If it were not because they had chosen to live as they do, they might have migrated to the cities or fused with non-native migrants as many native groups have done in the past, and the distinction between them and the whites would have been abolished. Yet, on the other hand, it has also long been known that indigenous traditionalism is an idea dearer to the anthropologist than to the native. People do not live as they do because they have always done so, even if this might be a frequently heard answer to anthropological 'why' questions, they do so because they have decided this is the way they want to live. It should be noted that this is a decision that cannot, by definition, be taken individually. As the Cashinahua case reveals, 'indigenous life' lies precisely in the fact that to be Cashinahua means to live in community with close kin instead of living in nuclear families amidst strangers.

The social philosophy that stems from the choice to live in small-scale, politically autonomous societies built around kinship, has far-reaching consequences for lifestyle and production, and therefore also for the social praxis of aesthetic judgement. Especially when this choice of social practice has been made against the background of alternative, available lifestyles. In the case of the Cashinahua and their Panoan and Arawakan neighbours the 'call', temptation or threat of the Nation State is older than the first arrival of the white colonisers at the Peruvian coast. Their frontier position between Andean Highlands and Amazonian rainforest put them in close contact with the advancing Quechua and Inca expansion, and historical research suggests that some of them (possibly Cashinahua and Conibo) were working in the gold mines of Potosi when the first

chroniclers arrived there (Renard-Casevitz, Saignes and Taylor, 1988, vol. I: 121-132).

This sporadic contact with a political context of the Inca Nation State where coercive power ruled the contacts between conqueror and vassals, attracted the people from the *Montanha* (woods) as much as it repelled them. Sources from the first colonial period mention that these people from the forest were never really subdued. They could come and go, disappearing into the impenetrable *Selva* when they wished to and coming back when they needed metal, gold or other goods unavailable in the forest (guerrilla techniques seem to be as old as there are registers on the region). This relational modality has been transposed unto the forest people's relations with white missionaries and colonisers: they could temporarily work for them but would disappear as soon as they had too much. It is therefore, sociologically speaking, logical that the ancient *Inka* figure in myth should survive nowadays as an operative image for conceptualising the ambiguous relationship of attraction and resistance towards the white invaders (see also McCallum, 1992 and Kensinger, 1986a on the relationship between the whites and the Inca).

Thus the Amazonians' choice to go on living in small-scale communities where the accumulation of possessions and power is socially discouraged, and where no authoritarian coercion or curtailing of personal autonomy is tolerated, is an old one, and the resistance against incorporation has therefore had to be conscious and cognitively well elaborated. This has been done in myth and ritual, as we will see below, but is also reflected in aesthetic praxis and evaluation.

In the section above we have already mentioned the Cashinahua fascination for the dangerously attractive beauty of their powerful 'Others'. While some indigenous people drive their repulse of excessive power so far as to also abhor its material manifestations⁷⁷,

⁷⁷ This is the case for the Piaroa (Overing, 1985). Piaroa aesthetics seems to be an explicit statement about the danger of uncontrolled cultural power. Power, when out of control, becomes ugly in behaviour and form. Beauty is strongly associated with the morally good and socially domesticated. The powerful is never beautiful in itself. To become so, it has to be constantly cleaned at night by the clear moonlight in the words of the wizard's song. This understanding of

the Cashinahua cultivate a secret admiration and longing for fusion with their emblems of otherness and power. Therefore the mythology of the most beautiful of all beings, the *Inka* (*Inka hawendua*), is not one of total rejection but one of projecting into the future of eschatology a final reunion. The snake people too are said to be extremely beautiful and seductive as are other *yuxibu* when visited in their houses, and all of them, forest and water as well as sky beings are *keneya*, that is, decorated with 'real' design. Their beauty is the reflection of their power, knowledge, and subsequent health, and is expressed in the use of bodily decoration (especially feathers, body painting and beads). The entire appearance is said to be shining and colourful, a visual energy that comes from or is due to their *dua*, aura, brilliance (name of the moiety associated with the interior).

Hawendua, the Cashinahua term for 'beautiful' contains the concept *dua* (brightness), but the nature of the first part of the word *ha-wen* is unclear (*hawen* could mean 'his or her' *dua*, or 'this one' (*ha*) 'with' (*we*) *dua*, but we leave this question to the competence of linguists). The word for goodness or kindness, '*duapa*', on the other hand, could also be related to *dua*, but again these are tricky questions for anthropologists looking for meaning where perhaps they should not. If, however, these three words, *dua*, *hawendua* and *duapa* were semantically related, as a decomposition of words would suggest, we would have found in the Cashinahua language confirmation of the same explicit association of ethic and aesthetic judgement that occurs in so many other native contexts where the beautiful is also the morally good.

Yet, when speaking of the link between aesthetics and ethics, it is important to establish, from the onset, a distinction between social practice and social imagination. The praxis of aesthetic judgement is intrinsically linked to ontological problems that occupy native reflection: the nature of power as an inevitable coexistence of its creative and cannibalistic sides and the refusal to accept coercive and economic power within the

aesthetics as closely linked to ethics and social life is elaborated in Piaroa mythology. Thus their most creative and powerful deity of creation time, *Kuemoi*, master of the water world, was also the most ugly of them all.

communities, linked to the previously mentioned "primary obsession" of all Amerindians with "the philosophical notion of what it is to be similar and different, a notion whose basic meaning may well *not* be that of gender." (Overing, 1986: 142).

One finds a visual comment on these questions in Cashinahua ideas about beauty. Therefore, in their actual aesthetic judgement, the Cashinahua value moderation, cleanliness and detail in both behaviour and caring for the body as well as in their use of ornaments and design. Art stands in a constructive and not destructive relation to the sense of community and the creation of a culturally proper way of life. Art style does not show any tendency to break with tradition because creativity is seen to occur only within and never outside its specific network of social and sensible meanings.

In this way we can see that the rules guiding artistic creation and judgement are the visualisation of another aspect of aesthetic imagination than that expressed in descriptions about the *yuxibu* of other worlds. Instead of experimenting with the dangerous manifestations of excess, they show the opposite logic of moderation and measure, an aesthetic praxis that expresses the pragmatic workings of a social philosophy that does not allow for extravagant and exaggerated difference at the level of real embodied life. Thus while their imaginary life can visit all the possibilities of form and luxury as visualised in the colourful cities of the *nawa* made of stone, crystal and iron, in daily life artistic expression gains value not through spectacle and exuberance but by means of subtle idiosyncratic details.

Earlier, in the chapter on Perspectivism, I have already mentioned the subtle use of asymmetry in an overall work of patterned cloth marked by a symmetric interplay between figure and counter-figure (I use the term counter-figure because there is actually no real background). I used Barthes' (1980) concept of *studium* to refer to the dominating visual discourse of a constant and infinite interplay of an equal number of identical design units and their complementary opposites, the same design units alternating with others by means of contrasting colours (mostly black and white in woven cloth, or black and red in

facial paint)⁷⁸.

In this way, the concept of the 'fabric of life' conceived as the interwovenness of equal elements (beings occupying the same position in a system), each one belonging to one of two opposite moieties (dark figures contrasted with light ones), is evoked in a woven cloth that shows how the repeated and systematic interlacing of complementary opposites, opposed in colour but equal in form, can form an infinite pattern. Thus in one fabric, the cloth joins what is opposed but at the same time essentially equal in form, substance and quality: black and white motifs are both made of the same cotton, spun into a thread and woven into a cloth, and *inu* and *dua*, or man and woman are both made of the same bodily fluids and *yuxin* agency.

The fabric performs the function of a skin or placenta, containing a bodily space within, and filtering and protecting as much as connecting what is inside with what is outside. It is by following this logic of the 'wrapping protecting its seed' (where 'seed' stands for the potential of a content) that the metaphorical associations of placenta with design, and design with skin gain meaning. The same logic associates skin with the walls of a house (called *kene*), and the conic roof of a house with the vault of the cosmos.

If the concept of body (*yuda*) can be extended to *nukun yuda* (our body) so as to include in its meanings the idea of all one's close kin who share food and roof (in the old days the big long houses used to house a whole village), the fact that the house is chosen as the metaphor of that which contains that body follows as a logical consequence. The villages of *yuxibu* in the cosmos are imagined in the same way as the contained wholes of bodies and communities: they are spherical and closed and the entrance is a hole or door. What links all these phenomena in Cashinahua ontology is the concept of design (*kene*), a design that never exists as an abstract concept but that always adheres to or is incorporated into a support. Design is that which separates the inside from the outside of a 'body' (or world) as much as it constitutes the means of communication between both

⁷⁸ See illustration annexed.

sides⁷⁹.

Thus, to come back to the formal analysis of style and the meaning style reveals when form is associated to the principle structures at work in ontology, we arrive at a synthetic unity in duality. In previous chapters, we saw how this basic structure expresses the quintessential characteristic of life on earth. Thus as much as life on earth is constituted by the simultaneous separation and linking of sky and water world and by the interweaving of opposite qualities (*dua* and *inu*, male and female), the woven cloth or painted surface is the unitary result of a systematic repetition of identical design units of alternating dark (*dua*) and light (*inu*) colours, representing respectively the water and sky world, night and day, male and female. The unity of the body and of life is brought into existence as a result of the meeting and mingling of the opposite principles of gender and of the sky and water worlds.

Consequently the overt discourse of style, its *studium*, stresses the essential sameness of all elements in accordance with a social philosophy that reacts strongly against any sort of power abuse (all human beings are more or less the same as are the design units), as much as it stresses the relatedness of human beings and the all-embracing cosmos whose bodies and beings are covered in the same network of design. It also visualises the fact that the body is composed of the joining of *inu* and *dua* qualities, as much as of female and male fluids. The *studium* is in this way one of homogeneity and coherence and expresses the idea of the community as being one social body (*nukun yuda*) covered by the same cultural 'skin' (cloth) or network of paths (the minimal units of design are called 'paths', *bai*) covering the whole domesticated (or explored, known) world.

The *punctum*, or aesthetically pleasing detail, on the other hand, comes from the realm of unpredictable events and personal creativity. Hence an extra angle in one of the multiple grecques composing a pattern will disturb the perfect symmetry of structure and

⁷⁹ See illustration annexed.

will wittingly call attention to the authorship of the piece of art as well as to the fact that even in an overall pattern of similarity nothing is ever produced twice without having undergone a slight transformation in the process of reproduction. As surely as the human being is unique by means of his personal history and the idiosyncrasies of his body, every product of a human being's work is unique in technique and conception and an artist never fails to explicitly mark this singularity in subtle detail for the attentive observer. So the quality of being unique although similar is always consciously visualised by means of the introduction of small distortions of classic patterns that give the piece of art its character.

Another even more remarkable phenomenon that adds to the particularity and distinctiveness of a piece of woven cloth with design is the smooth transformation of one pattern into another. Transformations of patterns occur only in weavings with patterns covering an extensive woven surface⁸⁰. This phenomenon was explained to me by Agostinho in the following terms:

“On *Yube*'s skin you can see all possible designs, they are twenty five in number but one of these patterns gives rise to a multiplicity of others. Because in the end they all belong to the same skin of the boa.”

Edivaldo phrased the question in similar terms:

“The design of the snake contains the world in itself. The spots on its skin can open itself and show a door to enter new forms. There are twenty five spots on *Yube*'s skin, they are the twenty five designs that exist.”

In contrast to design in weaving, the uniqueness of a body or face painting is obviously not so difficult to achieve, it comes with the framework as much as with the style of the painting hand: different faces will reflect the same pattern differently, while the complex surface forces design to adapt its angles into curves, accompanying the relief of the painted body. Therefore, the challenge of a face or body painting lies not so much in its asymmetrical detail and discreet originality hidden in an overall symmetrical field, as in the ability to cover the irregular surface without losing the coherence of design and

regular distance between the lines that compose the pattern⁸¹.

* In feather work, on the other hand, asymmetry seems to be more dominant than symmetry, at least with respect to the placement and size of feathers, although the resulting bouquet composed of slightly different plumes needs to be balanced and harmonious. The painted bamboo rings that support the delicate balance of feathers, on the other hand, are characterised by a much less dynamic disposition of design on their surface than is the case for cloths and face paintings where the centre of gravity of design is never in the middle of the field but always pushing towards the edges. The decentralisation of design on hammocks and ritual cloth, as well as in body painting enhances the impression of continuation of design outside the borders of the decorated

⁸⁰ Cf. Keifenheim (1996).

⁸¹ The same challenge in the maintenance of balance between coherence in pattern and application to an irregular support has been noted by Lévi-Strauss in his analysis of Kadiwéu (1955, 1958) face painting and by Gow (1988) in his analysis of Piro art. Gow suggests a relation between the complexity of the dynamic relation between graphic and plastic elements in art and the original (in the sense of primary) support on which the art style was developed and concludes that this could explain the great elaboration of design in Cashinahua weaving on the one hand and a more complex design system in Piro body painting on the other. The Cashinahua women were originally weavers, the Piro women painters. The same hypothesis has been put forward for Cashinahua weaving and its relation to body painting by Dawson (in Dwyer, 1975:131-150) This argument of the technical determination of artistic elaboration reminds us of Boas' classic *Primitive Art* (1928), a study written against the blind reading-into of symbolic meanings in design units, a method used without critical evaluation in superficial studies of ethnic art of his time. When design is understood as directly denotative and representational, no coherent meaning will result from iconographic analysis. The reason for this interpretative failure however does not lie in the fact that forms are mere forms without a meaning to convey (purely sensory and not conceptual or cognitive), but lies in the fact that a visual language communicates by means of a different logic from that by which language communicates.

field as if the design had been cut in half⁸², while the design on the bamboo crown is displaced in rows without diagonal crossings⁸³.

Hence in feather crowns the asymmetric balance of feathers is complementary to the symmetric ring that holds them together. The decoration of this crown can be painted or the bamboo ring can be wrapped in woven cloth. In both cases the motif is rigidly ordered on its surface, as if it had to compensate for the imbalance on its top.

For the *Txidín* ritual, where the song leader of the village teaches young candidate song leaders, one splendid feather costume, covering the whole body of its wearer with head, back and chest pendants, is made from harpy eagle feathers. Feathers of harpy eagles are difficult to get and they are kept as dear and rare possessions by those who catch the bird, but they will not be used by the hunter himself. The whole community contributes its feathers to the fabrication of the chant leader's and his pupil's costume and the apprentice who follows the chant leader in his song will in turn be allowed to wear the apparel for the duration of his performance. The chant leader's costume is a ritual feather cloth that belongs to the community and is only put together on the occasion of the ritual. It is the product of the combined contributions of every hunter of the village who was lucky enough to shoot a harpy eagle. In this way, the costume becomes a tribute to social cohesion instead of a means for an ostentatious display of private property or skill.

In the fertility ritual called *katxanawa* (dance of the hollow *paxiuba* palm), headdresses are also used. But this time each participant wears his own headdress. It is easy to imagine this as an occasion for strife and the demonstration of social prestige. Rabineau's (in Dwyer, 1975: 87-109) analysis of a museum collection of feather hats accompanied by field notes, made by Kensinger in the sixties, reveals some interesting

⁸² The same stylistic device has been noted by Muller (1990) among the Asurini, see also Lagrou (1991).

⁸³ See illustration annexed.

links between aesthetic and social judgement⁸⁴. Thus the hats made by the village leader and his son are considered to show great workmanship and delicacy. The son's work in particular is "praised for sparseness of feathers and elegance of design" (1975: 96). His behaviour is discrete and his ambition to succeed his father is not overtly expressed. He has mastered the aesthetics not only of craftsmanship but also of social etiquette.

The case of Muiku was different. He was a rival of the village leader and seemed not to keep his ambitions to himself. Thus he used harpy eagle feathers, although they were only to be used in *txidin* and *nixpu* rituals, in the *katxanawa* fertility ritual, and therefore he did not have enough of them, and because other villagers would not lend him theirs, he had to mix them with trumpeter bird feathers. This mixture and the use of too prestigious a feather in the wrong context were aesthetically disapproved of by his fellow kinsmen. Another hat he made was not considered beautiful either, although it was obviously well made, this time because he made excessive use of yellow feathers and therefore his piece of work was considered to be "overdone".

The above examples from Rabineau are meaningful in that they show the connection between social rules and artistic taste. The meaning of the aesthetics of headdresses, however, is more complex than that. Feathers have *yuxin* (Kensinger, 1991c) and must therefore be used in the appropriate combination and context as well as by the right person. It is not the head of the village who uses the prestigious harpy eagle feathers as a sign of his political prestige and authority (as suggested by Rabineau), but the song leader and his apprentices (among whom one of them first may be, but does not necessarily have to be the village head) who use them in a ritually controlled context. The harpy eagle feathers are part of the costume of the ritual representative of the *Inka* in the *Nixpupima* and *txidin* rituals. Because the owner of the feathers (*Inka* in its manifestation

⁸⁴ Nowadays the production of headdresses is rare and the quality of the production is not comparable with specimens found in the collections made by Schultes and Chiara in 1950-51 (Museu Paulista, without any accompanying notes) and Kensinger in the late fifties and early sixties.

of a bird: the harpy eagle) is called into the village square and is therefore thought to be present at the festivities, the person who uses the apparel has to know the correct songs to accompany the performance, if he does not want to expose himself to dangers belonging to the domain of *yuxin* and *yuxibu*.

It is not the village head, nor the shaman who specialises in the art of dealing with the feathers of birds and their use, but the song leader, because of the link between birds and his speciality: the art of memorising and performing ritual songs (all said to be learned from birds). These songs are linked to the domain of the *Inka*, while other songs, as the *yuan* songs in ayahuasca rituals, are linked to *Yube* and to the ritualised visualisation of realities associated with *yuxin* and *yuxibu*.

So we can see that the rules to which the use of certain materials and colour combinations adhere are more complex than those used for the regulation and distribution of social power. By means of the category of *dau* (charm, medicine, poison) that applies to the song leader's cloth as well as to all his decorations, including body painting and feather work, we understand that the use of certain emblems charged with meaning does not only have socially but also ritually binding consequences.

Objects and words in song are means of communication with the extra-human social universe with which one wishes to connect. One uses the appropriate feathers because their inherent *dau* enhances one's *dua*: brightness, aura. But one only wears the clothes one is strong enough to carry. Power is dangerous for a user who is not up to his job and must be kept as invisible as possible if one does not want to become exposed to competition, envy and revenge. This holds for ostentation of material goods and wealth as well as for ritual knowledge. Most of all it holds for the quality of shamanic power; it is precisely because this power belongs to the occult, that it is the most ambivalent and volatile of all powers known to the Cashinahua. Those who do not want to lose or weaken their power need to be strong enough to resist the temptation of sharing the secret of their pact with *Yube* with their fellows.

b. Design (*kene*), figure (*dami*) and *yuxin*.

“To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen.”
Plotinos⁸⁵

“Art is the burning glass of the sun of meaning.”
Roy Wagner, 1986: 27.

“There are two ways of not seeing what there is to see. One is where you locate the action to its proper activity space, but you are not experienced enough, or not (as yet) conceptually equipped, to catch its richness. You don't see enough of it. The other, more dramatic, is where you allocate it to the wrong activity space. You are blind to it.”
Jakob Meløe, 1988: 91.

Cashinahua sensibility to the presence of design (*kene*) in the world around is responsible for the classification of beings (humans, animals, plants and artefacts) in terms of ‘with’ or ‘without design’. When a certain being has patterns on its skin, this fact will be systematically mentioned in its name, through the qualifying adjective *keneya* (with design). We can illustrate this once more with the emblematic example of the jaguar: the two types of jaguar are distinguished by the fact that one, the *inu keneya* (jaguar with design), has a pattern on its skin, while the other *txaxu inu* (deer (red) jaguar) does not. And among the large ‘banana’ leaves which grow wild and are used for wrapping and steaming food and medicine (*kawa, patrasca*), one type is distinguished from the others by means of its design. Thus the generic name for this kind of leaf refers to the shape which is similar to that of banana leaves, *mani pei*, while the leaf with violet lines on its green surface is further qualified as *manipei keneya*.

This sensitivity to the existence of design in nature is concurrent with the high value placed on the complex design system that characterises Cashinahua artistic production in body painting, weaving and basketry. The emphasis on design is so strong that it has been chosen as the critical element in their self-image. When contrasting themselves with their neighbours, who do not use design (such as the Culina and the

⁸⁵ Cf. Furst (1972: 142).

Kampa or at least not a design system comparable in complexity to that of the Cashinahua, like the Yaminahua), they call themselves people 'with design'.

The Shipibo too are people with design (*queneya* in Shipibo) and this might be one of the reasons why Augusto, notwithstanding his affirmation that he never saw the Shipibo enough to really judge their similarity or difference, nevertheless calls them *huni kuin* because they are beautiful, because they are people with design. They also are owners of huge quantities of strings made of glass beads (*miçanga*), worn around the neck, ankle, upper arm, wrist, and under the knees by the Cashinahua as well as by their Pano relatives. These strings of beads are the quintessential manifestation of wealth and beauty in Cashinahua imagination. We will come back to them in chapter four.

The Yaminahua, in turn, are not really *huni kuin* or 'nukun yuda' (our body), despite the fact that the similarity of their onomastic system and language brings them so close to the Cashinahua that they are called other 'huni kuin' (*huni kuin betsa*). This difference in body is marked by their lack of true design, *kene kuin*. Theirs is *Yaminahua kene*, a less elaborate collection of designs, some of which have been incorporated by the Cashinahua for use by children, adolescents and young adults on informal festive occasions or to celebrate the return of hunters from a collective hunting expedition.

The *kene kuin* (true design), on the other hand, can only be used by initiates, children who have already passed the *Nixpupima* rite of passage. Although more common on ritual occasions and festivities or when expecting visitors from Peru, any adult wanting to beautify himself or herself can have their face or body painted with *kene kuin* by a close female relative (for married men preferentially by his wife) whenever *genipa* is at hand.

Intimately associated with this love for and importance of design in the Cashinahua aesthetic experience is the extensive use made by them of *ayahuasca*. More than for the purpose of healing, *ayahuasca* is taken to induce visions⁸⁶. The successful visualisation of

⁸⁶ In this way, the Cashinahua the use of *ayahuasca* differs greatly from the widespread use of *ayahuasca* by the riverine population of the Peruvian Amazon, who associate *ayahuasca* with the

the worlds of the *yuxibu* is experienced as intense both aesthetically and emotionally. The effect of the brew is not thought to be automatic but is experienced as a gift of the owner of the brew after negotiation and the active concentration by the drinker. The imaginative perception is not considered as a product of the perceiver's imaginative creativity but as the opening of a door through which one enters another world with a dynamic of its own. If during a whole night nothing has been seen, despite the repeated intake of several doses of the brew, two hypotheses are taken into consideration: either the leaf (*Psychotria viridis*) was too old to give light (that provides vision) to the power (pulsation, drunkenness) of the vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*), therefore leaving the drunken person in a clouded darkness, or its owner, *Yube*, was being stingy (*yauxi*) and would not open up his world of images (*dami* and *yuxin*) for the visitor waiting outside in darkness.

The first signs of *Yube*'s presence in the drinker's body (paradoxically also the moment of entrance of the drinker into *Yube*'s world or 'body') are said to be the acceleration of heartbeat, expressed through the words: "Its force is arriving like thunder". Some people vomit, but most people do not feel nausea. Vomiting may occur at different stages of the effect of the brew, not necessarily in the beginning, and has alleviating results. People say vision becomes better after throwing up, because it 'cleans'. The arrival of vision is announced by the appearance of small luminous figures, called *havent kene*, his design, that is *Yube*'s design. Afterwards once sees "only things of the vine" (*nixi pae besti*), figures of lizards and snakes twisting and wriggling their bodies, and finally, stable scenes in which appear human characters.

The regular experience of visions by the majority of adult men (and some women) has profound consequences for the meaning and 'presentation' of their cosmology. Mythic time and the worlds (houses) of the *yuxibu* become accessible to personal experience by means of an immersion into the world of images, called *dami* and *yuxin*. The cognitive and existential significance of this visionary contact with the imaginative

figure of the shaman as a healing specialist. See Gow, 1993a and 1995, and Luna, 1986.

world of mythology does not only reside in the consequent vivification of its images, but, more the most important element of the experimental knowledge thus acquired is the consciousness of the never-ending process of transformation of the cosmos that lies at the root of Cashinahua worldview. Thus the frame of this specific visual experience circumscribes a movement from bodies with or without design, to design transforming itself into visionary images and from these images into the visionary manifestation of *yuxin*.

The simultaneous presence of these two cultural manifestations of aesthetic experience signalling a highly symbolic, cognitive and emotional investment of Cashinahua ethos in visual experience points to the important role played by vision in their perception, classification and apprehension of the world. The fact that a high cognitive status is accorded to sight does not mean, however, that other senses are neglected. Yet it is linked to a native conceptualisation of the specific way in which each of the senses work together in the acquisition of knowledge about the environment.

Thus in order to identify plants in the forest, the senses of smell and ultimately taste are of crucial importance. These sensory capabilities seem to be much more trustworthy than sight, because the shape and colour of leaves seem to vary considerably according to size, location and geotropic position of the plant. For hunting, on the other hand, the hearing of sound is indispensable. The imitation of bird and mammal calls are efficacious lures to seduce the game to come and find its hunter. Smell is also important, especially the art of reproducing smells, again with the intention of misleading the game.

In the forest smell and sound are guidelines, indications of the proximity and identity of a creature, but confirmation of the presence and real identity of a perceived being will only come through the combined senses of sight and touch: these are capabilities represented by the eye *yuxin* and body *yuxin* respectively. If hearing and smelling indicate the nearby presence of a being, real contact is only established when the being is within view. When one sees a being, one may be sure of its presence but not yet of its identity. It is touch that will resolve the last shades of doubt: whether the perceived

(heard, smelled and seen) being is a real body or a *yuxin*. In this way, the distinction between bodies and images can only be made by means of touch. In Agostinho's words:

"*Dami* (figure) is just like *yuda baka* (body *yuxin*, shadow). You see it but you cannot hold it. It goes away after the *nixi pae* (strong vine), it is the *dami* (transformation) of the *nixi pae* of *yuxibu*."

Images (*dami*, *yuda baka*, and *yuxibu*) belong to the sphere of the nightly vision of the eye *yuxin* who acts in dreams as well as in *ayahuasca* sessions; while bodies, on the other hand, belong to daylight: they are heavy and do not disappear when one touches or tries to hold them. The right place and time for the perception of images is when the body is at rest, whereas the place/time to deal with bodies is when the body is awake.

Design is the linking medium that makes the transition between these separate sides of perceivable reality possible. In its relation with the complementary and opposed worlds represented by images and bodies (*yuxin/yuda*, night/day, immortal/mortal), design functions as the "metaphor" *par excellence* in the sense of bridge and linkage, sketching pathways towards and between separate worlds, or between the complementary sides of the same world, as well as between the complementary states of human consciousness or states of being. Designs are seen when awake (on bodies and certain artefacts) as well as when dreaming (on the bodies of 'images'). They are guides used by the eye *yuxin* when travelling between the imaginative perception of day time and the perceptive imagination of the night.

The snake, which owns all possible designs on its skin, is said to have eternal life because it changes skin, and women are fertile because they change their 'inner skin' monthly. The association between design and placenta, both important mediators in Cashinahua thought, seems to be confirmed in the meaning of some names (intuition that still requires linguistic confirmation).

A recurrent design pattern used for hammocks is *xamanti*. The term could be decomposed into the word for placenta (*xama*) and the suffix *-ti*, modifier indicating instrumentality or location (Camargo, 1991: 299). Choosing the first meaning of the modifier *-ti*, the translation of the name might be "by means of the placenta" or "that of

which placenta is made". This hypothesis resonates well with other ethnographic data that point in the direction of a relation between design and the placenta, where the placenta appears as "the original design" protecting the body (as in the Desana myth of origin of *ayahuasca* mentioned above (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1972, 1978) and for the Piro (Gow, s/d-Sun)).

Yet, if we take into account the fact that *xama* is nazalised, we find the verb *xaman-*, which means "to touch the region where trunk and legs join" (*passar a mão na virilha*) (Camargo, 1995: 109). This translation comes close to the translation for *xamanti* suggested by Paulo Lopes Cashinahua: "to place (something) on the legs of a person; when you place it, you join it (the lines)". Paulo made a gesture crossing the arms at the height of the pubis, indicating that the place where legs and trunk join represent the junction or continuity of the lines of the design. These verbs describe the act of joining and wrapping and, although they do not mention the uterus, situate themselves in that region of the body. In this sense, the attempts to approach the meaning of design reinforce more than they contradict each other: the design unites the lines, circumscribing other designs located in its interior.

Another association that can be made between female fertility and design, can be found in the verb *xankeikiki*, "weaving with design" (Montag, 1981: 394). The root *xank-* of the word *xankin* means "matrix or womb" (Capistrano, 1941: 616), "hole and channel" (Montag, 1981: 394) or "cavity in a tree" (Camargo, 1995: 109).

The placenta mediates between the foetus and the mother's body, filtering out the influences from abroad while at the same time protecting the inside. Thus it makes controlled contact with the outside source of life possible. In the same way the anaconda's skin, covered with design serves as a veil between the visible and invisible worlds. The patterns appear in the liminal space from which the human eye *yuxin* is taken from one side of reality (the side of sunlight) to the other hidden side, where images reveal themselves in twilight.

In the discussion about the meaning of design (*kene*), we explored the relation

between design and the body, between the perception of design and visionary experience, and the mediating function of design in the transition between the two separate sides of reality, the daytime world of bodies and the night time world of 'images' (*yuxin, dami*). At this point we need to have a closer look at the relation between the associated but nevertheless distinct concepts of *dami* and *yuxin*. Yet, before we continue on this path, the specificity of 'design' (*kene*) as distinct from 'figure' or 'image' (*dami, yuxin*) still requires some elaboration.

In Cashinahua discourse on visual perception and production, both concepts of *yuxin* and *dami* are used when referring to an 'image' or 'figure' as opposed to the abstract geometric design, *kene*. The Cashinahua first of all separate the phenomenon of *kene*, the abstract design, from other images perceived or produced, and then associate it to 'writing' (the *kene* of strangers). If *kene* is associated to writing, the question to be raised is what might have caught the Cashinahua's attention so as to establish the similarity between *kene* and writing and not, for example, between *kene* and other graphic activities such as the drawing of a figure or portrait.

We will, first of all, approach the closeness of the link between *kene kuin* (true or proper, 'our' *kene*) and *nawa kene* (the *kene* of the whites). On my first visit to the Cashinahua, shortly after the departure of the boat on our way to the village, I was writing down my impressions when suddenly my pen was taken from me by an old Cashinahua lady sitting beside me, who started to draw stylised patterns on her hand. These were the typical Cashinahua body and face painting designs I knew from photographs. Maria Sampaio then showed me how to do the same on my own hand and laughed. Noting she wanted to draw, I gave her coloured pencils and paper and asked for my pen. A sort of competition was installed to see who could 'write' more.

Dona Maria did not stop making *kene* and during the four days of travelling, she draw thirty designs. As a matter of fact, she only stopped drawing when the village was in sight. In the meantime, when tired of writing, I decided to draw human faces and bodies of nobody in particular.

I asked Maria whether what I was drawing could be called *kene* and she answered that, no, these were not *kene* but *dami* figures. After a while I decided to spend some time making portraits of people on the boat. This activity elicited some excitement and a lot of comments from people trying to identify the model and judging the similarity or lack of similarity to the person sketched. After several *dami* of different persons, one portrait turned out pretty well and a surprised observer exclaimed: “look at this one!, *damimaki* (this is not a ‘figure’), *yuxinki*, *hawen yuxinki* (it is an image, his image! (his *yuxin*))”.

So, from the start, this is how I got the key to the exploration of the Cashinahua classification of visual perception and expression. I would only learn much later how to make true *kene*, *kene kuin*. Even if I had known how to reproduce them at the time, I felt it was not appropriate to do so because my timid attempts had been dismissed with irritation by Dona Maria as “not true” (*kenemaki* (not design) or *kene kuinmaki* (not true design)), as if telling me to keep myself to my own *kene*, which I visibly knew how to produce in great quantity. What really surprised and fascinated them, however, was my activity of producing *yuxin*: “representations”, “imitations” of a person’s face. Later I learned that photographs were called also *yuxin*, along with the image reflected in a mirror or in still water.

After hearing about other uses of the terms *yuxin* and *dami*, I understood that one of the crucial distinctions between these two terms on the one hand, and the concept of *kene* on the other, had to do with volume and lack of volume, or maybe I should say with adherence and non-adherence. *Kene* is applied to all sorts of media but a medium in itself is never called *kene*, while the concepts of *yuxin* and *dami* usually mean the entity in itself, be it with or without a body. Thus a double, the ephemeral appearance of the image of a person, is a *yuxin*, a being that may or may not be perceived as decorated with *kene*. And a doll made of clay or wood or a person disguised by a mask are called *dami*, and may or may not be decorated with *kene*.

Kene is essentially graphic, a painted pattern covering the skin or serving vessels; a woven cloth, basketry, woven mats serving as walls for houses; in short, something

created to contain food or bodies. In contrast, *yuxin* and *dami* are entities, or images with agency of their own, with or without mass or bodily form. *Yuxin* and *dami* cover both the categories of artefacts, “things made”, and of beings (“animated artefacts”), but cannot be called “true bodies” (*yuda kuin*). ‘True bodies’ (*yuda kuin*) covered with ‘true design’ (*kene kuin*) are the supreme and final aesthetic achievement of specific human beings who need to master other arts to be able to produce, model and decorate bodies the way they like them, that is a beautiful (*hawendua*), healthy (*xua*, literally fat) and cheerful (*benima*) body. *Dami* and *yuxin* miss perfection or finalisation, and also stability of form: they therefore can not be said to ‘be’ bodies. Although they may have a body it is not their body but their special relationship to bodies that identifies their specific way of being.

With respect to the demarcation of the field of *kene*, however, it is not enough to state that *kene* is graphic because, as we saw in the boat story of drawing figures, letters and patterns on paper, both *dami* (figure) and *yuxin* (portrait) can at times also be graphic. What makes *kene* really different is that it adheres to a specific abstract style, a style that identifies all decorated Cashinahua products and artefacts as belonging to the same tradition, while the two-dimensional graphic expression of *dami* and *yuxin* does not belong to Cashinahua tradition and is therefore not constrained by Cashinahua style. The drawing of figures on paper has been introduced among them by missionaries and schools, and their execution is confined to these spheres of *nawa* activity. The only traditional figurative expression has always been three-dimensional, even if only in bas-relief.

In style and execution *kene* is not only an identifiable and strictly coded complex design system, but also constitutes a coherent system that uses the same patterns and motifs on all media it is applied to (although the names may vary on specific objects). This, again, does not mean that the medium does not influence the execution and shape of design. It obviously does. As we saw, the shape and form of the medium forces the design to adapt its curves and angles and to adjust to the surface. Yet, at the same time, the recognizability of the unity in the style of the designs that cover all sorts of bodies and artefacts of Cashinahua culture is as important as its relation to the surfaces covered.

As we saw above, the only explicitly stated information on the meaning of design I obtained from Maria was that design was the language of the *yuxin*: “*kene yuxinin hantxa*”. This enigmatic phrase poses several questions. What language does she mean? And how does this relate to the first statement about *kene* that she taught me by showing me its explicit association with writing? Later on this association was reiterated during my last fieldwork visitation at the occasion of the herbal treatment of the eyes of children and participating adults during the initiation ritual. Where previously only girls wanted to learn design (*kene*), now also boys received the eye drops from the hand of the anthropologist, in order to be successful in learning to read and write.

Other cultures with strongly stylised design systems in body painting and basketry also associate their graphic style with writing (as the Kayapó-Xikrin, Asurini, Siona, etc. See Vidal, 1992). One obvious quality that writing and graphic arts are understood to have in common in these cases is their stylised, non-figurative or ‘non-representative’ character. In relation to the use of the term ‘non-representative’ when referring to graphic patterns, some limitations of usability may exist, in accordance to the context. It point will be dealt with when dealing with the iconic aspects of design.

For the Cashinahua, however, writing and *kene* seem to have more in common than stylistic constraint and the fact that both graphic systems can be inscribed on surfaces of objects and bodies. Somehow *kene* seems to be linked to language, and through language to knowledge and power. But, the fact that *kene* is said not to be a human language but the language of the *yuxin* poses the problem of translation, the problem of the type of language we are dealing with and consequently of the types of knowledge, and different modalities of communication in Cashinahua conception.

This brings *kene* straight into the field of discussion of art and of what exactly art can be understood to communicate. Certainly it does not express in the same way that verbal language does, because if it did there would be no artistic expression needed. It is because art communicates something other than spoken language, and because each kind of art does this in its own specific way, that an artist cannot be asked to explain or to

translate into words what he or she just communicated in images, sounds or gestures⁸⁷. Therefore Picasso's answer to this sort of question was: "Everyone wants to understand art, why not try to understand the song of a bird?"(Geertz, 1983: 94), while Isadora Duncan replied: "If I could tell you what it means, there would be no reason for me to dance" (Bateson, 1977: 177).

In the case of non-verbal communication, we are dealing with a certain kind of messages that would be falsified if we communicated them through words (Bateson, 1977: 177). If from this it would follow 'that what cannot be spoken about should be silenced', we would be obliged to end our discussion about non-verbal discourse here. But, as Geertz (1983) remarked, experiences that touch us emotionally are felt as being pregnant with meaning, and people are as much led into talking about passion, even if well aware of the limited power of words in this context, as they are into talking about artistic performances or creations that managed to speak to their soul.

This urge for communication would not exist if it were possible to perceive 'pure form', void of any emotional or cognitive significance. Because then we would be satisfied with silent, purely 'aesthetic' contemplation alone. Forms or sounds only speak to us because they are already meaningful from the start. We can only listen to that which we already somehow understand and we can only perceive that which we somehow already knew before, even if not 'consciously'. This statement however does not really resolve the problem and requires a more satisfying understanding of what 'consciousness' actually means. Otherwise we risk casting the problem of non-verbal communication into the so-called 'unconscious' or 'pre-conscious', something we want to avoid at all costs, since, in this way, we would run the risk of adopting a perspective that takes the unconscious as the key to the interpretation of all artistic manifestations.

⁸⁷ A demonstration and analysis of the specificity of the musical message and code, distinct and independent from the verbal message in ritual song can be found in Bastos (1989) on Kamayurá music and ritual.

I found interesting suggestions related to this question in Bateson (1977) and in Solomon (1976). I will start with Solomon, a cognitive psychologist and philosopher who suggests a certain way of looking at emotions that will be complementary to Bateson's considerations on the 'language' or 'iconic code' of art, dreams and other messages of the 'unconscious'. Solomon does not write about art, but quotes Tolstoi to justify his inclusion of art in his reflection upon the passions. Tolstoi says that: "It is only the expression of sentiment that gives the arts their meaning" (Solomon, 1976 (1993): 132). Therefore, if we want to understand artistic expressions we have to understand, not only the aesthetic rules to which each piece of art in one way or another has to obey in order to be minimally 'readable', but first and foremost the feelings they are understood to elicit. Emotions for Solomon are not to be understood as blind drives that escape the control of reason but as primarily cognitive and rational:

"The passions are judgements, *constitutive* judgements according to which our reality is given its shape and structure." (1933: xvii)

"The way the world is for us is never simply the way the world is... It is our passions - and our emotions in particular - that set up this world, constitute the framework within which our knowledge of the facts has some meaning, some "relevance" to us. This is why I insist that the emotions are constitutive judgements; they do not find but "set up" our surreality. They do not apply but supply the framework of values which give our experience some meaning." (1993: 135)

In this way Solomon gives priority to value judgements over any purely cognitive or aesthetic, or any other sort of consideration. This means that what is being aimed at in this different way of philosophical thinking about emotions is their conscious, cognitive and synthetic character. Purposeful agency as opposed to the blind acting out of unknown impulses is what is at stake here. Emotions would reflect the synthesis of a cognitive process in the broad sense of the word, a cognitive process that has as its focal object of reflection and perception the quality of the relation between self and other. Solomon includes not only art in this field of subjective and wilful judgement (with explicit inspiration in Nietzsche's writings), but also mythology, whose purpose would be not so much to make the world 'intelligible' as it is to make it meaningful (Solomon, 1993: 144).

Solomon's and Bateson's discourse on 'art' (or on non-analytic thought in general) intersect at the point where they define the principle and first object of 'art' as the relation between self and other. To this relational core Bateson also adds the relation of self and its (non-human) environment. Bateson goes one step further by demonstrating the systemic character of this non-verbal communication on relatedness, while Solomon tries to enlarge upon the field of action of the intentional agent.

For Bateson, however, the big mystery is not an "unknown" unconscious but consciousness itself. While the combinatorial methods of the unconscious are understood to be continually active, necessary and universal (1977: 175), the way things and thoughts surge to the surface of a person's conscious awareness is what seems to be less obvious. There are different ways in which a person communicates and for Bateson the primal modality of all communication is not verbal but bodily, by means of expressions and gesture. Also, the real subject of most communication would not so much or primarily be the information that is exchanged about things, thoughts and persons, as the checking and confirmation of one's relation to the other and to the environment.

For Bateson, the essence and *raison d'être* of communication is the creation of redundancy and thus of significance, and the reduction of accidentality by means of restriction (1977: 170). Every style, a personal style as well as the style of a work of art, is thought to respond to this characterisation of communication in the broad sense of the word, and all creative products of a person's imagination can therefore be seen to communicate. The important thing to distinguish when trying to understand the message then is to distinguish the level of communication and to listen to it in the correct way. Not only can the represented entity itself, or the narrative component (or name or referent) of a piece of art signify, but also (and most significantly) the style, the 'iconic code' that transformed the referent into a new artefact, as well as the medium or material used, the composition, rhythm, and ability brought into evidence in the performance or transformed product.

Bateson's ideas on what and how art communicates clarify their communicative

quality, without falling into the pitfall of treating art as a sort of language (reducing it to the model of narrative 'iconic' representation in the moulds of 'allegory'), or as a sort of writing (trying to read it as a linguistic code). For Bateson, the messages contained in dreams, myths, poetics, drug-induced perception and visual arts communicate through the iconic code of descriptive images as opposed to the arbitrary, digital code that characterises the verbal part of language. Nevertheless, despite language's basic digital code, verbal description also becomes generally iconic once it is used in the broader structure of communication (1977: 172).

This statement resonates well with the mention I made, in the first chapter, of recent research in the field of metaphor, where it is argued that in the end all language is figurative and metaphorical. All language can be said to be metaphorical in the sense of making sense of unknown realities by means of the junction of previously unconnected meanings and fields. Therefore we can easily understand the impulse of an ever-ongoing conversation between people whose purpose it is to 'connect' (relate to each other) by means of an evocative language that tries to translate into sentences the cryptic messages conveyed in the coded language of iconic non-linear thought.

It is Bateson's conviction that the subject of all artistic communication (as well as that of dreams and myths) is that of the problem of 'grace'. 'Grace' would be expressed by a being as well as by the products of a person's work when all the different parts of the person's or being's mind are integrated. The success or failure of psychic integration is the content of artistic communication and that would be the reason why artistic expressions of unknown cultural contexts could be recognised as such even by uninformed eyes. Yet when consciousness is cut off from the circuit of psychic activity that goes on uninterruptedly below the level of the normal state of consciousness, consciousness becomes deformed and narrowed. What consciousness unassisted by art, dreams, poetry, etc. will never be able to appreciate, concludes Bateson, is the systemic nature of the mind, as well as the relatedness of one mind to another and of self to its environment.

The argument, situated on an excessively general level, seems problematic to me since art communicates more than a universally recognisable psychic integration or quality of relatedness. To fully appreciate the metaphoric or communicative quality of an artistic expression one should be as familiar as possible with the cognitive and emotional references with which the work resonates and dialogues, and to which it continuously cross-refers. It is nonetheless true that art works can speak to us even if we do not know anything about the world it is depicting. It does so by means of a certain 'grace' that like that of a cat or a horse, to use Bateson's examples, talk to us in their own untranslatable way.

It is also a fact that the performance of an artist requires a certain degree of unconsciousness with respect to the way one achieves one's feats which only come with habit. This is the unconsciousness of knowing how to perform the act so well that one does not need to think about it any more. The action and creation thus flows and gains shape as if it came out of nothing (actually we would not be able to survive if most of our actions were not carried out in this way). Bateson refers here to embodied knowledge, attuned with its human and non-human environment, as expressed in the elegant gestures of a master of an art form. He also refers to the healthy relatedness of the individual to his surrounding world, a knowing how to live that has more to do with wisdom (awareness of relatedness) than with pure rational thinking.

There is a level where Bateson's approach resonates well with my own data. Cashinahua graphic style and feather art correspond to the basic ideas of this people about the meaning of similarity and difference (the relation between self and other), as well as about the relatedness of people and other beings in the world (self and environment). As with Bateson's example on Bali painting, these basic ideas are not expressed in an univocal and denotative way as would be the case in allegoric representations of abstract ideas, but in a synthetic and polyphonic way permitting several different and complementary readings and interpretations at once. Moreover, the most important message, in the Bali case presented by Bateson, does not lie in the depicted

cremation procession or in the underlying phallic symbolism of the cremation tower, but in the combination of these different levels and also in the overall composition of the scene where the agitation of the figures at the bottom of the frame corresponds to the tranquillity of the images at the top, thus:

“En dernière analyse, ce tableau peut être comme l’affirmation que choisir entre turbulence et sérénité, comme projet humain, serait une grossière erreur. Concevoir et exécuter le tableau fournit une expérience qui expose cette erreur. L’unité et l’intégration du tableau affirment qu’aucun de ces deux pôles contrastantes ne peut être choisi à l’exclusion de l’autre, parce qu’ils sont mutuellement dépendants. Cette vérité profonde et générale est dite, en même temps à propos de la sexualité, de l’organisation sociale et de la mort.”(1977: 194)

Similarly, Cashinahua aesthetic expression does not communicate specifically or exclusively on the level of social relation (egalitarianism, interdependence and hypothetical interchangeability of social positions) or on the level of the constitutive complementariness of the sexes and moieties (dualism in social thought as expressed in the contrastive colours of enlaced figures and counter-figures). Nor does aesthetic expression exclusively refer to the interdependence of the visible and invisible sides of the world, or to sexual union (although this is one of the possible readings of the touching lines of a design unit). Yet, the whole material production and aesthetic expression (especially graphic design) is a synthetic statement on all these levels at once.

And this is, according to Bateson, why these aesthetic expressions could be called ‘good art’: instead of being a mere ‘representation’ or a mere phrasing of a specific kind of denotative knowledge about the world that could have been better expressed in words, good art creates something new, a fresh way of looking at the relation between the self, the other and the world. The synthetic consciousness of and simultaneous reference to the interconnection of several existential levels at once are what makes non-analytic or non-discursive communication special. The visual code communicates the insight and perception of an existential relatedness that is conscious on a level that escapes verbal discourse because it is simply impossible to verbalise everything at once.

The way of understanding art suggested by Bateson is interesting in that it explains

the specificity of a non-verbal message and the need for its translation for a possible integration into verbal discourse. It also shows its necessary and stimulating effect upon analytic thought in that it initiates a process of reflection and association, a process of connecting and broadening of the mental circuit so as to amplify one's awareness and field of cognitive perception.

Yet I think we must not forget the other, certainly just as relevant side of (non-verbal) communication that lies in its necessary openness of meaning (*l'oeuvre ouverte*). No work or expression ever carries the totality of its meaning in itself. There is no inherent or secret or absolute meaning to be found anywhere if not in the encounter between the observer and the observed. This assessment is meaningful for us anthropologists so as not to hide our share of the responsibility in the dialogue that tries to make sense of other worlds in other languages and other codes.

Therefore, let us come back to the perceptive triad of *kene*, *dami*, and *yuxin*. I hope the specificity of *kene* has by now become clear. *Kene* is a sort of written code, inscribed on bodies and objects, and follows strict rules of composition and execution. *Kene* is not the body, nor is it the *yuxin* to which it refers. It is its 'language', a code, composed of signs that hint at a presence, at the possibility of revelation of *yuxin* in embodied form. *Kene* contains the possibility of forms and thus of beings.

This is stated in the comments of Agostinho and Edivaldo about the role of original design (*kene*) on the boa's skin while under the effect of vine drunkenness: the skin of the snake is said to contain not only all possible designs but also the possibility of the transformation of these designs into images and bodies. The spots on the mythical snake's body are its designs and each of them transforms into images of animals and plants in the ongoing transformation of the visionary visual field. Therefore, adds Francisco, one should never leave the designs behind, for one should let himself be guided by them in order not to get lost in the world of the *yuxibu*.

Design has this capacity of multiplication of form however only on the level of *yuxin*, the world of free images, a process not restrained by the weight of slowly growing

and moving bodies. This is the meaning of the statement that *kene* is the language of *yuxin*, and not the language of humans. It needs to be 'translated' by humans in order to give it its place in the human world. Because of its linkage to the exterior world of *yuxin*, design can even be dangerous for a person's health, not only because it can trigger mental images (and thus cause or initiate the perception of *yuxin*), but also because it draws paths to be followed by the eye *yuxin* on its journeys when dreaming. Additional information from Keifenheim strengthens this interpretation: sick people are not be allowed to sleep in hammocks with design because the design is thought to have the power of drawing their *yuxin* into its webs and lead the eye *yuxin* astray on the path of the dead from whence it does not return (Keifenheim, 1996).

The fact that *kene* is considered by the Cashinahua to be similar to language and writing in the sense that it alludes in coded form to bodies and *yuxin* instead of actually coinciding with them, while images (traditionally three-dimensional artefacts used with ritual purpose) are somehow the effective manifestation of *yuxin*'s and bodies' actual form, suggests the possibility of a clarifying application of Peirce's tripartite model of non-verbal (or non-linguistic) signs to this equally tripartite model of Cashinahua non-verbal signs of visual perception and their relation to the real manifestation of the entity (*yuxin*, image, *yuxin* or *yuda*, body) to which they refer.

In its semiotic relation with *dami* (image, transformation), *yuxin* can be said to occupy the place of Peirce's "dynamic object", in the sense of a metaphysical presupposition that indicates the real quality of the being, where *dami*, in its quality of a metonymical sign, refers to without ever really coinciding with it as long as it is *dami* (transformation). *Yuxin* is *dami*'s referent, its most faithful or most complete image, invisible for humans in an quotidian state of being, yet always there, belonging to another place, but always active behind the scenes. *Yuxin*'s image coincides with its being. When *yuxin* finally reveals itself as *huni kuin* (true human being) to the human eye (eye *yuxin*) it is a revelation, because to see in this way implies a shared knowledge and partaking in the being thus revealed. "To see is to know", and thus the *yuxin* being made visible in the

form of a true human being also will speak an understandable language, will eat the same food, will be turned from other into self.

Therefore one says *yuxin* when one sees the apparition of a mobile human image without a body. In this case, the *yuxin* can be the double that left the body to which it belongs, or a being without a body, or even pure energy, free to assume any form or body. Its mobility is not limited by the inertia of matter. In other words, for the *yuxin* (who is *yuxibu*, master of transformation) the body is like a skin or cloth it can put on or take off. This, however, is not the case for those *yuxin* (who are not *yuxibu*) that belong to animals or 'normal' (this-worldly) beings, who find themselves planted in a body where they created roots that permeate the flesh to which they give substance, form and vitality.

The image of a being is never a mere appearance. In this sense, *yuxin* is like the ancient Greek *psychè* (Vernant, 1992: 186-191): the manifestation of the absent. What is seen 'is', since it shows itself to the eye in all its details, with the movement, definition and grace of a real human being. But it (the *yuxin* or double thus perceived) is not a body, and is not of this place. It cannot be touched or it disappears immediately.

Dami, on the other hand, is a becoming or a deviation (transformation) and connotes movement. *Dami* means image, but is a deformed image, or an image in the process of being formed. The word *dami* is therefore a relational term, a sign, always referring to something that is exterior to it or transcends it. *Yuxin* in this sense can be read as the potentiality of being that exists in and for itself because when it manifests itself, it is. Its most revealing manifestation is anthropomorphic because in this form it becomes identical to the human form and being, a precondition for the possibility of communication and mutual understanding.

Depending on the context, different manifestations of the same being can therefore be called its *dami*, its transformations or 'lies' (*txani*), disguises by means of which the *yuxibu* confuses or frightens the viewer. This is the meaning underlying the experience with ayahuasca. First of all, one sees 'lies', *nixi pae besti* (only things of the vine), reptiles, 'all sorts of animals', and enlaced vines. The snake swallowing the initiate

pertains to this same phase of *dami* (transformations). The real name and image of the brew, however, is *huni*, person and the drinker will only be satisfied with the experience if he managed to see people, *huni*, the people of the vine showing themselves in the form of people. Yet, the *yuxibu* itself in terms of agency and potentiality is all these things at once. It is both the primordial male shaman *Yube* and his wife *Sidika*, master of design and combines in this way the male and female productive capabilities.

Dami is the noun used to describe the transformation of images before the eyes of a person under the influence of *ayahuasca* (*'dami en uiin'*, 'I see transformations, or figures'), or the verb used to speak of the transformation the viewer himself experiences while under the influence (*'en damiai'*, 'I am being transformed' or 'I am transforming', this last translation implies agency while the first refers to the undergoing of a process). The same expression *damiaii*, to transform, is used to express the process whereby a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. All myths relating to the transformations of animals into humans and vice versa use the verb *damiai*, when talking about the process of transition.

The same verb *dami* is used to describe the modelling of the foetus in the pregnant woman's womb. The modelling agent is the father's semen and penis, while the process of transforming liquid into substance is done by means of 'cooking' (*ba*) in the mother's womb (Cf. McCallum, 1989a). Also the modelling of figures in clay is called *damiwai* (to make figures), while the ritual dressing with masks and palm leaves through which the wearers are disguised as forest beings is called *damiai* (to mask, to transform). Instead of using palm leaves or masks, men (and sometimes women in rituals of gender inversion) can also hide their face and body under rudely applied patches and stripes of achiote or genipa that evoke the spots and stripes on the skins of the animals they aim to imitate. This kind of activity is not called *kenę* (to draw patterns) but *puxa* (to colour or stain) and contrasts strongly with the delicate networks of labyrinths the women draw on people's faces with fine sticks wrapped with cotton and soaked with transparent genipa paint for the same festivities. These beautiful 'true' designs are then covered with red and black paint during the process of visual transformation, *dami*, in the forest in preparation for the

acting out of enemies or beings of the forest who will invade the village of the moiety or village that hosts the festivities.

Besides these rude patches of colour which disguise the body, men can also draw figures on paper, an activity also called *damiwa*. These are the only drawings males are allowed to make. Any attempt at making *kene* by men is ridiculed by women as “*kenemaki, damiki!*” (no design, just figures!). True *kene* is as much a strictly female activity as cooking, spinning, weaving and pottery, since they are all associated with female fertility.

The last graphic inscription, related to the male domain, and equally called *dami*, are the tattoos. Tattoos are applied in the form of small signs or traces, in the face or on the chest. The only tattoos I saw were used by elderly men. Although this information still needs confirmation, I believe that tattoos are linked to war. My hypothesis is that only those who killed an enemy receive tattoos (actually the three men I saw with tattoos were also the only ones who, I learned, had killed Yaminahua when young). The ritual imposition of tattoo⁸⁸ is obviously related to a change in a person's identity, this time a permanent one that could signal the transformation suffered by a man who has killed an enemy and has in this way become exposed to the *yuxin* of his victim.

The relation of *dami* (in all its different uses, from ‘behaving as if’ to ‘on the way to becoming like’) to its *yuxin* (or the perfect finished form to which it refers) is simultaneously indexical and iconic. The relation is indexical because *dami* is ‘physically’ (or metonymically) linked to its object (like footprints in the sand), and iconic because *dami*'s relation to *yuxin* is not only based on contiguity and metonymy but also on partial formal similarity. Being a visual and concrete sign, which is idiosyncratic and without general validity, *dami* could be classified under the Peircean *iconic sinsigns*. Their perception and expression are not patterned; they do not adhere specific stylistic constraints or conventions comparable to those guiding the execution of patterned design,

⁸⁸ Applied by a *txai*, cross-cousin.

kene. Therefore, if both *kene* and *dami* are related to *yuxin* as visual significant are related to their referent, they do so in a different way.

Notwithstanding the fact that *kene* is a complex and strongly patterned design system that does not represent but signifies the invisible world of *yuxin*, *kene* cannot be said to stand in a symbolic relation, in the Peircean sense of symbol, to its referent *yuxin*. The Peircean symbol is connected to its object by force of an idea alone, and its association to the form of the sign is merely conventional and arbitrary. The symbol is in this sense definitely not of the same nature as the quality it represents. Writing is therefore a symbolic system in the plain sense of the word in that it represents a spoken word by means of a graphic system that lacks any sort of iconic or indexical relation with its referent, being connected to that which it represents only by means of an idea. In this terms, *kene* could only be a kind of 'writing' in the metaphoric sense of the word, where the metaphor refers to the patterned and stylised character that both graphic systems share.

Rather, *kene* is more an 'iconic legisign'. The category of *legisign* refers to the high degree of focalisation and abstraction of the drawing (or graphic sign), while the adjective *iconic* indicates a relation between the significant and its significance that is not an arbitrary or conventional one but one of similarity. Among the Cashinahua this similarity always presupposes metonymy. This is why both the images of *yuxin*, *dami*, which are figurative and concrete, and the *kene*, which are patterned and express more abstract qualities of the referent, are nonetheless both linked to their referent by means of an indexical association. Both, as part of a whole, partake of the quality of that to which they refer, invoking it instead of 'representing' and substituting it.

We have seen that the three terms used by the Cashinahua to speak of images stand in a close relationship to each other. This relationship is characterised by complementariness, transition and potential transformation. *Kene* can transform itself into *dami* during a visionary experience, while *dami* is always on its way to becoming *yuxin*, the manifestation of the real being it hints at. In the visionary experience with *ayahuasca*

this means the revelation of the ultimate human form of any *yuxibu* of the normally invisible world. Thus we can see how *kene*, *dami* and *yuxin*, all three highly polysemic concepts, constitute a complex discourse on the phenomenology of being that puts the transformability of the universe at the centre of its concern.

From the foregoing we can conclude that for the Cashinahua all images are 'doubles' of the beings to which they refer. The Cashinahua do not, therefore, pose themselves the problem of identifying the real and the illusory in the same way as Western philosophical tradition since Plato has done. It is Vernant's thesis (a thesis philosophically close to that of Ricoeur) that a different approach to images was the consequence of the democratisation of the use of writing in ancient Greece and that the first elaboration of these profound changes can be found in Plato's defence of distanced contemplation as opposed to the traditional educational system, which was based on the methods of mimesis. Plato's educational ideal was, in his own words, only possible by means of the use of writing.

Plato completes a rupture with the traditional system of oral transmission of knowledge which used as its method for memorisation the oral recitation of poetic songs, usually accompanied by dancing. This method promoted learning through empathy and the identification of the public with the actor or singer representing the roles in question. This mimetic method lacked, in Plato's vision, the necessary critical distance for the real search for objective knowledge that only writing would be able to create. Plato's critique of mimesis took him to a reformulation of the notion of image that marked "a stage in what might be called the elaboration of the category of the image in Western thought." (Vernant, 1991: 174)

The 'image' is turned into a purely superficial appearance that alienates the student from the real static 'essence' of being. The personalised performance in the process of oral memorisation and transmission of knowledge would immerse the student in the sensible flux of becoming evoked through the dramatic, rhythmic and emotional language of the sophists and would thus preclude any possible reflection and distance on the part of

the one who receives the information.

So, in Plato's eyes, sophists, poets and actors would all lose themselves in the multiplicity of sensible appearances that all belong to the field of mere opinion (*doxa*), and would stay blind to the real knowledge of being (*episteme*) sought after by the philosopher. The truth for the philosopher would be the idea of the 'essence', of the internal structure of being, which is unique and permanent and is not dependent on the point of view of the observer. This philosophical position presupposes the existence of an objective and logical reality, exterior to the subject and governed by universal laws, knowable by the intellect alone. It is a way of thinking about the relation between being and appearing that radically changed the status occupied by image in archaic Greek thought. We will linger on this topic because it clarifies some of the *idées fixes* about reality and illusion that occupied Western thought for a long time, to be challenged only with the advent of psychological theories on the active role of imagination played in the phenomena of perception⁸⁹. I quote Vernant on the topic:

"For archaic thought, the dialectic of presence and absence, 'same and other,' is played out in the otherworldly dimension that the *eidolon*, by being a double, contains, in the miracle of something invisible that can be glimpsed for just an instant. This same dialectic is found again in Plato. However, once transposed into a philosophical vocabulary, it not only changes its register and assumes a new significance, but the terms as well are also in some sense reversed. The image, a "second like object", being defined in some respects as the Same, also refers to the Other. It is not confused with the model because, having been denounced as the untrue, the not-real, it no longer, as in the case of the archaic *eidolon*, bears the mark of absence, of elsewhere and of the invisible, but rather the stigma of a really unreal nonbeing. Instead of expressing the irruption of the supernatural into human life, of the invisible into the visible, the play of Same and Other comes to circumscribe the space of the fictive and illusory, between the poles of being and nonbeing, between true and false. The "apparition", along with the religious values that invest it, gives way to a "seeming", to an appearance, a pure "visible" where the question is not one of making a psychological analysis but of determining its status from the point of view of its reality, of defining its essence from an ontological perspective." (Vernant, 1991: 168)

⁸⁹ The concept of 'imagination', referring to the capacity of the mind to produce images, appeared first during the second century after Christ (Cf. Vernant, 1991: 185).

The sensible thus becomes the illusory and the false, while the intelligible, its opposite, becomes the only really real. The idea of image as illusion and the possibility of seeing something that is not there stands at the basis of the concepts of 'hallucination' and 'representation'. The idea of *faux-semblant* as well as that of artistic representation are consequences of this secularisation of the image. At the moment of this epistemological division, the image starts to simulate the presence of something without any metonymic sharing in the quality (or 'essence') of the represented. The notion of representation supposes the absence of what it substitutes, as well as a qualitative difference between the represented entity and the image that replaces it. The image has no reality whatsoever outside its being similar to the entity to which it refers.

The search for this sort of pure spirit (idea), present only to itself and becoming polluted when immersed in matter and in the changeable forms of life, gripped Western thought until the eighteenth century when, with Kant as principle target, it began to be questioned by hermeneutics, phenomenology and the emergence of the social sciences. Modern theories of perception reintroduced the category of agency and the notion of the creative power of the human mind into the concept of image and since then the role of imagination and the relation between reality and appearance have begun to be accordingly re-addressed. The problem of the meaning of 'fiction' and 'mimesis' is the order of the day in anthropology, in the arts and in other human sciences. This is how we have become prepared to accept the different reading and meaning of the life of images suggested by the Cashinahua.

To conclude, we can note several specific features in the Cashinahua phenomenology of visual experience sketched up to this point. First of all, vision is conceived of as a dynamic process and never as something static and passive. In the production of design, a fixation of the perceiver's point of view is never aimed at. Since there is no background or figure on which the eyes can rest their attention, but only the restless dynamic of a switching perception of figure and counter-figure, the perceiver's gaze is drawn instead into the kinetic dynamics of the geometrical labyrinth of design

(Guss, 1989: 122). Therefore we can see that Cashinahua "writing" (*kene*), the sensitive inscription of meaning in the broad sense of the word (Cf. Derrida, 1967), works with a concept of vision that differs greatly from the role given to vision, painting and writing in classic western culture, where writing has been considered to be the crucial technique for fixing time and knowledge (the flow of thought and speech) into a permanent visual form, making it thus susceptible to distanced and objectified observation (Ricoeur, 1981, Vernant, 1991).

The Cashinahua consider knowledge to be incorporated. Thus when referring to the knowledge contained in the notebooks of the ethnographer or teacher, a Cashinahua does not refer to the letters (*kene*) on the paper but to the paper itself containing the letters. For this reason paper is called knowledge, *una*⁹⁰. Ironical comments of the Cashinahua helped me to better understand their corporeal conception of knowledge. Thus they suggested that the preoccupation of the white with storing and registering knowledge em objects outside their bodies, produced bodies that stopped knowing. Books contain the knowledge, *una*; tapes are 'voice catchers' (*huibiti*), and cameras accumulate the perfect images of bodies, in other words, *yuxin*, and are therefore called 'yuxin catcher' (*yuxinbiti*)⁹¹. But if one wants to 'really' learn, Augusto told me on one of the last afternoons I was with them, one has to perform the knowledge. And he took me by the arm to dance and sing.

⁹⁰ See Gow (1990) for a similar approach to writing, books and knowledge among the Piro.

⁹¹ Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982) report that the Peruvian Cashinahua interpreted the cause of the epidemic that hit them shortly after a visit to their villages by the German/Brazilian anthropologists Shultes and Chiara in 1950/1951, as caused by the visitors' filming activity. The capturing of their *yuda baka*, *yuxin* of the body, would have reduced its size and left the people that had been filmed weak and susceptible to illnesses.

Part II. Expression and Agency: Myth and Ritual

Chapter 3. Myth: The creation of the World: an equivalence between cosmogony and ontogony.

"The gods know that when matter rests mindless and spirits float free it is either before dawn or after the twilight of time and of existing things."

Richard Schweder, 1991: 8.

This chapter approaches Cashinahua cosmogonic and ontogonic thought through myth. I use the term cosmogony in conformity with the theoretical proposal expressed by the editors of *Cosmogony and Ethical Order* (Lovin & Reynolds, Eds., 1984: 8):

"The comparative study of cosmogony must, then, be broadly construed as a study of the ways in which cultures relate their basic notions of the origins of the reality in which they live their lives to the patterns of action that they consider to be dependable and worthy of choice."(1984: 8)

"An account of how things began is... an indication of a tradition's most general ideas about reality... It is in the many ways that conceptions of world order and human action are correlated that we find some of the most interesting expressions of moral and religious rationality."(1984: 18-19)

Although I do not analyse ritual as an expression of myth, I perceived, nevertheless, a strong correlation between mythology and ritual song while working on the rite of passage which will be described in the following chapter. Not only do mythological themes return in elliptic form at several points during the transcription of ritual songs, but also the whole sequence of initiation is perceived as a re-enactment of the story of the origin of humanity. The metaphorical death and rebirth of the initiate during the rite of passage parallels the story of the recreation of humanity by the primordial mother *Nete*.

The creation of humanity, on the other hand, is coexistent with the creation of the world. It is only after the event of defining differences between heaven and earth and humans and animals, with the accompanying ordered rhythm of the alternation of

night and day, that humanity itself became possible. In other words, it was with the advent of mortality, one of humanity's most defining features, that the separation between heaven and earth became a fact, and it was only after the theft of the sun that cosmic time became ordered with the rhythmic alternation of day and night. Because the heavenly bodies and the forces that regulate the weather belong to this theme of the ordering of cosmic space, their myths of origin are also included in this section.

The sketch of this cosmogonic scene is, however, not more than a preparation for the analysis of the myth of *Nete*, creator of the first 'real' humans. I selected the myth of *Nete*, along with the myth of the preceding great deluge as centre of reflection because of its clarifying relation to the rite of passage. The other myths related below have been chosen because of their cosmogonic character: these are myths about the origin of things. They have therefore a conceptual importance in the sense that they explain why things are as they are. They illustrate a cosmology that stipulates a profound interrelation of the earth with the sky and water worlds, as well as a consciousness of the permanent possibility of an inversion of positions. Cashinahua mythology is rich and could be analysed from a multiplicity of points of view. The selection I made has limited itself to myths that can be said to be cosmogonical, that is, myths about the origin of fundamental cosmic and earthly distinctions such as the origin of day and night, of mortality, of the heavenly bodies, of culture and of the different species of animals that inhabit the world, and finally the myth of the origin of the *huni kuin*, the "proper humans".

3.1. The origin of death and the separation of heaven and earth

“It is worth calling attention to two features of the sky: its association with skin and the ambivalent nature of the life it contains. Heaven is the place of changing skin. This is not an accident. Skin is the container of space. It conforms to any shape and has no inherent form of its own. Radiant skin betrays the character of the being contained by it.”

Sullivan, L. 1988: 120.

I chose this quote from Sullivan to start the introductory section on myth because of the importance of bodies and ‘skin’ in Cashinahua onto- and cosmogenesis. As we saw and will see in more detail in the following chapter, the marking, painting and hiding of the skin communicates the state of being of a body to other beings. A healthy, sociable body will thus be differentiated from bodies going through phases of transition and vulnerability (or illness)⁹².

That the quality of the skin, the outer appearance of the body, communicates about what is inside, holds for human and animal bodies as well as for heavenly bodies. This is why colour, design, and bodily decoration are so important in Cashinahua perception and cognition. The presence or absence of design on a perceived being’s skin, its colour, and its radiance (*dua*) or iridescence (*txaxa*) all communicate. A smooth and perfumed skin, rubbed with achiote and decorated with black genipa designs is beautiful (*hawendua*) and has *dua* (radiance, health and grace, charm). It communicates sociality and fertility, a willingness to engage with others and to show oneself.

A skin dyed with black, on the other hand, communicates a process of recovery from illness, birth or other moments of transition (such as mourning), and signals the possibility of only partial sociability, while a body painted red but without design mimics the colour of the blood to which it has been exposed, a situation that provokes

⁹² See Vidal (1992) for a detailed analysis of the elaborate and detailed code used by the Kayapó-Xikrin to mark a variety of positions in the sequence of social states, ritual processes and different positions in relation to the central event (birth, death, etc.).

a total avoidance of sociality. Therefore both the bodies of a recently born child and that of a girl menstruating for the first time are dyed in red achiote paint during a seclusion that lasts four or five days, the time needed for the blood to dry up (in the case of the baby, the time for the navel to dry up). Once they are allowed to leave their secluded place, they are dyed black (nowadays only babies and not young girls are dyed black when they leave seclusion).

As much as differences in states of being, the difference between kinds of beings can also be signalled by the appearance of the skin. Thus, while human bodies are opaque and coloured, the characteristics of transparency, lack of colour and changeability of colour will mark the body or absence of a body of the *yuxin*. When seen in the light of a full moon (*uxe badi*, 'sun moon') the *yuxin* are said to be white, whereas when seen on a dark night, *yuxin* are said to be black (Capistrano, 1941: 156). Irridescent (*txaxa*) skins, said by the Cashinahua to look like a body covered in fireflies, can also signal the presence of a *yuxin* body.

The most radiant of all skins belong to the heavenly bodies who are considered to be humans (mythical ancestors) in their own sky worlds. There are myths of origin for three sorts of heavenly bodies, the moon, the morning star and the seven stars. Most stars seen in the sky are said to be humanlike inhabitants of the sky or "eyes" (*bedu yuxin*: eye *yuxin*) living in the sky world, the exception being some specific patterns which depict sky animals. *Kana*, the God of thunder and lightning, is also an anthropomorphic being, the *xanen ibu* (leader) of a village inhabited by a certain kind of sky people (*nai nawa*) reputed to be wild, angry and red-haired beings (*sinatabu*)⁹³.

⁹³ One of the sections originated by the four alternating name-giving groups is called *kanabu*, people of the thunder. The name-giving section belonging to the same name-giving generation but to the opposite moiety is *dumubu*, people of the snake. The latter belong to the *dua/bamu* moiety (linked to *Yube*), while the former belong to the *imu/inani* moiety (linked to the jaguar and the *Inka*). In the other generation of name-giving groups we find the *awabu*, people of the tapir, on the *imu/inani* side, and the *yawabu*, people of the peccary, on the *dua/bamu* side. The Cashinahua also called my attention to another phenomenon, not explicitly linked to section names, but definitely to the character of *Kana*. These were the red-haired and light-skinned children, a few of which could be found in each village. One would be inclined to attribute this phenomenon to mixed marriages with white men, and nobody would deny the fact that this has happened in the past and still occasionally happens today (although not in the villages where I lived). The fact, however, is that children with reddish hair are also born in apparently unmixed

Kana himself is a bald, red-faced giant who passes his time drinking corn soup and shouting. His belches are said to be thunder, his arrows lightning.

One myth of the origin of humans on earth is a myth linked to *Kana*, lightning. After the sky fell on the earth and killed all living beings, the sky became earth and the earth sky. With this inversion of positions, what used to be human now became *yuxin* who live in the sky as they did before on earth (Agosto Feitosa, song leader). But the earth became empty and the sky full of people. One day it was raining in the sky world and lightning (*kana's* arrow) hit, killing a pregnant woman who fell through the heavenly layer onto the earth. The crab *xaka* found her dead body, cut it open and raised the twins that were alive inside her. These twins were a girl and a boy and their crab parents made them marry. From their descendants a new humanity was born. (This version can be found in Capistrano de Abreu, 1941: 482). In this myth we can see the two basic cosmogonic principles at work: the seed of life is planted on earth by the fertilising power of light (the lightning), and it is reared by the nurturing river and one of its inhabitants, the crab (one of the animals which has the knowledge of changing skin, the power of transformation).

There is, however, another version of this myth (of which I collected several versions) where it is an earthly woman who is killed by *Kana*, the God of lightning, to be abducted to live with him in the sky world. Her son survives, saved again by the crab *xaka* who brings him up on fruits alone. One day he is seen by an uncle of his, the brother of his mother, who manages to capture him by approaching him, hidden under foam produced by the river. But the child is inconsolable (some versions say this started with the loss of his mother, others that it is a consequence of his not adapting to the lifestyle of his new adoptive family, used as he was to crab food). His crying makes the rivers swell and threaten to overflow (the child, produced by the crossing of

households. To the question whether these children were *nawan bake* (children of strangers), I received a vehement negation with the explanation that these were *kana bake*, children of lightning, but that in no way were they children of strangers. If we consider the Cashinahua logic of kinship, we can easily understand why this characterisation of hair-colour as a sign of strangeness is strongly denied. Conception, upbringing, inclusion and belonging are what make kin, not the colour of one's hair. Kinship and otherness are processual concepts, not closed categories.

thunder, lightning and water is a *yuxian* (being with transformational powers)).

Eventually he is consoled with the right (crab) food or by becoming accustomed to life without his real mother and the dangerous crying with the consequent swelling of the rivers stops. But once the boy is tall and strong enough, he takes off to the sky to avenge his mother. When the giant, his mother's husband, arrives, the boy transforms himself into a bat and kills *Kana* by means of a razor-sharp piece of bamboo and a line (made from his mother's cotton thread), thrown into the giant's corn soup. *Kana's* gluttony is responsible for his indifference to the little piece of dirt he saw when he picked up his cup to drain it in one go. The son tries to convince his mother to follow him back to the earth, but as she has become used to her new life, she refuses and stays behind with her small baby who, once tall enough, will become the new *Kana*, a producer of thunder and lightning.

The sun, in contrast to most other heavenly bodies, is not considered to have either human or *yuxibu* agency. Rather, the sun is understood to be the *Inka* cannibal God's fire, a primordial power, the source of light and heat, which is necessary for life on earth. Rain, on the other hand, belongs, as we saw, to the domain of *Yube*, the cosmic snake (whose phenomenological manifestations in the sky are the rainbow and the moon). Only women can sing to *Yube* to stop the rain, not men. In this way, we can see how in the sky world, notwithstanding the many characters that inhabit it, the same two elementary, male and female principles are at work, as those which on earth govern day and night, cold and heat, the appearance of sun and the falling of rain.

The myths of origin of the moon and of the morning star tell of the events that forced these two ancestral heroes to part from their earthly kin because of their isolation and shame following the discovery of their incestuous behaviour.

The myth of the morning star (*Pena Bixi*) is that of a father who systematically invites his daughter to accompany him to the edges of the forest where he goes to do his necessities, while his daughter follows him with a basin and a corn cob for his toilet. This suspicious daily ritual catches the attention of his son-in-law who decides to follow them. When he discovers the incestuous relations between father and daughter, he goes back to the village and makes their secret public. The father is abandoned by his kinsmen and stays behind, alone with his daughter.

After living in total isolation for a long time, father and daughter are invited to attend the *Nixpupima* rite of passage in a nearby village. The father adorns himself with macaw feathers in the nostrils, necklaces, earrings, and a magnificent blue headdress. The father's efforts in beautifying himself are strongly stressed by the story teller. On their way to the village where the celebration is taking place, one of his earrings made of the shell of a river conch falls to the ground and his daughter, walking behind him, steps on it on purpose, thus shattering it into pieces. This act might be understood as a silent revolt of the daughter against the excessive sociality of her father, expressed through his ornaments and the importance given to his appearance. This accident provokes a profound sadness in the father, but he continues on his way to the host village. When they arrive in the village, the father perceives that, notwithstanding his beautiful outfit, no one pays any attention to him. Tired of this ostracism and sad because of what his daughter has done to him, the incestuous father decides to leave the living and to become the lonely morning star, always visible in the sky not far from the moon.

The myth of the moon tells the story of a secret lover who used to visit the hammock of his chosen one in the darkness of the night to make love to her without ever revealing his identity. The woman, curious to discover the identity of her secret visitor, decided to stain his face with black genipa paint, so strong that it could not be washed off. The morning afterwards, the man was unable to clean his face. Ashamed to appear at the shared morning meal in the house of the head of the village, he tried to hide his face, but his sister found him out and was astonished by what she saw.

Yube, the incestuous brother, then invited his brother-in-law to join him on a war expedition against the enemies called the *Bunkenawa* (dwarf people). This was a way to escape the gaze of people in the village. The enemies killed *Yube* and fixed his head on a pole as a trophy. Disguised as *yuxin* (covered in fireflies) the brother-in-law succeeded in scaring off the enemies, and recovered the injured head with the intention of burying it. The head, however, refused to remain silent. It was alive and followed its frightened companion the whole way home, crying out that it was thirsty. But no water was ever enough to satisfy a head without a body and, once home, there was no place for it inside the house of the living.

Eventually, tired from crying and imploring his kin who would not let him in, the head decided to become the moon. In this way, his kin would be able to see him and would never be able to forget him. That was also the promise he made his sisters make, that they would remember him every month as they saw the new moon surging from the darkness. And he warned them too that if they should forget, he would make them menstruate. He would come back to them that night, in the form of a macaw feather and make love to them⁹⁴. The night following this new moon they would lose blood.

His mother gave him coloured cotton threads which he threw into the sky until they caught a beam supporting the sky. To get hold of the threads, *Yube* used his teeth and thus climbed into the sky. These coloured threads became the rainbow also called the 'path of the enemies' (*nawan bai*), a path followed by the dead souls (*yuxin*) on their way to heaven. Some versions of the myth (Agostinho from the Jordão river; Capistrano, 1941: 457) say that the rainbow is the blood that dripped from *Yube*'s head while climbing into the sky and that the stars are his eyes. The versions I collected on the Purus river, however, link the origin of the rainbow to the coloured cotton threads used for weaving.

Instead of being contradictory or conflicting, these variations of the same myth reinforce each other's meaning. The cotton threads stand for blood, for female fertility and the quality to contain, the capacity to weave containers and bodies. The blood that drips from *Yube*'s head is female blood, the blood he received from his mother when he was a foetus, as well as the blood he lost during war because of his sister. Thus the blood loss is twice female, in origin and cause. This blood traces a path, the rainbow, the "path of goodbye" followed by the *yuxin* of the dead. A head without a body is eternally thirsty because it cannot be satisfied, this is the condition of the dead *yuxin* who has no place on earth any more.

The journey up into the sky represents the gradual loss of the affective links that

⁹⁴ The scarlet macaw feather used by the moon to make love to women registered by both myself and Capistrano (1941: 457) for the Cashinahua, and by Townsley (1988, 1993) among the Yaminahua.

pass through the blood, the links of *Yube's* first and pristine love for mother and sisters, the love of his kin with whom he shared food and memories, blood and attachment. Edivaldo (head of the village of Moema) says about the rainbow, path of the dead and image of transition between separated worlds: "People say it sucks up the water until there is no water left". When there is no liquid left to stick to the *yuxin* on its way up to the sky world, the 'soul' is detached from all affections and memories that caused it to feel homesick (*manuaiti*).

This is an important myth in Cashinahua cosmology. The myth links death to fertility and fertility to the cyclical waxing and waning of the moon. It is a myth that associates one's death and the blood lost in war to the fertility of one's sisters. The theme of incest speaks of the necessity of breaking the bond of initial non-differentiation in order for fertility and reproduction to become possible. This necessity is phrased in terms of a curse uttered by a rejected brother and son. Just as these first women in his life made him bleed and suffer, and did not let him come back home, so they themselves would be condemned to bleed periodically as he did, and they would do so with the same regularity as that with which he would reappear in the sky. Their forgetfulness, however was as necessary as was his curse which was strange enough also a blessing, a gift, since no conception is considered to be possible without bleeding, and no bleeding without penetration.

The waxing and waning of the moon in the sky is equivalent to a change of skin, a metaphorical death of the same order as the changing of clothes in ritual language. This logic is made explicit in the funeral, where a ritual song is directed to the dead soul to encourage him to put on the 'yellow clothes of the *Inka*' (*Inkan tadi sauwe, paxin tadi sauwe*). This means that he has to become *Inka* himself, assuming the body of an *Inka*. Similarly, in an *ayahuasca* song, the listener is told to put on 'vine clothes' (*nixi pae tadi*), the clothes of a peccary (*yawa tadi*) and those of a squirrel (*paka tadi*). In the visionary experience, the person is temporarily transformed into a peccary or a squirrel, all the while he is 'wearing their clothes'.

It is this changing of skin that links the moon to the cosmic snake. The snake is one of those paradigmatic animals that changes skin and is therefore thought to possess eternal life. The eternal renewal and regeneration of skin is the eschatological image

used by the Cashinahua to visualise eternal life and youth. This theme will be addressed in the myth of the origin of death and of the separation of heaven and earth.

Women are also thought to change their skin, although it is an internal skin that is changed. It is their monthly blood loss and renewal of the inner cloth that enables them to give life to new bodies. In this way we can envisage a similar process to those described above where an appearance, cloth or body has to 'die' for another to be born (this interpretation becomes especially clear in the case of the placenta and its disposal: the placenta is considered to be the 'old cloth' of the child and needs to be buried and sacrificed for the child and the mother to live).

The outer skin of humans, however, can never be changed and this is the cause of ageing. While heavenly beings have grey, white hair ('to become grey' is *dua-i*; *dua-i* also means 'to become radiant'), their skin is young and white. This shiny appearance is enhanced by the delicate network of fine black designs that cover their body. To human eyes, they appear as twinkling stars on the firmament. Thus, in *ayahuasca* songs, stars are described as '*bixi bedu keneya*', 'stars, eyes, decorated with design'. This crucial difference of body, or rather of skin, between heavenly beings and ageing people's skin is the central theme of the myth of the origin of death.

Before they were definitively separated, there was a coming and going between earth and heaven, and therefore also between life and death. People could move back and forth; and further they could become renewed by exchanging their old skin for a new one. This capacity was lost when the old ancestor Pukã died. Pukã had become tired of his old skin and wanted to die. He asked his son to kill him⁹⁵. The son gave him a poisonous toad to eat and so he died. When he was going up into the sky, he

⁹⁵ In Capistrano's version (1941: 486-498) it is the old man's son, Manã, who asks the old grey-haired man, "Father, when do you die?" His father answered, "You want me to die? If so, do you want to kill me? I cannot die just like that. You will have to give me some poison to eat, if you want me to die." The son went to find toad poison and gave it to his father to eat. The story ends with the statement "Before this happened (the misunderstanding of the old father's warning that they should always change their skin), when we died we would always come back here young and renewed." (1941: 487) And further on, finishing another version of the same myth (where it is a woman who warns the others as well as it being a woman who hears the wrong words): "We, however, do not change our skin and our bodies grow tired with their old skins. We cannot live like that any more. That's why we die." (1941: 498)

cried to his children “*Xuku xukuwe!*”, “Change your skin! Change your skin!”

“From the sky they heard a terrible thunder. The rain was falling heavily and they could not make out his voice. The snake, the cockroach, the worm, the scorpion, the *mulateiro* tree and two kinds of river crabs (*xaka, xai*), they all understood. The shrimp too understood the message. They heard his calling “*xuku xukuwe!*”. So they change their skin and do not die. They always have new skin. But us, we die because *txitxisapa* (a huge cockroach) fooled them (our ancestors). ‘*Keyu! keyu!*’, he said. He said Pukã was calling “Finish!, finish!” And thus the people started to die. They wanted to beat him, but he was afraid and hid under a piece of wood. They beat and hit him. They were angry. In this way he became very flat. The lizard *nixeke* too, the snake and the cricket, they change their skin, but we do not.”(Antonio Pinheiro)

In this way, the humans lost their capacity to return, rejuvenated, to the world of the living after dead. When people did not ‘die’ (in the sense of ‘finish’), their visits to heavenly worlds did not need to be definitive, one world and the other were conceived of as different villages with distances easily bridged. “In old times”, Augusto told me, “the sky was not high. We could see the inhabitants of the sky just as they still see us today.” Antonio Pinheiro explained to me that this capacity for global vision was due to the fact that humans did not have high foreheads at that time (an explanation also registered by Capistrano, 1941: 432). Nowadays, what hinders our vision of the other world, says Antonio, is the fact that our eyes are not situated on top of our head but under the eyebrows, and when we turn our eyes upward (without moving the head), we see nothing but darkness.

In that earlier time, people were giants (*nawa* “very big”) and after one of them hit his head against the bottom of the upper level, he cursed the proximity of the sky world and sent the people and their land (the village with surrounding gardens) high up into the sky. They ascended a bit and asked him “Is this high enough?”. “No!”, he answered, “higher!”. And thus it went until he could neither hear nor see them any more. Thus again, an apparently contingent but all-too-human event caused an irrevocable separation and reordering of the cosmos.

In mythic times, I was told by Milton Maia, the *ayahuasca* specialist in the village of Nova Aliança, that people knew a special kind of *ayahuasca* vine called *xanka huni*, the vine of lightness which enabled them to ascend into the sky, following the example and path traced for them by the sky people when they decided to go and

live far away from the earth.

“Well, this is the way our ancestors did it. They wanted to ascend into the sky⁹⁶ (the whole village all at once, taking their house and gardens with them). So they decided to take *xanka huni*, the vine of lightness. They went to get the vine and beat it into pieces to boil it. When the vine was cooking, they took it from the fire to let it cool down. Then, when the *xanka huni* was cold, they drank the brew. (They also sprinkled the brew along the edges of their gardens so as to assure that the whole piece of land would levitate with them in their ascension). When they had finished it all, the drunkenness began to manifest itself by means of trembling. With the first signs of the arrival of the effects of the brew, they sent one of them off to inform the other village.

“Go and tell them. Run. Take the main path, and hurry back!”, people told him. “Go and let them know that we took the vine of lightness. Tell them we are already seeing “those things you see when it is beginning to arrive” (*betsa betsá watanikiki*). Tell them the brew has already begun to take effect. Quickly! Run! Go quickly!”, they told him.

The messenger went, but he did not want to tell anybody. Instead, he hid himself at the edges of the village to try to make love to the women of the other village. Hidden, he called to any woman passing by, “Come here, beautiful woman. Come!”

“Where is he?” his people asked, “When are they going to arrive? (The earth) is already trembling. What if they do not come? Maybe they just won’t come, so let us ascend. We are going up already.”

And thus they went shouting, “*Hi! Hi! Hi! Hi!*”, and trumpeting (with a trumpet made of clay), “*Pudi! Pudi! Pudi!*” They trumpeted on the armadillo’s tail, “*Txã! Txã! Txã!*”, and drummed on the wooden maize grinder, “*Tinki! Tinki!*” In so doing, they made a lot of noise and the people of the other village started to notice something strange. They stopped to listen and wondered “What is happening to our kinsmen? Let’s go and see what they are doing. Let’s go and see why they are making all this *purin purin* noise for.” They were running, advancing rapidly on the path. “We are going to have a look at the other village making so much noise”.

From the other side of the same path, they saw *duxau*⁹⁷ arriving, the man who had been sent to inform them. But this man did not tell anyone anything, all he wanted was to make love to the women. When he heard the sounds of crying, *Sai! Sai!*, and of trumpeting, “*Purin! Purin!*”, he left his hiding place and came running in the direction of the villagers, who were running in the opposite direction.

“Why are our kin making all this *purin purin* noise?”, they asked him. “What is happening?”, they asked. “Nothing is happening”, he answered, “they took the vine of lightness and are already seeing ‘those things you see when it is beginning to arrive’.

⁹⁶ I have inserted clarifying comments in parentheses which were given to me by Milton outside the context of this concise narration which he made me write down word by word in Cashinahua, so that he could translate it afterwards with me.

⁹⁷ *Duxau* is the name of the bird into which the man would be transformed later, when trying to follow his people (omitted by the storyteller in this version).

“Tell our kin so that they can come with us!”, they said. And so I have come. They are already making a lot of noise. They are going.”

“Why did you come so late? Why didn’t you come immediately?”, they asked. “I was already on my way”, he answered. “Let’s go! They have taken the vine of lightness, they are already ascending. Let’s go with them!” And thus they went, running along the path to the other village. When they saw them, they were already levitating, up as far as this (the narrator shows the level with his arm above his head). By the time they arrived at their village, they had already ascended much higher. Seeing them, they cried “Take me with you!” (reaching out their arms).

“We sent a man to tell you. Why didn’t you come straight away?!” they answered (from the levitating platform). “Take me with you! Take me with you! Don’t leave me behind!” he (the messenger) cried. “Come on then!” they said. But (the platform) was too high, he could not touch the edge with his hand. And thus they went higher and higher, shouting “*Sai Sai*”, trumpeting “*Purin Purin*” and blowing on the armadillo tail “*Tsãtsã*”. Ascending in this way, they left the earth. Until here go my words.”

This myth is a statement of the mediating nature of the *ayahuasca* brew. *Ayahuasca* is a means of transport and of transformation, a means of reconnecting with the invisible layers of the cosmos, as well as a way of experiencing through imaginary experience the world and stories told in myth. “If you want to learn about the world of the ancestors”, Osmani from the village Moema told me, “you have to remember an ancestor’s story (*miyui*) before you drink the brew. If you focus well on the story, the story and its beings will appear to you in vision and you will understand the meaning this story has for your own life and experience. You will feel the story, you will live it”.

One of the myths visualised in *ayahuasca* sessions is the myth of origin of the brew. Initiates in the art of the vision quest starts with the myth of origin of the brew. Shortly stated, this myth goes as follows. The human ancestor called *Yube* enters the water world of his affines, the snakes, to marry the beautifully painted snake/woman whose vision seduced him. The myth recounts his initiation into the taking of *ayahuasca*, as well as his failure to resist the fear induced by the visions. He cries out “The snakes want to swallow me!”, thus offending his snake affines, the owners of the brew. The next morning he escapes the village because his affines are planning to avenge the insult. A year later, during a flood, the hero steps into a small river, where he is captured and wounded by his angry affines. His human kin save him and before

he dies, he transmits the knowledge of the preparing the brew and its songs to his people. Four different types and specialities of vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) sprout from his buried body (from his legs and arms), while the *kawa* leaves (*Psychotria viridis*) grow from his eyes.

The initiate, when meditating on this myth while under the influence of the brew, lives the same primordial conflict of affinity and strangeness (in a world where he does not know the rules and habits) as that originally experienced by the cultural hero, an adventure that gives knowledge and power but which also involves the symbolic death of being caught and broken by the grip of the anacondas.

But let us come back to the image of the sky as seen by a person in a 'normal', waking state of being. The images seen in the sky evoke a mirror relation between the sky world and the earth, one similar to that between the earth and the water world. When one looks in a lake, one sees an inverted world reflected, whereas when looking at the sky, one sees only signs. The inverted image of their world reflected in ours, however, is seen by the sky people, who are said to have a clear vision of what happens on earth.

In August, dry season in the Amazon, specific constellations appear in the sky. These constellations are not understood to be a community of sky people (*nai nawa*), but they is to be the tracks of the sky animals. When the sky turtle (*nexun*) leaves the heavenly forest to put her eggs on the heavenly riverside, people can see her footprints, her path (*bai*) in the sky, as well as the eggs she dropped. After her appearance in the sky, rain is expected to fall the next day and the earthly turtles are supposed to follow the sky turtle's example. On clear summer nights, the footprints of the heavenly tapirs can also be seen. The heavenly tapir is said to walk to a saltlick to satisfy his hunger (Sebastiana Sampaio, village of Nova Aliança).

The signs seen in the sky are said to foretell (*duai*) events on earth. While forest animals predict through cries and sounds, the sky predicts through images. The most meaningful predictions are those related to an impending death. Dreams too presage events. Thus a dream of a harpy eagle flying by is a bad omen. The harpy eagle is the messenger of the *Inka* (the Divinity of death) and if the dreamer tries to shoot the bird in his dream, he is actually trying to kill his own eye soul (*bedu yuxin*) or that of a

close relative. This dream was told to me by Antonio Pinheiro, who heard the cry of the same bird the next morning. He stood up, saw the bird flying by, and remembered his dream. In his dream he tried to shoot the bird but missed. Missing the target saved him and he explained why. If he really had shot and killed the harpy eagle, he would have killed his own or one of his close relatives' eye *yuxin* and would thus have caused them (or himself) to die in the near future.

The bad omen of stars is a silent one. When a person looks in a bright sky full of twinkling stars, he can be unlucky enough to see a perfectly closed circle of stars, the seven stars. If this happens, what he has seen is the village of the *yuxibu*. On one clear summer night, I was pointing at the stars and asked Sebastiana what they were. She turned my face away and answered "*Bixi bedi bedi duai*" ("the twinkling of the stars predicts"). "When one sees many, many stars together, one can see them make a circle, this is a sign you will die".

The last of myths related to the constellation of stars refers to this circle of 'seven stars', the Pleiades. In contrast to the first two heavenly bodies, the moon and the morning star, whose myths we have mentioned previously, and who live a lonely life in the sky as a result of the transgression they committed and the subsequent ostracism they suffered during their lives on earth, the seven stars live in group and leave their community on earth not because of transgression committed by themselves but by their close kin. The myth of this group of seven stars shows the heavenly origin of cultivated plants. In the last chapter on the rite of passage, the association of cultivated plants with the sky world will become even more evident.

The first myth of the origin of the seven stars goes as follows. The women had collectively resolved to hide their knowledge of cultivated plants from their husbands and children who were forced to live on meat alone. Yet, one day a little boy secretly followed the women and saw the women gathered in their gardens, all copiously eating from the delicious fruits and vegetables they had cultivated. Because they did not want him to tell anybody in the village, the women decided to take the boy with them, each time they left for the gardens. One day, however, the boy succeeded in secretly taking some vegetables with him to let his friends taste. They, who had all their life been forced to live only on meat, decided to abandon their stingy mothers and to go to live

as far from them as possible: they became the seven stars (Agostinho Manduca of the Jordão river).

This myth shows how, again, social conflict causes the protagonists to leave the village of their kin to become strangers, in this case inhabitants of the sky. Another myth of origin of the seven stars, told by the same Agostinho from the Jordão river, considers these stars to be a heavenly father and his six earthly sons. As we will see below, this myth will again associate the heavenly beings (stars) to the theme of cultivated plants.

A girl used to look at the stars, wishing one of them would descend one day to become her husband. The star listened to her nightly prayers and decided to give in to her desire. The star was a handsome man, but to appear to the girl, he dressed himself in the clothes and skin of an old and ugly man. Thus he went to meet her in her garden. Surprised with the appearance of the stranger, she asked him who he was and he answered he was the star she had been longing for. The young girl refused the man but invited him nevertheless to accompany her to her village.

People received the visitor well and allowed him to stay. The girl's older sister accepted the old man in marriage. At that time people did not know how to cultivate plants. The stranger gave them bananas, manioc and corn, in this way bringing an end to the period of hunger in which humans were forced to eat earth. Every day the old man disappeared into the gardens where he demonstrated his exceptional gift of gardening, which caused all the plants tended by his hands to grow in abundance. His wife and parents-in-law were very happy with him.

Time passed and one day his wife decided to go and look for him, working in the garden. There she saw a handsome man who approached her to make love to her. "No", she answered, "I am here to find my husband". "I am your husband", he answered and showed her his old man's cap and clothes which he had taken off to work. His wife was so pleased with his new appearance that she insisted he should come back with her this way. The star resisted, afraid that his father-in-law would kill him seeing a young man instead of his old industrious son-in-law accompanying his daughter, but she convinced him and he took his cap with him to prove his identity.

The girl who had been longing for a star was surprised when she saw the beautiful appearance of her sister's husband. That night and the next day in the garden, she tried to seduce him, but the handsome man refused her: "You did not want me then, I do not want you now", he said. Not only the sister of the star's wife, but all the women of the village started to fight for this ideal husband and because of their bitter jealousy, life became impossible for the star's wife. For this reason, the star decided to leave this world and go back to his heavenly abode. When he left, he took his six children with him. His wife stayed behind with her family.

So far the myths have related to the heavenly bodies identified by the Cashinahua. As we have seen, all these beings possess the power to change their skin or clothes and it is this capacity that makes them eternal. Because of his heavenly origin, the star man was able to rejuvenate his skin any time he wanted. His *dua* (brilliance, charm) was inexhaustible. The power of eternal beings lies in the circularity of their being. They do not grow nor do they die, they only repeat their circular paths of eternal light without ever failing to appear in the sky at the due moment.

In contrast to their repetitive life in eternity, the origin of each of these bodies lies in an uncommon event that causes them to leave the place of the living. In myth, the death and eternal life of these heroes is always the consequence of a social conflict. Death is a rupture, a treat to or consequence of the lack of social coherence. The origin of death itself is an accident, the consequence of joking, of trickery and of a misunderstanding that caused the humans to unwillingly produce a rupture into a previously interconnected universe of eternal alternation between star bodies and bodies made of flesh and bones, thus putting an end to a time in which it was easy to change one's skin.

3.2. The origin of Time and the theft of the sun

“The science of the snake is transferred by the sun.”
Agostinho from the Jordão river.

At this point, we go one step back in our sketch of Cashinahua cosmogenesis. Back to the time prior to the separation of the cosmos into the separate layers of heaven and earth, as described above, and of earth and the water world, as will be described below. At that time, the world was considered to be one. At this stage, what needed to be organised was horizontal not vertical space. The myth of the origin of time deals with the origin of the systematic, rhythmic alternation between day and night, light and darkness, which is a crucial organisational principle for the Cashinahua, as we have seen in the chapters on the conceptual framework that organises Cashinahua perception and cognition.

In myth, this phenomenon is linked, from the start, to the theme of changes in the weather. This is the reason why the myth of the origin of time will be followed by the myth of the theft of the sun, a myth that explains the appearing and disappearing of the sun behind the clouds. Both themes, that of day and night, and that of the darkening and revealing of the sun, are linked to the theme of the darkening of the eyes of humans by invisible forces. Thus, although the rhythmic alternation of day and night was fixed in the cosmogonic event that establishes the origin of time, the relation between darkness and light remains susceptible to the vicissitudes of *yuxibu* agency. As we have seen in the preceding pages, the *yuxibu* forces can only attack human bodies after ‘suddenly transforming day into night before the eyes of their victim’.

Finally, the theme of the sun will be associated, not only with light, but also with heat. The sun is the fire of the inhabitants of the sky. They need it to warm their cold bodies. Thus the association of the cosmogonic myth about the theft of the sun with the myth on the theft of cooking fire that marks the origin of humanity, becomes justified. That is the reason why this myth will be included in this section. Let us therefore start with the myth of the ordering of time, that goes as follows.

All beings lived at the base of the sky, each group or house guarding its own hole (Capistrano, 1941: 436). The qualities that constitute the basic rhythm of life on

earth, in the sky and in the water world, existed in these separate holes guarded by the primordial beings and there was no ordered rhythm in the use their owners made of their qualities. Thus there was the hole in which heat was hidden, and another that housed the quality of cold, another hole contained dawn, while a fourth one sheltered the night.

“There was no sun, no cold and no darkness, and all people lived well. One group lived in a house close to the hole of dawn, another close to that of darkness, another lived close to the hole of the sun and still another to that of coldness. (These holes were always kept closed). When they were angry, however, one person could open the cave of coldness, while the next could take revenge by opening that of the sun, the other in turn would open the cave of the night (and the day would be immediately transformed in night), the people of the fourth house in turn that of dawn.” (Capistrano, 1941: 436-437)⁹⁸

In short, the vicissitudes of social misunderstanding determined the weather and the rhythm of day and night. The story goes on to tell how a shaman (*mukaya*) found the cave of night and decided to surprise all the people in their daily work with the sudden darkening of the sky, forcing them to spend the night where they were: if they were swimming in the river trying to catch fish, they had to try to reach the shore in total darkness, if walking at the fringes of the forest carrying water, they had to stop half-way, if they were defecating or urinating, they stayed where they were, in the bush.

Because of the chaos caused by the *mukaya* who opened the cave of the night, the owner of darkness called a meeting with the owners of the other qualities. They agreed to introduce a regular rhythm of light and darkness, heat and coolness and thus order was brought into the world. Once their rhythmic alternation was put in motion, their effects too merged, because before, when each one was kept separate at the base of the sky, darkness meant total invisibility, sunlight meant blinding white, heat would burn you and cold would freeze you to stone. The myth ends with the phrase: “If they had not done this, we would sleep under the sun in zenith”. (Capistrano, 1941: 441)

This myth of the four qualities of cosmic being and their ordering or social

⁹⁸ I edited Capistrano's text, because a literal translation of the original would make the text unintelligible.

control through democratic agreement and co-ordination recalls the logic of the origin of humankind in the form of independent entities (name-giving sections) surging from the ground or from cavities, each one at a different place. Social life then originated from the joining of these originally independent (*nawa*) groups. A myth of origin of this kind is found among the Marubo (Melatti, 1977).

The sudden and unexpected darkening of the world before one's eyes is a theme that returns in other myths, not related to cosmogony, but to the powers of the world of the unseen. The wanderer's vulnerability to the unknown forces (*yuxin*) of the forest is expressed by the fear of being overwhelmed by darkness. It is one of the ways in which one can lose direction and thus cross the limits of the known world. Once one strays from known paths, danger is everywhere. The unexplored forest is the reign of *yuxin* and *yuxibu*, but so is the night. The Cashinahua are reluctant to go out hunting during the night.

As we saw earlier, some *yuxibu*, like those who inhabit the huge lupuna tree (*xunu*), are said to have the power of transforming day into the night. Thus one of the feats of the great mythic tobacco shaman, *Dume kuin Teneni*, was to kill the lupuna monster *Nibu baka piana* who used to cause the sudden darkening of the sun before the eyes of people passing under its tree, forcing them to sleep where they were. When they were asleep, he would come down from his tree, kill them with a club and eat them. In this way he obstructed the way between villages, making mutual visiting between relatives impossible.

His wife took a vessel with a flame hidden underneath with her. When they passed the lupuna tree, they were overcome by darkness, and were forced to spend the night under the tree. The hairy monster, under the illusion that they were sleeping, came down from the tree with his club. When he came close to *Dume kuin's* wife, she unveiled the flame. So being able to see and seize the monster, *Dume kuin* hit him on the head, killing him.

Another myth deals with the same theme of the conquering by humans of the forces of darkness. The magical twins, *Iyo* and *Ipi*, are born from the swollen knees of their father, who had been stung by a swarm of bees. The twins grow quickly, like any *yuxibu* child, and start to wander in the forest (characteristic of *yuxin* and *yuxibu*

beings), until they arrive at a lupuna tree. As soon as they come close, the sun disappears.

“They decide to cut the tree to have light, but don’t have a machete. One of them, *Ipi*, clothes himself with green palm leaves and goes to observe the agouti who is working in its garden. The agouti notices the green body coming closer and calls: “Hey there! Who are you?” He does not answer. “Don’t you have a tongue?”, but no answer. “If you do not know how to speak I will cut your tongue!” And *Ipi* answers, “If you want to cut my tongue, come closer!” He is looking the machete, tied to the agouti’s leg. The agouti comes closer and he takes the machete. “Don’t do this to me!”, cries the agouti, “This machete is my life, I need it to prepare my garden.” But *Ipi* runs away with his loot.

First of all *Ipi* starts cutting. He cuts, but each time the tree grows again, closing the cut. “How can this be?”, he asks. “It is looks as if I didn’t cut, it always grows again?!” “Well then, let me cut”, answers *Iyô*, “You don’t know how to cut. Maybe with me it works.” *Iyô* cut the tree and it did not close any more. He cut and cut until only a small part in the middle was left, but the lupuna did not fall. They looked up and noticed a giant sloth holding one of its branches with one claw and the sky with another. To get rid of the sloth, they asked the the help of the squirrel, who climbed up the tree and threw a handful of stinging ants at the sloth’s eyes. The sloth, in pain, let go off the sky to rub its eyes and the lupuna started to fall. The squirrel jumped, but the lupuna still touched his tail, that’s why the squirrel’s tail stands up. The tree fell and the sun reappeared” (Agostinho Manduca)⁹⁹

What is of interest here is the relation between the ordering principle of day and night with the phenomenon of the darkening of the eyes of humans passing the lupuna tree. To capture humans, the *yuxibu* of big trees cause dizziness (*nixun*) in people who pass or touch the trees without precaution. Heavy dizziness causes headache, and strong headaches can eventually cause the victims to faint. The processes of fainting and of dying are expressed by the same word, *mawa*.

By juxtaposing the myths of the lupuna tree with those of the origin of day and night, we can trace a parallel between the fates of particular humans, the heroes of the

⁹⁹ The similarities between this myth and myths about the lupuna tree collected among the Yagua (Chaumeil, 1983: 155) and the Embera (Isacson, 1993: 57) are striking. In the case both of the Jivaro and of the Embera, however, what was lacking was not sunlight, but water. The magical twins cut the tree, but the cavity they cut closes during the night. When they finally succeed, there is also the sloth holding the sky with one hand and the tree with the other, impeding the tree from falling. In both cases, stinging ants are used to make him let go of the branch, as in the myth quoted above. When the lupuna, tree of life, finally falls, its branches turn into rivers.

myth, and that of humanity as a whole. The sudden darkening of the sky, caused by the opening of the cave of darkness or by *yuxibu* dizziness have the same result. The victim is seized by an unexpected darkness that provokes a shift of realities and leaves him totally open to the intervention of *yuxin* who inhabit the world of darkness.

The only protection against these forces is the control of the source of light: the tobacco shaman, *Dume kuin*, and his wife defeat the monster by lighting their candle. Similarly, humans today acquire control through their ability to see the enemy. Thus, during the night, humans protect themselves and ward off images and phantoms by lighting a fire. *Yuxibu* and *yuxin*, for their part, flee as soon as they see the light. Thus when shamans (*mukaya*) of the old days called *yuxin* into their houses to talk during the night, their wives controlled the situation by lighting a fire when people judged that it was time for the *yuxin* to leave.

The relation between light and darkness also guides the *ayahuasca* ritual. The Cashinahua place much emphasis on the rule that one should never light a fire once the session has started. "If you do", I was repeatedly told, "the *ayahuasca* snake comes to bite you." When people are dreaming or having visions, they see with their eye *yuxin* and not through the eyes. The Cashinahua say the eye *yuxin* is travelling. An abrupt interruption of this process by waking a person or by producing light, can provoke 'soul' loss. The eye *yuxin* loses its way back to the body. Where exactly the eye *yuxin* goes, however, is not clear. Some songs suggest it is inside the belly itself that the *yuxin* visualises the cosmic worlds of *yuxibu*¹⁰⁰, others say the eye *yuxin* leaves the body, following the pathway traced by the hammock he is lying in.

The fact is that the confusion between the two ideally separated realms of day

¹⁰⁰ This journey inside the body reminds us of the Cuna shaman who goes to fight the 'mother of pregnancy', *Muu*, inside the body of his patient (Lévi-Strauss (1958)), as well as the Emberá descriptions of shamanic journeys into the 'cosmic body' (Isacsson, 1993). The following *ayahuasca* song, already cited before, illustrates well the same logic of interior journey: "My adopted son, let us warm up the vine, the power of the vine, dry up. New in man's belly... The power clears up like light, my adopted son, the sky is red, the power is red. The man swallows (it) into his belly, inside the man, swallows the red sky. ... There in the sky is a little boy *nambuã*. The honey of the sky is sweet, he drinks all of it. It's sweet now in our belly, scrape it and drink it. In our root, you in the root of *nixi pae*, another world is coming out, people coming out of my belly..." (Leoncio Kaxinawá, translation Antonio P. Kaxinawá).

and night is considered to be dangerous and is thought to be capable of producing serious illness and death. Therefore the dizziness and fainting caused by big trees, the visits of *yuxin* during the night, and the use of light during an *ayahuasca* ritual, are all related phenomena. They are an actualisation of the kind of chaos produced in the world by the primordial shaman who threw darkness over the world without advising anybody.

Other Cashinahua myths about the genesis or ordering of cosmic qualities and time do not describe the origin of the four qualities (darkness, light, cold and heat) as separately owned by four different groups, but return to the *Inka*/water world dualism. This is a duality where one of the protagonists is the stingy owner and his opponent the clever cast out. As in all myths related to the *Inka* figure, the *Inka* occupies the position of stinginess and wealth. His antagonist is the vulture, representative (by means of his association with strong smell and putrefaction) of the earth and water world. These characters are in turn related to the *inu* moiety, in the case of the *Inka*, and to the *dua* moiety, in the case of the vulture.

I did not collect the myth about the theft of the sun by the vulture and will therefore use Capistrano's version (1941: 447-454). At the origin of time, the *Inka* was living close to the root of the sky. Only he was the owner of the sun, of cold, of the day and of the night. He would open and close his baskets at will. But he was alone and felt lonely. One day he met the tarantula spider and invited it to live with him. "Is your house beautiful?", the spider asked. "Yes it is", answered the *Inka*, "come and have a look." Spider found the *Inka*'s house to be beautiful, wide and clean. The spider decided to go and live with *Inka* who gave it the basket of cold to take care of and sent it to live at the root of the sky. *Yutan* is the name for this deadly spider, as well as for "friagem", a period of two weeks of icy winds and cold that marks the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season.

In the vulture's house it was cold and dark. One day the vulture went to visit the *Inka* and asked him for a little bit of his sun to warm and illuminate his house. The *Inka*, however, detested the vulture's smell, and instead made fun of his bald head. The vulture left with empty hands but did not go far. He hid himself to observe the *Inka*.

The *Inka*, thinking he was alone, took his basket¹⁰¹ with sun from its hiding place in the roof of his house, opened it to take some, and stored the rest again in the same place. Then the *Inka* left. He went to visit the harpy eagle, his kin, and took some of his sun with him to give him as a present. In the meanwhile the vulture entered the *Inka*'s house and stole what was left of his sun.

The vulture is a mediating character par excellence. If the harpy eagle portends death and comes unceasingly to pick up the *bedu yuxin* (eye *yuxin*), the vulture comes to eat the flesh. In this way the vulture is related to the destiny of the *yuda baka* (body *yuxin*), a destiny always hypothetically reversible as long as the eye *yuxin* is still around (or, in mythic language, as long as the bones are intact). The myth *Bixku txamiya* (*Bixku* the ulcerous one) illustrates well the ambiguous role of the vultures and their mediating between life and death.

The King Vulture, *Ixmin*, came down from his abode high in the sky to eat the rotting flesh of *Bixku*. *Bixku* had been abandoned by his kin because his ulcers were stinking too much and people could no longer stand it. When the King Vulture arrived, he came in full regalia. When he saw the convalescent man, he decided to take off his beautiful outfit (his *dau*, charms) in order to eat without spoiling them. At that moment *Bixku* hit him with a piece of wood, and all the vultures, the king Vulture in front, fled in a hurry. *Isa hana*, the bird of seven colours, felt pity for the ulcerous man and healed him with herbal medicine (*dau bata*)¹⁰². When his skin was fresh and perfumed again, *Bixku* took the king vulture's charm and adornment and dressed up so beautifully that when he found his kin in their new village, nobody could recognise him.

The vulture does no harm. He only comes to eat dead flesh. In the case of *Bixku* however, he came too early. There was no dead flesh to be eaten yet, and instead of

¹⁰¹ This basket is a woven box called *bunanti* and is used by the men to keep their tobacco snuff instruments and feathers.

¹⁰² Another version of the same myth (Capistrano, 1941: 266-267) lets the ulcerous one be healed by *xuya*, the mouse. This mouse is known from another myth where she teaches herbal medicine for delivery of children to the women who up to that time used to be sacrificed by the *Inka*. Cf. Kensinger, 1986a and McCallum, 1992, for other versions of this myth.

passively suffering the attack to his bodily integrity, the intended victim stole his aggressor's regalia. These regalia helped the hero of the story to transform the experience of illness into a source of power. *Bixku*, healed of his ulcers, became beautiful. (Capistrano, 1941: 263- 274).

Like *Yube*, the cosmic snake, the vulture also regulates rain and the movement of the clouds (called *nai xapu*: the cotton of the sky). *Inka*, as a sky deity, owns the sun (the power of light and heat), but Vulture makes the sun appear or disappear behind the clouds.

“When you see the vulture flying high in the sky, and the women sing, there will be no more rain or wind. “*Ma xete biaki*” (the vulture has already taken it away). There will be no rain or wind when he flies close to the sky.” (Antonio Pinheiro)

When the sky is clouded, the oropendolas (*japini* birds: *txana*) are said to be gathered in their communal house, dancing *txidin*, the song leader's dance, where the song leader and his disciple are dressed in a long, woven robe with design, the *Inka*'s robe, decorated with pendants and headdress in harpy eagle feathers. The song leader's dance (*Txidín*) is related to the rainy season and was traditionally performed inside the big communal long houses. When the vulture arrives to participate, the dark clouds are shattered: the oropendolas flee from the strong putrefied smell of their visitor and thus the sun appears again (Capistrano, 1941: 453).

The myth of the theft of cooking fire by the proto-beings from *Yauxi kunawa*, the stingy stranger, is closely related to that of the theft of the sun by the vulture. Here the proto-beings occupy the position of the vulture, while the stingy stranger occupies the position of the *Inka*. The proto-beings ask first and after refusal they decide to steal. *Yauxikunawa*, the stingy stranger, is again depicted as living alone while having possession of everything: he has all possible kinds of plants in his garden and the fire to cook them. All the existing poisonous animals (scorpion, poisonous snakes, wasps, ants, mosquitoes etc.) are his pets and defend his possessions. On the other side of the fence, his opponents represent all the rest of the living beings on earth, the as yet undivided community of beings who would become differentiated into the class of humans, different species of animals, and birds after the event of the theft of cultivated plants and fire, realised through the joined forces of them all.

The acquisition of culture, through their civilizing theft, creates the difference between animals and humans. The animals acquire their characteristics from their heroic acts in the battle against the stingy one. Thus the man who stole manioc transformed into a cayman. Running with *Yauxikunawa* at his heels, he threw himself into the water and became a cayman. Another person got hold of a grain of maize and hid it behind his teeth. *Inka*'s wife, an almost infallible diviner, knew that one grain of maize was missing. She tore apart *Nixeke*'s fingers but found nothing. Not satisfied, she opened the victim's mouth so far that she tore it up to the victim's ears, but she found no grain. *Nixeke* finally escaped, to become a lizard (Edivaldo, leader of Moema).

Another animal, *txede* bird (*curica*) gained its characteristics in his theft of fire, the most difficult of all feats. Holding a piece of glowing wood in his beak, he escaped, but *Yauxikunawa* sent storm and wind to try to extinguish the fire. All the birds together accompanied *txede*, making a cover to protect the fire. Finally he found a hollow tree where he could rest. On escaping, the *txede* bird burned by accident a person who became so angry that from that moment on he refused to eat any food cooked on fire. He became the jaguar, the one who eats raw meat (Agostinho from the Jordão river).

Txede, in turn, lost his long beak because part of it was burned. From that moment he has a short black beak. Around his eyes, two white circles are reminders of the smoke he had to stand (Milton Maia). The *txede* bird with the white circles around his eyes gave rise to a recurrent motif called *txede bedu*, the *curica*'s eyes. This motif is used preferentially around the eyes, but can also be found in weaving, basketry and pottery. Besides his role in the origin of the acquisition of fire, the *txede* bird is associated with the eye *yuxin*. It is said that the eye *yuxin* leaves the eyes in the form of this bird¹⁰³.

In the end, *Yauxikunawa* is killed with the help of the armadillos, who dig a hole in the house of the enemy. Bathing in his blood, gall and liver, the macaw (*xawan*) acquires his scarlet feathers, and the little *xane* bird the brilliance of his blue feathers.

The comparison of this myth with that of the theft of the sun reveals the recurrence of the theme of the stingy powerful stranger, the enemy by excellence, linked to and contrasted with that of his smart opponents, who first try to convince the stranger into reciprocal sociality but are, after failure, forced to attack.

In the myth of the theft of fire, animals and humans are still undifferentiated. They represent as a whole the population of the forest as opposed to the stranger, owner of the sources of culture. In the myth of the theft of the sun, the vulture can be understood to be the representative of the earth with its smell of rotteness, and therefore plays the role of mediator in favour of the inhabitants of the earth on the terrain of the *Inka* stranger.

In these myths, the desired goods, the sun, cooking fire and cultivated plants, are understood to be of exogenous origin. They come from the world outside and, since their owner refuses to establish social relationships of sharing and reciprocity with the protagonists of the story, the latter decide to conquer them through war or stealing. The inhabitants of the earth and water world (represented by the vulture) need the sun to shape their world and warm their bodies, as much as the proto-beings need cultivated plants and fire to become humans. Thus both mythological themes are cosmogonically linked. Light and fire come from the outside, and need to be conquered by means of cleverness or violence, while darkness, the potentiality of all possible forms and colours, comes from within.

In the following myth of the great deluge and the re-creation of humankind by one of the few survivors *Nete*, the water world (linked to the *dua* moiety) is described as a rejected otherness, while the sky world (linked to the *inu* moiety) is seen as the longed-for otherness, the destiny of humanity. In relation to the sky world the humans are the rejected, refused ones, because of the smell that betrays their belonging to the earth and linkage to the water world. Only after total transformation of the body and bones will the eye *yuxin* be received in the heavenly abode after death. In relation to the water world, however, the humans (or their ancestors) are those who reject their potential affines, and it is this human rejection of social reciprocity with the people of

¹⁰³ See illustration annexed.

the water world that provokes the great deluge.

Yet, it should be noted that these terms of more or less exteriority will be inverted during the initiation ritual. During this ritual the *Inka* is turned into an honorary visitor and occupies the centre of ritual attention and activity, while the principle participants, the initiates and the song leader alike, are temporarily transformed into *Inka* people themselves. During this ritual, the host village incorporates in a pacific way the *Inka*'s life-giving qualities of maize and fire that were originally, in mythic time, stolen from the enemy. Thus we see that ritual tries to obtain through ritually controlled procedures, what the proto-humans of mythic time were forced to obtain through war.

The position of humanity betwixt water and sky can be read in the Cashinahua colour symbology. The spectrum of colours is terminologically caught in between the saturation of colour resulting in the colour black (*mexupa*) and the absence of colour being pure white light (*huxupa*)¹⁰⁴. Human and daily life develops in-between these two non-colours, these two extremes of the absence of human embodied life that are the aquatic and nocturnal darkness, on the one hand, and the pure solar light, so strong that it dries and burns everything, on the other. As non-colours, black and white represent the extremes of time and space before existence and are therefore the colours of non-being, of invisibility and of the absence of life.

Life and the appearance of a myriad of colours come into being when light filters through the total darkness of the night and the pristine water world, revealing shapes and forms that were otherwise invisible. The appearance of forms and colours is impossible also in the pure proximity of the blinding and burning light and heat of the sun. Too much light makes one blind. Life under the sun is only possible when there is water and air to filter heat and light into colours and forms. Life therefore, can be found in the vital mixture of extremes, where light and water together produce the whole spectrum of colours that mingle and transform gradually one into the other as in a rainbow.

¹⁰⁴ See D'Ans & Cortez (1973) and Camargo (1991) for a linguistic study of Cashinahua colour categories.

The rainbow, the place of encounter between light and water, is therefore an image of transition and linkage between the separate celestial and water domains, a mediating metaphor par excellence. As we have seen, in the myth of *Yube* the Moon, the rainbow is as much the path of the dead experienced in the ascending direction (the blood loss of the climbing head) as it is the path of life in the descending direction (the blood loss of fertile women).

While the head of the dead lover goes up to become the moon, it loses its blood (the blood he received in his life time from all the women he loved), and with the lost blood, all the memories and affection that made it impossible for him to be silent and forget, or to be silenced and forgotten. Once he arrives at a point in the sky so as to become invisible and inaudible, he can rest. In this way, the journey of *Yube* along the pathway of death represents the slow process of an acceptance of death by the dead person as well as by his kin. The rainbow absorbs all the liquid that still links the human *yuxin* and body to the earth, and that causes the smell of rotteness that irritates the delicate noses of the *Inka*, the inhabitants of the sky. Thus, while on its heavenly journey, the *yuxin* has to dry up to become light enough to live on the firmament. On earth it is the wailing songs, tears and mucus that have to dry up for the people to be able to finally let the dead one go. After this total drying up of pain, the phantoms that used to hang around the proximity of the village will also drift away. The dead one has receded into invisibility.

Thus we see how at the centre of cosmogony and anthropogony the same necessity for a balanced complementariness between the two basic life-giving elements is at work. We encountered this complementariness in the overall complex symbolism of the recurring rule of 'two in one' from ontogony (the dual nature of man, of his body (bones and skin), and his mind (body and eye *yuxin*)) to the gender and moiety dualisms characterised by dual aspects in social organisation, in ritual and in daily life. Beings in the world are always dual, made of light and water, and of male and female substances. It is because of the constant interaction between these two elements that a being is alive, on the move. Once all water escapes from a living body, the alchemistic bond is dissolved and life vanishes: the *yuxin* of urine and faeces return to the earth, the eye *yuxin* ascends to the sky, and matter lies lifeless. The flesh rots and the bones

dry up, until they too dissolve into powder.

That is why we can call black, total darkness, and white, pure light, the colours of non-being. The white bones represent the absence of life of the dead person. The colour represents eternity, stillness, absence of movement. Black darkness too is associated with the absence of life, but it is a state that is full of potentiality, concentrating all possible colours to be revealed. Black is associated with the water world, the darkness before dawn; while white is associated with the stillness of afterlife where there is no longer change. White is the colour of permanence and associated with it is yellow, the colour of the *Inka*, the colour of the clothes (new skin) with which the dead person will be transformed into an *Inka* God after the complete disappearance of all his corporeal remains on earth. This happens when the last remaining water evaporates from the incinerated bones in the fire (Montag, R., Montag, S., & Torres, P. 1975). A whistling is heard and this sound is understood as the last bit of *yuxin* escaping from the bones to make its journey into the sky world.

Thus Cashinahua dualism reflects the productive tension between humanity's aquatic origin and its celestial destiny, where the *Inka* God's fiery blinding gaze of pure light will consume the eye *yuxin* and transform it into a light being, a star. Eternal life is a life without transformation, without organic processes, without illness and death. Life in the sky is pure cyclical repetition, a life framed by rituals that obey the never changing rhythm of the ever returning seasons. Dressed in *Inka* clothes and harpy eagle feathers, the inhabitants of the sky pass their time dancing *txidin*, the dance of the song leader.

Life on earth is caught in-between these two events of conception and death. Humanity and life on earth constitute the transitory coloured solidity between aquatic dark fluidity and solar eternity. While in its mother's womb, being wrought from creative fluids, the being-in-becoming does not yet have its own form and consistency and needs to coagulate and harden to become a body. After death it will lose this form and consistency again when finally the bones, the structure of what was once a body, release into the burning fire (the second phase of the traditional funeral) the last sigh of life and become fragile. They are then ground into powder to be consumed with corn soup.

We can recognise this abstract sketch of Cashinahua ontogeny in the structure of the following myths of the great flood and the subsequent re-creation of humanity by *Nete*. The cause of the flood lies in humanity's refusal to engage in social relationships with the water world. The rupture with the water world causes a cataclysm that will alter the whole order of the world. The event that provoked the fish people's indignation involves the adventure of *Ixan* and his pregnant wife/sister. At that time, men used to marry their sisters.

The central theme of the sequence of myths to be dealt with in the following two sections (the myth of *Ixan* about the cause of the flood and the myth of *Nete* about the reshaping and final destiny of human sociality), revolves around the problem of potential affinity that confronts humanity in its beginnings and end. *Nete* presents us with a provisory solution that will define the social rules of a new generation of humans, the *huni kuin*, humans properly speaking, the actual Cashinahua.

The human condition, then, is the intermediate solution for the problem posed by the necessity of affinity: no longer the undifferentiated incest as before the deluge, but also not yet the extreme exogamy with the fascinating ideal of beauty, the *Inka* cannibal god, for whom humans are game. This last hypothesis of marriage options will be treated by the final part of the myth about the reencounter of *Nete* with her brother *Nawa Paketawã*, the giant who became a stranger, an ally of the *Inka*. Instead of receiving *Nete*'s children as potential sons-in-law, *Paketawã* kills his sister.

The solution to the problem is a marriage rule which is endogamic at a village level, while organised by moiety exogamy. This rule was introduced by *Nete* who intermarried her two twin couples, teaching them that those who were born in the same gourd should not marry each other.

3.3. The Great Deluge

The myth of the great deluge begins as follows: In the middle of the night, *Ixan*'s wife wakes up and calls her husband.¹⁰⁵ She is 'hungry for meat' (*pintsi*) and wants him to find something for her to eat. *Ixan* leaves the house and walks around the forest to find some game for his wife. Suddenly he hears the call of the *toa* frog. He decides to get his wife a frog to eat and follows the cries. Time goes by and at dawn *Ixan* has not yet returned from his hunting trip. Nor would he be back soon. The song of the *toa* had seduced *Ixan* and a *toa* female abducted him into the water world. There *Ixan* formed a new family and forgot about his earthly kin. His earthly wife, however, was unable to forget her husband/brother and spent her days crying at the edges of the river where *Ixan* had disappeared.

One day, *Ixan* decides to give in to the wishes of his earthly sister/wife and prepares to visit her. She looks at him as he leaves the river and walks in the direction of her house. Yet to her great disgust, she sees that he comes accompanied by a multitude of fish people, all beautifully adorned and painted as though they were prepared for a big festivity. Instead of offering them a seat and giving them corn soup and boiled bananas to eat, the wife ignores the visitors and runs into her brother/husband's arms. She would not let him go or loosen her grip and *Ixan*, almost suffocated, becomes transformed into a *peste*, a black blood-sucking fly, which is bothersome and common on the Purus river.

Offended by the indelicate reception, the fish people return to their home in the lake. The same night the rivers start to overflow and do not stop rising. The water covers houses and the highest trees. Most of the people run and try to climb in the first

¹⁰⁵ A myth translated in the bilingual education publication "*Ixan*" of the SIL in Peru, and translated into English by McCallum (1989a: 416) begins the story of the flood as follows: "My ancestors (*xenipabu*) were created in a hole inside a tree. (The tree is unspecified. The term used for hole is the same as that used for womb, *xankin*). When they had been created inside the hole in a tree, they multiplied on and on, being created. They learned to live... The women had sex with different men, making children, mixed up children..." The myth stresses the absence of marriage rules during this period. The abduction of Yukan (also called *Ixan*) came about to bring an end to this period.

tree they encounter on their way. When they realise they will be unable to keep their head above the water, they try, in despair, to fly. All these people become transformed into flying ants, others become bees. A man called *Busen* and his son climb into the high *goiaba* tree. The river continues rising. The son cannot hold the slithery tree any more and cries for help. But the father, afraid for his own life, climbs higher. The son drowns. The water is already at the level of the father's nose, but then suddenly it stops. The father is transformed into the black uakari monkey (*dukawã*) who has a moustache like the whites (*nawa*) in memory of the rising water (Agostinho, Jordão river).

Not only were people transformed into animals, but human artefacts were too. Thus the club used in war (*bina*) was transformed into an electric eel, the spindle used for spinning became a stingray and a woven basket decorated with the traditional *kene* patterns (*kakan keneya*) became a snake's head (Edivaldo, leader of Moema)¹⁰⁶. The most significant of all transformations produced by the flood, however, was that of the couple *Sidika* and *Yube*, who were making love in their beautifully painted hammock at the moment of the flood. They were transfigured into the giant anaconda (Agostinho). This remarkable metamorphosis is worth a parenthesis because of the dense network of meanings invested by the Cashinahua in the giant anaconda. As we saw above, the giant anaconda is only the end stage of a series of metamorphoses of the snake principle who lived first on land as a boa to then retire to a cave in the lake when tired and too big to move¹⁰⁷. From there, the giant anaconda, as a 'big chief' controls the coming and going of its people, the inhabitants of the water world (Edivaldo). If, in his

¹⁰⁶ Another version from Agostinho says it is the *kakan* basket which becomes the stingray with design (*keneya*).

¹⁰⁷ It is curious to note that the same theory of transformation of the boa into an anaconda was registered by Isacson among the Emberá (1993: 48): "The *je* mythological water snake is associated with the boa (*Constrictor constrictor imperator*) called jepá. It is still believed that the jepá boa metamorphoses in its old age into a je giant water snake... (It) is said to search out a small pool at the headwaters where it lies down and turns into a je. The pool gradually fills with water and when it runs out of space it moves to a bigger pool where it continues to generate water... (this happens) not when they die but when they grow old, which means that the essence of the jepá boas is considered to be everlasting. If killed, however, the *jepa* dies without becoming *je*. *Je* is seen as the very origin of the river and its waters."

abode of the water world, the giant snake is a 'chief', on earth, in its manifestation of boa constrictor, it is said to be the primordial shaman, the master of arts and teacher of both women and men.

The arts learned from the boa by men and women, separately and under strict secrecy, are extremely gender related. Men acquire hunting magic from the ritual killing of a boa. After killing the boa, he is said to consume the boa's uncooked heart, a ritual praxis necessarily followed by a rigid diet and seclusion for three months. The positive outcome of the ritual is confirmed by a final personal encounter with the boa's *yuxin* in a dream. Men can also keep the snake's skin to make a headdress from it, to be used in fertility and hunting rituals.

In a similar encounter, women can acquire control over their fertility, as well as of design magic. To become a mistress in the weaving of patterned cloth, the mother's mother, ideally her name giver (*xuta*), kills a boa. The girl eats its eyes and expresses her wishes to the escaping *yuxin* of the dead boa. The knowledge of complex design patterns in weaving is a sign of intelligence and dedication and not all women of a community are capable of mastering this art. That is why its mastery confers so much prestige on a woman. The position of master weaver enhances her desirability as a spouse, as well as her possibilities of becoming the first among the women, the female leader, called *ainbu keneya* (woman with design). But, along with her wish to control the art of design and weaving, the girl can also ask for the power to attract men. Men joke about this. They say that if a woman who ate snake eyes wants you, you become hypnotised just like the boa's game (Augusto Feitosa, songleader).

Leaving the forest, the girl takes the boa's skin with her to hide it in the attic above her loom. Once home, both the girl and her grandmother fast while the girl rests in her hammock, waiting for a dream with the boa's *yuxin* (Rosa Lopes da Silva Sampaio). The encounter in dream with the boa's *yuxin* is deciding for the positive outcome of the ritual, for men as well as for women. The secrecy of the ritual, carried out in the forest, alone or in the presence of a helper, a close and highly trustworthy relative (the reason why preference is given to a name-sake grandparent), is also decisive. An envious or careless person can invert the words spoken to the snake and thus produce the opposite of the desired effect.

The ritual interaction with the boa for the sake of fertility needs to be performed by the girl before her first menstruation (again, in the company of her *xuta* (name giver)). The grandmother will smear the boa's blood over the girl's belly and the girl will pronounce the ritual words asking for a delay in menstruation and pregnancy or, to the contrary, a pregnancy in the early future. I was told by Antonio Pinheiro (information later confirmed by his older sister Maria Sampaio) that the same ritual can be used to produce permanent infertility. He told me this had been done by his parents to his older sister when she was still a prepubescent girl and that he was considering the possibility of doing the same to his youngest daughter, still a child of only four years of age. His sister lives in Peru and remained childless. The reason for this, explained Antonio, was that his parents wanted her to become a master in design, a 'professora', an *ainbu keneya*, a woman with design. Without children, she would have all the time to dedicate herself to the learning of a great variety of weaving songs and motifs. Besides helping her sisters with the upbringing of their children, she would later be capable of initiating the girls in the art of weaving with design.

Whatever this case represents, a *post-factum* interpretation of a childless fate, a quite original example of indigenous birth control and role specialisation, or a creative contribution of my interlocutor to our mutual effort of making sense of each other's worlds and lives, the fact that the idea arose in Antonio's explanation of the complex field of interaction with the boa is significant in itself. Dealings with the boa have to do with the relation between men and women, with their powers for mutual attraction and seduction. It is a fact that in the Amazon a successful hunter is also envisioned to be a fortunate lover and husband. The gift of meat is related to sex and fertility, but, after a triumphant hunt, the hunter not only comes home with meat, he also has stories to tell, and can invite people to eat in his house. He radiates good luck and satisfaction¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁸ The 'sex for meat' hypothesis was first formulated by Siskind (1973). Although there exists some disagreement over Siskind's sexist interpretation of the link between male gifts of meat and female sexual generosity, the 'metaphor' certainly exists in the region. We will reencounter the same image further on.

A marrying girl, on her side, needs to be capable of weaving a hammock for her husband, if possible decorated with design. From the moment that the young man sets up his own hammock his girlfriend's house, they are married. From then on, they will share this hammock several times a day, in the evening before sleeping or in the early morning. The period of early marriage coincides with that of the 'fabrication' of a child, a time in which it is considered normal and appropriate for a couple to spend a lot of time together in one hammock.

It was at such a moment of union and transformation, of the fabrication of a new being, that the young couple *Yube* and *Sidika* were caught by the flood and transformed into the huge anaconda, owner of all liquids, master of fertility and teacher of the gender-specific arts that will enable men and women to attract each other in order to unite when the day gives way to the night and people can retire to their hammocks. In terms of origin and knowledge of fertility, the cosmic snake can thus be said to be a hermaphroditic being, combining both sexes, another manifestation of the Cashinahua 'two in one' ontological rule that signifies life and movement.

The skin covering the cosmic snake is the transformation of the hammock in which the intertwined couple were sleeping, while inside its skin, the snake keeps its secret of being double, the union of one with its double, its shadow, its other half¹⁰⁹. The relation of the snake to duality has been noted in several instances. The boa not only has a split tongue, but is said also to possess two penises¹¹⁰. As we saw above,

¹⁰⁹ An relevant ethnographic parallel to this association of sexual intercourse and the figure of the snake can be found among the Emberá who would, according to Isacson, "compare the contractive movements of the jepá boa with the sexual act." During the puberty ritual the women would imitate the movements of the boa, while dancing in the initiatic *hemede*, boa-penis-house (Isacson, 1993: 59). The same theme interested Roe in his comparative study of Amazonian myth and symbolism (1982: 180). He concludes: "One can now begin to appreciate why the anaconda represents a key figure in tropical forest cosmology. It presents the ultimate paradox of an androgynous being that combines the essence of all sexuality within its body. It is both a "he" and a "she", demiurge who, as the Panare (Dumont 1976: 206) have it, autocopulates constantly."

¹¹⁰ According to Isacson, this significant ethnographic detail finds confirmation not only among the Emberá but also in biology: "The boa constrictor, like any other species of the reptilian order, has two male organs, called hemipenises which, further more, Emberá imagery displays in the bifid tongue of snakes." (1993: 149)

this special characteristic, also noted by the Cashinahua (by Augusto and his wife Alcina) makes him a superlative of fertility, the *yuxin* father of twins. The mother of twins, in turn, attracts her *yuxin* snake lover by eating the intertwined seeds of cotton while still a girl, another example of two different elements linked into one.

There is another element in this mythological episode that requires our attention, and that is the strong association of the snake with the hammock, and of both with the rainbow. The song of the handing over of a newly made hammock by a wife to her spouse (or of a sister to her brother), gives us the second link, as well as others to be explained below (Augusto Feitosa, chant leader of Moema, Purus river):

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>yawa nuxa yawa nuxee eee e</i> | The peccary's cover, the peccary's cover, eee e |
| <i>yawa nuxa ikiki</i> | Covering ourselves in the skin of the peccary |
| <i>dispi dabe tedabes</i> | Tie the two ropes |
| <i>Tedabes kawankin</i> | Tie and swing |
| <i>min disi tewewe</i> | Tie your hammock |
| <i>txana disi tewewe eeeee</i> | Tie the hammock of the oropendola eeeee |
| <i>nai bai teweweeee</i> | Tie the pathway of the sky eeee |
| <i>badi sintan tewewee</i> | Tie the rainbow of the sun eeee |
| <i>nai bai teweweeee</i> | Tie the pathway of the sky eeee |
| <i>txana disi tewewe eee</i> | Tie the hammock of the oropendola eee |

The first sentence of the song compares the hammock to a peccary's skin. This reference is explained by the myth of origin of peccaries, humans who, one day decided to transform themselves into peccaries, an idea conceived by the group apparently to punish a reluctant virgin. To accomplish this feat, they all left together to gather huge quantities of *pama*, bread fruits. After satisfying themselves with large amounts of this typical peccary food, they covered their bodies with old hammocks and hid their nose and mouth behind remnants of ceramic vessels.

As they moved out of the house, their voices already sounded like grunts and their bodies slowly transformed themselves into those of peccaries. This terrifying scene was witnessed by the extremely beautiful but asocial girl who had been left

behind by her kin because she refused to let any candidate for love or marriage come close. Once alone, she cried in despair, calling for her kin to come back or to take her with them, but there was nobody left. Suddenly she heard a noise, the voice of a crying baby. She looked to see where this sound might be coming from and finds the baby in a *bunanti*, the basket where her father used to keep his tobacco. The tobacco child, son of the *yuxin* of tobacco *Xete badi tema*, was called *Mana dumeya dua* (*Mana* with tobacco, *dua*). Because he was a *yuxin* child (*yuxin bake*), he grew up at a miraculous pace, soon tall enough to marry the girl who brought him up. From one of his first hunting trips he brought back three peccaries among which the girl recognised her father, mother and aunt. She cried but nevertheless ate the peccaries brought by her husband. A new humanity was born from this couple.

As much as the transformation of humans into anaconda, this myth speaks of a primordial identity of body between humans and peccaries before the event of irreversible transfiguration. The type of hammock called “peccary cover” is a small one used for babies and small children, as well as by adults, for sitting or resting. Thus older men and visitors are offered a small hammock, *yawa nuxa*, to sit. Real, big hammocks however are called hammock, *disi*, or, in ritual language ‘rainbow’.

The only literal allusion to a hammock (*disi*) made in this song, serves to invoke an oropendola’s nest: *txana disi*, the oropendola’s hammock¹¹¹. This bird is known for producing nicely woven, elongated nests, which hang down from the branches of trees. We will reencounter this bird when dealing with the rite of passage, because it is after this bird, famous for its imitation of all possible songs of other birds, that the song leader, *txana ibu* (father or leader of the oropendolas) is named. The *txana* bird represents the ideal human being. In its female role it is a skilled weaver (*txana ainbu ibu*, the female leader of the oropendolas), while in its male role it has the trained ear of a singer and the indispensable memory of a song leader (*txana ibu*). The oropendola shares even more with humans, they both have the habit and knowledge of living in

¹¹¹ Among the Airo Pai (Tukanoan group of Colombia) the oropendola nests are similarly compared to human-made hammocks. The association between oropendola birds and humans is also expressed by the fact that for the gods, men are oropendola birds, who are the weavers in this society, while women are perceived as parrots. Belaunde (1992).

community, a quality more important than any other skill.

Txana is also the name of a red coloured tree, whose bark is used to produce a red paint. This second meaning was explained to me as referring to the red colour of used hammocks. As happens with all other decorated objects used by the Cashinahua, the designs decorating the new hammocks become gradually invisible, as they become covered with dirt and the red achiote. Nowadays, the hammocks keep their design much longer, because people use clothes instead of covering their bodies in red achiote paint.

Finally, in the last sentences of the song, the hammock is called pathway of the sky (*nai bai*) and rainbow of the sun (*badi sintan*). Thus, while the real rainbow, produced during the day by the encounter of humidity and the sun, is said to trace the pathway of the sky for the souls of the death, the hammock can be said to be an inverted rainbow. It is the rainbow of the night, tracing in its design the paths to be followed by the eye *yuxin* during its dreams. This interpretation is compatible with the view of sleeping and dreaming as a little death, in the sense that sleeping and dreaming provoke a temporary separation of the eye and body *yuxin*, a separation that will become definitive with death. The correct position for a person to sleep is with the head pointing westward (*badi kamiski*, where the sun always goes), and the feet to the east (*badi huimiski*, where the sun always comes from), as if to accompany the sun's inverted way.

The circle of rainbows, inverted arcs, can be closed if we remember that the rainbow by means of which the head of *Yube* climbed into the sky, was made of the coloured threads of cotton, spun by his mother to weave hammocks. Therefore we can say that just as much as a hammock can be called a rainbow, the rainbow can be called *Yube's* inverted hammock, the hammock of death, where finally he found rest. The Cashinahua conception of transformations suffered during crucial rites of passage such as birth and death, but also during the remodelling of the child's body into that of an adolescent during the *Nixpupima* ritual, corroborate this interpretation of the association between hammock, rainbow and 'little deaths'.

In all these transitions, the hammock plays the crucial role of substituting the placenta in its role as container, cooking vessel, place of transsubstantiation of matter

or body into something else, into another body. First of all, there is the parallel between cooking and gestation, described in Chapter Two. Once 'cooked', modelled and hardened into the solid body of a baby, the baby is born. As soon as it is born, it is painted red with achiote, to keep the *yuxin* away (or to help it recover from birth), then it is wrapped in a towel (or woven cloth), a first substitute for the placenta. Until the remains of the umbilical cord fall off, the baby will not leave its mother's hammock. The link between hammock and placenta is explicit at this first stage.

When a person died, he could traditionally have one of two kinds of funeral, either burial or the endo-cannibalistic meal. When buried, the body was wrapped in a hammock and delivered to the ground to be transformed into all kinds of earthly animals and insects (see Chapter two). A metaphorical cooking and transformation thus took place under the ground. If eaten, the body was cooked for twelve hours, a whole night long, to disconnect the meat and the *yuxin*, to transform in this way human flesh into food, meat. In this case, the hammock, in its function as transformational agent and container, was substituted by a cooking vessel.

The capacity for transmutation of the vessel, mediator between the cooking fire beneath and the water and human body inside, was stressed by the small three-dimensional figure modelled on its sides. The modelled figure (*dami*) represented a lizard, *nixeke*, not only one of the animals who heard *Pukã's* advice to change skin, but also the animal who stole the grain of maize from its stingy owner and thus became one of the symbols of the advent of culture and humanity.

Two elements point here to transformation. First of all, there is the mere presence of a figure on the vessel, while no other cooking vessels ever have any decoration. This is, besides dolls used in children's play and masks used in the fertility rituals, the only representative figure I ever saw in Cashinahua material culture. As we saw above, figures and images (*dami*) denote transformation in Cashinahua ontology. Secondly, the content of the figure represented: a lizard, symbol of eternal life through the changing of skin, and, through its role in the myth of the conquest of culture, of the transformation of animal into human. If, in myth, he helps in transformation in one direction, on the fire he helps in the transformation in the opposite direction: the transformation of human flesh into edible meat.

I learned from Kensinger (personal communication) that there is another occasion in which the modelled figure of a lizard appears on ceramics, and that is during the ritual of *Nixpu pima*, the only occasion in life where the body is again remodelled and re-cooked, transformed into a new body, into that of an adolescent ready to engage in productive and reproductive labour. In the *Nixpu pima* ritual, the two images appear, that of the vessel with a lizard and that of the hammock as substitute for the placenta or womb. This time the lizard is modelled on the cup traditionally used by the initiates to drink their corn soup.

Maize is one of the key symbols around which the *Nixpu* rituals revolve. The image of the lizard *nixeke* is significant in this context because of the transformation alluded to, but also because of its association with the maize that will make the bones of the children grow quickly. The image of the hammock appears at the night before the blackening of the teeth, the culmination of the ritual called *Nixpu pima*. During that night the children are rolled up in their hammock and obliged to lie rigidly without moving, talking or looking. The women, their mothers, grandmothers and aunts, sit at their sides, swinging the hammocks the whole night long, while singing songs that invoke the game or fish that their children, both girls and boys, will catch. The image of metaphorical cooking at this stage of the ritual becomes almost graphic. We will come back to this ritual in the next chapter.

3.4. The creation of humanity by *Nete*

The first real humans were created by *Nete*¹¹². Humanity before the deluge was incestuous, and therefore pre-social, although they already knew the cultural arts of gardening, ceramics and housebuilding. It was the unwillingness of the ancestors to engage in affinal exchange relationships with the fish-people that aroused the water people's anger and the flood. We have seen above how all human beings died or were transformed into flying, climbing or swimming animals. One human, however, survived the flood. *Nete*, who lived in the same house as *Yube* and *Sidika*, got hold of a 'sky root' (*bema*) of the lupuna tree¹¹³ which saved her life.

Clinging onto the piece of wood, *Nete* was taken downstream with the current of the stream until she arrived at the root of the sky, where earth and sky meet. As she arrived, the rains stopped and the level of the river started to go down. Finally *Nete* could see and touch the white sand of the beach and she set food ashore. Realising she was the only survivor, *Nete* cried the whole way downstream. She saw she had nothing to plant, nobody to hunt for her, nor anybody to live with. Tears did not stop rolling from her swollen eyes, and mucus flowed from her nose. Swarms of bees and wasps, attracted by the tears, attacked her. *Nete* defended herself as much as she could, but in the end the insect bites succeeded in making her blind. That is why she is called *Nete*

¹¹² The myth of *Nete*, ancestor of the *huni kuin*, cannot be found in the compendium of myths collected by Capistrano at the beginning of this century (1904-1910, edited in 1941, where another sequence is given to the events after the flood: 500-506), though versions of the same myth can be found in a bilingual education publication "*Ixan*" by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (1979), in D'Ans ((1978) 1993: 113-125), in McCallum (1989a: 417-419) and in Lagrou (1991). The most complete of all versions, especially in comparison with the versions collected on the Purus river by McCallum and by myself, was transcribed and taped by Cashinahua students during an alphabetisation course run by the CPI (Comissão Pró-Índio). The story tellers were recognised specialists from Peru and from the Jordão river. In particular, the details with respect to the giants *Hidi* and *Nete*'s brother, *Nawa Paketawã*, are more elaborate in this than in other versions of the myth. The CPI version was roughly translated by myself, unhappily without the help of Cashinahua informants (because the text reached me after I had already left the field. A short résumé of the myth in Portuguese, written by Cashinahua CPI students, follows the text in Cashinahua, but leaves out the most interesting passages). The similarities of this myth to that collected by D'Ans are also notable.

¹¹³ From the same wood the initiation stools, *tasa kenan*, are carved.

the blind one (*Nete bekun*).

Nete was suffering a lot and thought of making children to keep her company. She found two gourds on the beach¹¹⁴. She took the heads off two bees and put them into one gourd. Then she removed the heads off two other kinds of bees and placed them in the other gourd¹¹⁵. Finally she filled the gourds with her saliva, tears and mucus and closed them with wax. She let the gourds cook (*bawa*) in the sun and when they were ready, they burst open. A couple of *inu/inani* children left from one of the gourds, and from the other, a couple of *dua/banu* children. The first couple was big and strong, while the second was taller but thinner. The biggest one was white, while the smallest one was dark¹¹⁶. Thus difference was born. *Nete* taught her children that they should make love and marry only one from the other gourd, while they should treat the one with whom they shared the same gourd as a sibling¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ D'Ans speaks of four gourds, while the CPI version and those collected by McCallum and by myself on the Purus river, mention two gourds, one for each moiety.

¹¹⁵ Bees are an significant image of fertility for the Cashinahua. Not only do they live in groups around a (female) leader, working together to build their community, they also produce the quintessence of the two extreme poles of gustatory qualities used in the Cashinahua classification system and etiology: honey (*buna*) is the sweetest of foods to be found in the forest, while beeswax (*bui*) stands for bitterness and is associated with resin (*sempa*). Honey is considered to be a potent potion for fertility. When honey is found in the forest it is given to women who wish to become pregnant. They are supposed to drink a whole bottle of it until they become drunken with honey and feel impelled to vomit. They are said to conceive soon after this ritual. Beeswax on the other hand is the taste of the *mukaya*, "man with bitterness", for whom all meat tastes like beeswax. Bees also emit a strong poison when they sting humans. Several myths link extraordinary fertility to the swollen state provoked by bee stings. Stinging insects are related to the magical darts or arrows with which shamans attack their enemies: their stinging transmits poison (*dau*). Therefore, through the combination of honey, beeswax (all-purpose glue also used in the preparation of arrows) and their stinging qualities, bees are linked to the most important fertile processes of transformation (hunting, pregnancy and shamanry). As we saw above, health and reproduction are achieved through the correct balance between sweetness and bitterness (*bata* and *muka*), and bees, like humans, produce both. Note that during the great deluge, some humans are transformed into bees to be changed back into humans later on by *Nete*. The bee is also one of the rare animals with the power of autogenesis, but as I was unable to check the relevance of this information to the Cashinahua, this other correspondence with the story of *Nete* can only be considered a happy coincidence.

¹¹⁶ The colour detail comes from the CPI version (1996: 47).

¹¹⁷ In the CPI version only two boys are created, the potential sons-in-law for *Nete*'s brother.

When they were big enough to walk, *Nete* told her children they still had an uncle, *Nawa Paketawã*, who left long ago, before the flood. *Paketawã* was *Nete*'s brother. His wife died young and he stayed alone, crying because there was nobody who would plant and harvest vegetables for him. His brother-in-law had a wife, his parallel cousin. Each time she sat down, she made him see her vagina. When she was weaving baskets, she made him see her vagina. Then she climbed in her hammock and called him to make love to her. He did and asked her to marry him. In the meantime, her husband had come home and people told him what had happened.

Nawa Paketawã and his lover left the village of *Nete* and travelled first downstream. The river they were following ran into a river of white water, and that one flowed into another with red water. The red river ran into a yellow one and finally they arrived at a huge river with white foam: they had arrived at the root of the sky (the colours of the rivers crossed vary according to versions). At each new river they crossed, their legs became marked with a new colour and at every new river they came to, they repeated the same ritual: *Nawa Paketawã* prepares the *puikama* (fish poison) and, after throwing it in the river, sits down to look at the pubic hair of his wife while she takes off her short skirt and jumps naked into the river, swimming and catching fish.

Several versions¹¹⁸ emphasise her short skirt. This detail is important because Cashinahua custom prescribes a skirt that touches the knees. The Culina women are accused by Cashinahua women of provocation because of the short skirts they wear. Another significant detail of the scene described above is the fact that he sits down and looks at his wife, while only she fishes and swims. Normally *puikama* fishing is a collective activity where men, children and women swim and catch fish together¹¹⁹. To further clarify the meaning of the details describing the couple's behaviour, it is useful to keep in mind the extremely discrete way in which Cashinahua women sit to wash and even fish, thus avoiding by carefully controlled bodily gestures any exposure of

¹¹⁸ The CPI version *Shenipabu Miyui*, as well as that from D'Ans, and mine from Agostinho.

¹¹⁹ Women and children can also organise fishing expeditions with fish poison, without the participation of men, but in that case men do not accompany them to observe them.

the genital area. The CPI version goes on to describe how the sight of his wife's pubic hair makes him 'very cheerful', and that the fact that he alone sees her this way provokes in him a strong desire (*kemu-aya*: 'leaves him with saliva').

This is not the only myth using the theme of *puikama* fishing expeditions to evoke the image of strong sexual desire, a desire usually linked to extramarital affairs. Thus the myth of *Bane*, which I heard twice as it was told on the eve of a collective fishing expedition, links the hero's extramarital affair with the wife of his brother to his ensuing abundant catch of fish. He stays behind and does not fish with the community because he is making love to his mistress. People return from the fishing expedition with no idea where they might be, and gossip begins that the couple will come back empty-handed. After satisfying their desires, however, Bane catches, in a fraction of time, much more fish than the whole group together and returns triumphantly to the village.

If hunting expeditions require precautions with respect to sexual smells, fishing expeditions, to the contrary, seem to combine well with femininity and sexuality. The link between smell and success in hunting and fishing is evident to the Cashinahua who consider success in an expedition to be linked more with the power of attraction and seduction (through imitation and disguise) than with force and attack. Fish are attracted by (related to) the smell of sex and female secretion, while the same smell betrays the hunter and drives his game away.

The role of attraction in successful hunting explains why the snake is consulted for hunting magic and not the strong and athletic jaguar (*inu keneya*) who seems to be better off, in myth, as gardener and herbal healer than as hunter. His brother, the red jaguar representing the *dua* moiety, however, is said to be a good hunter. After his successful expeditions (and not before, as happens with *Bane*) he conquers again the wife of his brother. One of the reasons for the spotted jaguar's failure has to do with his jealousy. He is so preoccupied with a potential betrayal by his wife, that he does not go far but keeps circling around the house to control her. Thus he comes back without game, while at the same time being unable to prevent the betrayal he suspected.

But let us come back to the character of Nawa *Paketawã*, a figure of absolute sexual desire, so strong and uncompromising that it becomes a force, destructive of sociality, yet, simultaneously, as we will see further on, productive of cultural knowledge and power. *Paketawã* desires all that is socially forbidden: first of all, the woman he desires is already married. Not only does he seduce her but he also takes her away from her husband and kin to go and live alone with him, far away in the land of strangers. Secondly, she belongs to an unmarriageable category: she is his parallel cousin. And finally, the kind of daily rituals they perform do not represent legitimate, marital and productive sex, which is performed in the hammock at home or hidden in the gardens. Theirs is provocative and adventurous sex: with her short skirt, she sits with her legs open to provoke him, and in the river, she swims naked while he looks at her.

Yet *Paketawã*'s sexual exploits do not stop here. As soon as he leaves the village of his kin in the company of his new wife, he travels in the direction of the *Inka* people where he offers his sexual favours to all the *Inka* women. At this point, the description in the CPI version becomes a humorous caricature, imitating in an onomatopoeic way the noise of his huge testicles knocking on the ground (1996: 59). The enormous size of his testicles signals the high investment of his bodily knowledge in that part of the body, a part that will be, as we will see at the end of the myth, his Achilles' tendon.

Nawan Paketawã displays behaviour that, at the beginning and at the end of the myth of *Nete* and the great deluge, is declared untenable for controlled human social interaction: on the one hand he marries what is too close, committing a mild version of incest, while on the other, he engages with what is too different, with the *Inka* people, emblems of otherness. The result is that what was once a brother, becomes a stranger for *Nete*. And it will be in the form of what she considers to be her long-lost kin that *Nete* will have to face the danger of an encounter with the enemy. *Paketawã*, as she will discover too late, has become through intercourse, sharing, and peaceful coexistence with the *Inka*, an *Inka* himself. To see what became of her brother, *Nete* will undertake the long journey upriver, following the paths and rivers of different colours he once crossed to arrive at the high cliff, *mawa* (cliff; death), where he built

his house, close to that of the *Inka*.

One day, the children asked *Nete*, “Mother, why are you alone? Why is it that you alone are bringing us up?” *Nete* answered; “I was not alone, our kin were the *hidi* (giants), who were all killed by the water. The water covered my brothers, my parents, my grandmothers and cross-cousins. They were all covered by the water. I was left alone. That is why I let my hair grow so long. I was sitting here alone, suffering. So I made you.” “So that is the way you did it!”, her children replied and *Nete* continued, “But upriver lives a man, he is your uncle. We will go to see him.”(CPI version, 1996: 47)

Meanwhile, the beaches were drying up and *Nete* decided to teach her children about the vegetables she and her kin used to plant. And thus they started to ask: “What kind of vegetable is this?” “This is edible, we use it green, we make corn soup from it and meal. That is manioc. Manioc is like a tree, its leaves are light brown. We eat the boiled roots. We can mix the leaves too, with the roots. To plant manioc, we cut two pieces from its stalks which we place in the ground. To plant the maize, we make little pits in the ground with sticks and we sow the grains in each pit.”

On the next beach they found banana. “What kind of plant is this?” they asked, describing the plant’s forms in detail to their blind mother. *Nete*, touching the plant, then identified the plant and explained its properties, how you prepare and eat it and how it should be planted. “When bananas (plantains) are ripe, we cook them until they are soft and then we mash them and mix them with water to make *mani mutsa*¹²⁰. When they are green we cook them too, to eat with meat.”

In this way, always moving upstream, from one beach to the next, they find and learn about potato, sugar cane, papaya, peanut and beans. “All these vegetables”, tells *Nete*, “were planted by the *hidi*”, the giant ancestors of the Cashinahua. Suddenly they arrived at an open, abandoned space and found huge white bones and fragments of ceramics. *Nete* sat down and burst into tears. Asking their mother what was happening,

¹²⁰ *Mani mutsa* is a sweet and much appreciated banana drink.

the children learned that this was the place where their ancestors lived¹²¹. The encounter with the remains of the *hidi* village was the incentive to learn of housebuilding and ceramics. This was also the place where the children planted the seeds and stalks they had taken with them on their way.

Nawa Paketawã was living alone with his wife on the cliff. Like the *Inka*, near whom they lived, their marriage was sterile and his wife said she missed her *babawan* (nephews). So, when their vegetables were ripening and their maize green, ready to be harvested, she decided to capture and domesticate pets. It was she herself who caught them, "she was a good hunter, she was like a man" (CPI version, 1996: 55). Thus they were soon surrounded by the young of water and land turtles and of different species of monkeys. They fed their pets with the products of their gardens and made them eat *Nixpu*, the teeth-blackening plant used on children for the first time during the rite of passage held at the age of the replacement of milk teeth with permanent ones. *Nawa Paketawã* took the monkeys and blackened their teeth, while his wife took the turtles. "The black uakari monkey (*dukawã*) chewed so much of it that his teeth are black to this day" (Agostinho from the Jordão river).

We see many inversions of normal social life in the habits of *Paketawã* and his concubine, inversions similar to what is said of the dead, of the *Inka* and of the whites, all of them strangers. These inversions are not necessarily morally disapproved of, although some are, such as the uncontrolled manifestation of temper and excess of desire. Strangers, whites and *Inka* alike, are all *sinatabu*, "angry, hot tempered ones". They all commit libidinous excesses, from incest to intercourse with complete strangers, and, at least in the case of *Paketawã*, the dead and some *Inka* characters (those representing the dead), their sex does not lead to reproduction. This last detail is congruent with the unchangeable scene of the world of the dead, made of eternal repetition. There is no growth or decay in the village of the sun with its eternally young, though grey-haired and adult inhabitants and that is why there can also be no

¹²¹ Exceptionally big bones, apparently from prehistoric beings, are reported by the Cashinahua to have been found in the region. Along with stone axes (*yami*), these are the only archaeological objects found in the region by non-specialists. Both kinds of objects have been given a mythological elaboration and meaning.

birth: the dead have no blood. Originally, the dead are lonely. For their village to grow, they need to 'capture' wives and husbands. If *Paketawã* brings up pets as if they were his children, the *Inka*, instead of adopting and bringing up children, marry the dead. The dead prey upon the living like the enemies of neighbouring tribes prey upon each other¹²².

The myth of origin of the knowledge of childbirth reflects well this view of missing growth processes among the dead. In the old times, the *Inka* were specialists in Caesarean births and the people, *huni kuin*, depended upon them to deliver their children. While the child was saved and given back to the *huni kuin*, the mother inevitably died on the operation table and was taken (in this case eaten) by the *Inka*. The *Inka* in this case have no paternal desires. The *Inka* figure is affine (*txai* (brother-in-law) or *bene* (husband)), not a father or mother figure (*ibu*). *Paketawã*, though a human who has become ally of the dead, that is a stranger, refuses any affinity. He represents death and enmity in its purest sense: he kills and is killed.

After resting for a while, *Nete* and her children resume their journey. They are now coming close to the headwaters of the rivers, near enough to the house of Nawan *Paketawã* to hear him cutting the wood to make fire and stools for the initiates. Although she cannot see, *Nete* knows it is he she hears. They arrive at a high and steep cliff, and need to build a ladder to climb the steep wall of stone. At this point, the storyteller stresses *Nete*'s divining capacities, as well as the fact that she is a *yuxian*, a shaman. One of the versions, the one I collected from the song leader Augusto with the help of Edivaldo, says that *Nete* knew that her brother kept pets and that he was giving them *Nixpu* to strengthen their teeth¹²³. Actually this was one of the reasons for her

¹²² This is how the song to send off the soul (*bedu yuxin*) of the dead goes: "*kaibis katanwe* (3x) (go, go, go), *ana nenu humuma* (3x) (do not come back here), *Inka bene watanwe* (take the *Inka* as your husband), *paxin tadi sautanwe* (put on the yellow cloth), *min kaikakiki* (you are going), ..., *kaibis katanwe* (go, go, go), *ana nenu humuma* (do not come back here), *kaibis katanwe* (go, go, go)." (Song leader Augusto Feitosa and Antonio Pinheiro)

¹²³ In Augusto's version, not only the monkeys, but also the tapir and peccary 'ate' the stalks of the plant and still do so today. They are only chewed and then spat out. Smiling, the old man shows his few teeth and says, "Look at my mouth. The deer (*txaxu*) was like me, the only one who did not have the courage to eat *Nixpu*. He was afraid and ran away. That is why he has only one crooked tooth left!" Augusto's joke referred to the fact that besides the lack of teeth,

visit, to learn the *pakadin*, songs of *Nixpu*.

Nete's brother too was a shaman. He learned his arts from the *Inka*. *Nete* knows she will die, but nevertheless insists on climbing up the cliff to see her brother who, in her own words, had already become a stranger. At this point of the story, the problem of potential affinity, longed for but dangerous, returns to the foreground. *Nete's* brother is the father-in-law she desires for her children, as well as the owner of knowledge, which is precious to these pristine humans. Yet he is unwilling to share his ritual knowledge or to receive his sister and potential sons-in-law, just as the *Inka* and the stingy one were unwilling to share their sun or fire.

Paketawã's wife, on the other hand, is happy when she sees her *daisbu* (sons of her brother's sister, potential sons-in-law). As we saw above, she had been longing for company for a long time and each time *Paketawã* overreacted in his zeal to please the *Inka*, hunting more for them than for her, she threatened to leave and try to find her long lost kin. Thus she welcomes *Nete* and her children warmly and runs off to tell her husband. But her husband, instead of interrupting his activity to see his long lost kin, continues to chop wood and shouts and scolds, "What does she want here?! I do not want them here!".

Paketawã curses his sister, saying that since she insisted upon invading his territory, she will have to die in three days. Two different versions add relevant details to this event. Agostinho from the Jordão river says *Paketawã* kills his sister with the help of a stone, a stone of ice with which he sends her such a cold wind that she freezes to death immediately. *Nete*, the blind seer, knows this, knows he will send her the *Inka's* icy wind and weeps in sorrow. She sends her children off to gather firewood as quickly as possible, but they come too late and *Nete* lies already dead when they return. *Paketawã* received this stone not from his allies, but from his lovers. It is the *Inka* women¹²⁴ who gave him the stone and made him into a shaman, assures

he and the deer also have their name in common. Augusto's personal name, *Isaka*, is the name of a deer who was a human being in mythical times.

¹²⁴ In a comparative study, Melatti (1992: 143-164) noted the empowering effect on mythic heroes of amorous affairs with the wife of their brothers as a recurrent theme in Marubo, Matis and Cashinahua mythology. In Pano psychology and social morals, a man's brother's wife,

Agostinho.

D'Ans version of the myth adds the detail of a split head (d'Ans, (1978) 1993: 124). Enraged and out of control, *Paketawã* hits his own temples and cracks his skull. What is strange, according to D'Ans, is that the wound does not bleed. This detail gains meaning in the context of *Paketawã*'s association with the dead, beings without blood. The myth goes on to say that the rupture will only close again after his sister's death. This last sentence can be understood as expressing the logic of war, where wounds are 'healed' through revenge.

Thus, at the end of the journey upriver, *Nete* is killed by the shamanising of her brother. The weapon he uses against her is one he got from the enemy, the representative of death. *Nete*'s children then prepare their revenge. In comparison with *Nete*'s children, *Nawa Paketawã* is a giant. Their attack will therefore have to be similar to the strategy used by insects (and shamans): almost invisible and apparently

especially if he is single and living in the same household, occupies a position that privileges the temptation of and possibility of an affair. So much so that myths are ambiguous in their prescription of the expected behaviour of the betrayed brother. Both as a brother and a husband he should be generous enough to tolerate the affair. Notwithstanding this apparent tolerance, the competing brother and the husband's wife have to know the limits of exposure of the liaison, because no husband is obliged to tolerate provocation in his own house. Part of the plot revolves around this psychological conflict of loyalties and desire. I think, however, that the crucial empowering element alluded to in so many myths, is not so much the fact that the hero has an affair with the wife of his brother, as the simple fact that he has affair. Affairs are considered to be empowering for women as well as for men and the effect of the affair is enhanced with the danger and secrecy implied. Lovers are supposed to exchange knowledge and power through intercourse (Agostinho, Jordão river). Through intimacy they come to know each other and each other's world. *Paketawã* is one of these strong characters who, by following his individualising desires, brings about novelty in the world. The more dangerous and distant the affair, the more gratifying. Thus *Paketawã* acquires the knowledge of *Inka* shamanising, of *Nixpu*, and of the domestication of animals, not from *Inka* men, but from his female lovers. Other examples of the conquering of knowledge through amorous liaisons are *Yube* who brought the knowledge of *nixi pae* back from his adventure, and *Basabu keneya* who received the first body painting ever used by the Cashinahua from his *Inka* lover after defeating and almost killing his *Inka* rival, his lover's husband. The logic at work in these narratives about adultery might be the constitutive role of the third element in Amerindian social philosophy, as suggested by Viveiros de Castro (1993: 177): "O ternarismo inerente ao regime concêntrico da sociabilidade amazônica (consangüíneos, afins efetivos ou aparentados, afins potenciais ou não aparentados; cognatos, não-cognatos, inimigos) vai encontrar uma manifestação clara na forma daqueles que eu chamaria de "terceiros incluídos"..." Examples of these 'third included ones' given by the author are: formal friends, lovers, godfathers.

innocuous, but, if the attacker owns real poison, deadly. They prepare their little arrows and while pretending they are just playing, shoot them into their uncle's huge testicles. At first, *Paketawã* feels some itching. He thinks he is suffering from nasty ants and scratches vigorously. His testicles start to swell. *Paketawã* retires to his hammock, and dies the same night.

The trajectory of a person's life is parallel to this initiatic journey of *Nete* and her four children who on their journey reinvent and learn culture, discovering and identifying the remnants of the lost culture of their ancestors, the *hidi* giants, whose bones, plants, ceramics and marks they encounter on their path. In the same way, a person's life resembles a journey upriver, learning how to live and where to plant. Once he arrives at the cliff, he dies. His *yuxin* will retrace the entire path back downstream until he reaches the root of the sky and then upstream, until he arrives at the cliff (*mawa*) where the soul of the dead will climb the ladder (*tapeti*) of the death or follow the rainbow path thrown by the inhabitants of the sky at the encounter of the *yuxin* of the dead.

The children accompany *Nete* until her time to die has come. At that point she has already taught them all the names of wild and domesticated plants, as well as of animals that can be hunted and eaten. At the end of the long initiation and teaching, they arrive at Nawa *Paketawã*'s house where they learn about the eating of the *Nixpu*, final stage in the process of preparing young children for participation in productive activities. There they establish their first affirmative act: they avenge the death of their mother.

The teaching of the names of all existing plants and animals by *Nete* to her children mirrors the *pakadin* (ritual songs) of the *Nixpupima*, where, during long song sessions at night around the fire, every single being, plant or animal of their universe, is named. This preparation for the final blackening of the teeth takes a whole month of *pakadin* singing. Only after all beings have been named, as in the initiation journey of *Nete*, will *Nixpu* will be eaten to fix both the bodily structure and the spoken knowledge. We can therefore see why the myth of *Nete* is not only a guideline for the visualisation of the Cashinahua conception of ontogenesis, the trajectory of a human life, but also for the rite of passage we will deal with in the following chapter.

The flow of the river, downstream (*maikidi*) and upstream (*manankidi*) is an important element in spatial orientation, in daily life as well as in ritual practice. The root of the sky lies downstream, at the edge of the world. From this place, *Nete* took her four children upstream, to see her brother, the giant who lived near or with the *Inka* on a steep cliff called *mawa*. This same spatial orientation orients life and the destiny of 'souls' and illustrates the parallelism in this initiation myth between the genesis of humanity and that of every new human being: the story of the origin and destiny of humankind is also the story of the origin, proper modelling and destiny of the human person and body.

At death, the eye *yuxin* travels downstream until it reaches the root of the sky where it finds the giant *tapeti*, the ladder up which it climbs into the sky to find its affines, the *Inka*, living in the eastern, heavenly highlands. The path to their village is wide and clean, decorated with blue, yellow and red feathers. The *Inka* comes to meet the *yuxin*, playing the flute and splendidly adorned with a blue feather headdress, necklaces and white arm and leg bands, body paintings and a woven robe covered in design. His appearance is stunning, "The *Inka* is really beautiful" (*Inka hawendua haidaki*). The *Inka* can also throw the rainbow, called the path of the stranger (*nawan bai*) or the path of the sky (*nai bai*). This last procedure seems to be the normal way to the village of the dead followed by women¹²⁵. Upon arrival in the village of the dead, women will be received by their kin who mediate on their behalf during the first contact with the *Inka*, while men are directly received by the *Inka* affines themselves. Both encounters, however, entail danger, because the *Inka* are especially sensitive to etiquette, and if the transformation has not been complete, the newcomer's perception of things will be so different from that of his hosts that he will be unable to disguise his repulsion of their alimentary habits and will vomit¹²⁶. Once offended, the *Inka*, instead

¹²⁵ Both McCallum (1991) and Kensinger (1995) affirm that women and men follow different paths to the village of the dead.

¹²⁶ This was the fate of *Huan kadu*'s mother, a woman who visited the village of the *Inka* before she was dead. This myth will be analysed in the next chapter.

of marrying him or her, kill and devour the newcomer raw.

The same alternation of movements following the spatial orientation indicated by the flow of the waters can be found in the description of the journeys of the *yuxibu*. Their moves too parallel that of *Nete* and her children, first downstream (as if dying) and then upstream again (until they arrive at the cliff of death). The only difference is that these *yuxin* of the waters always come and go, they do not climb the ladder to the abode of *Paketawã* and the *Inka* and that is why they do not die:

“The *yuxibu* of the water travel downstream, transforming themselves, seeing new places until they arrive at the sea where they become salty and cannot help anyone anymore. But there they become homesick because they belong to the forest. And thus the wind takes them back, whereas they descend through the rain.” (Agostinho from the Jordão river).

Chapter 4. The Nixpupima rite of passage

“We Navajos are always learning, it is our way, it is our eternal transformation like a seed. We are seeds, and we plant ourselves.”

Witherspoon, 1977.

“The bone is like the seed of the fruit.”

Quiché-Maya, Furst, 1974: 11-12.

4.1. Baptism and the awakening of sexuality

The ritual blackening of the new permanent set of teeth of girls and boys having already lost all their milk teeth is the central event in the rite of passage called *Nixpupima*: “to make (them) ‘eat’ *nixpu* (the teeth blackening herb)”. After this first ‘eating’ of *nixpu*, the blackening of teeth was traditionally introduced as an indispensable ingredient in makeup used for rituals and festivities by all adult and adolescent men and women, along with body painting, bead strings and feather headdresses (for men). Nowadays, unlike body painting and beads, feather headdresses and *nixpu* have become almost totally obsolete, although the ritual first blackening of teeth is still considered to be an important passage for children into adolescence¹²⁷.

The Cashinahua translate the meaning of the *Nixpupima* rite of passage to a non-indigenous public as ‘our Baptism’¹²⁸: it is a ritual ‘fixation’ of the child’s name and bathing is also part of the ritual proceedings. After bathing, the initiate, who has been transformed into a new being by means of the ritual intervention, is reintroduced into normal social life. The child is ‘baptised’, Edivaldo explained to me, “because he already has thoughts of his own (*ma hawen xina hayaki*).” This means that the child is considered to be ready to leave its position as a passive receiver of care to become an active producer of food and social relationships. The statement that ‘he or she is

¹²⁷ McCallum (1989a: 133), however, mentions that she saw adults blackening their teeth on many occasions during the preparation of *Katxanawa* increase rituals. Her fieldwork was carried out only a few years before mine on the same Purus river.

¹²⁸ This fact has previously been noted by Lindenberg Monte (1984:20) and McCallum (1989a:

already capable of thinking for him- or herself' signals the idea of an entrance into a period of personal responsibility after having passed through the early period of mastering social and linguistic skills¹²⁹.

The child receives a name as soon as it is born. The name is chosen from a permanent stock of names, following the rule of recycling names in accordance a principle of alternating generations¹³⁰. A first-born girl can, therefore, receive the name of her mother's mother, while her sisters are named after a sister of her grandmother on the mother's side, and a boy is preferentially named after his grandfather on his father's side or one of his grandfather's brothers. The name-giver is the child's namesake (*xuta*) and will have a special bond with the child for the rest of his or her life. Namesake grandparents invest a lot in the children's education, giving them presents and taking care of them whenever the parents need to leave the house for work.

When a girl is past the toddler stage, the link with her grandmother becomes more evident. Therefore, if she suffers from a long lasting illness, it is usually her namesake grandmother who takes care of her. Thus it was the case that the Maria Sampaio systematically woke up to take care of Philomena when she had one of her fits (mostly at night) and not the girl's parents. Whatever few beads that Dona Maria received also went to the girl as a matter of course, because she apparently needed the multi-coloured bead necklaces as protection; they were her *dau* (her medicine, in this case in the sense of 'protection'). Thus Philomena wore more necklaces than any other child in the village.

In the olden days, I was told, children were always covered with heavy strands of beads, that crossed their chests. Because Cashinahua women much prefer glass beads, which have to be obtained through an exchange with strangers, over seeds that can be gathered in the forest, they wear far fewer beads than they would like. It should

132).

¹²⁹ See also McCallum, 1989a: 132-142.

¹³⁰ The rules of transmission of names have been extensively studied by several Cashinahua scholars, which explains why little attention is given to the topic in this work. See Kensinger (1984a, 1991a), Deshayes and Keifenheim (1982), D'Ans (1983) and McCallum (1989a).

be noted, however, that the link between beads and contact with strangers is not at all recent. To the contrary, it is constitutive of the meaning of the word for bead, *mane*, which also means metal and imperishable goods obtained from the *nawa* in general. The prestige of glass beads is therefore intimately linked to the Cashinahua desire for contact and exchange with strangers, a desire also expressed in ritual song and in myth.

During the first years of childhood, the child's name is constantly used by its parents and relatives. This is the period in which, along with the acquisition of language, the child will acquire the cognitive and social skills of addressing kin by the proper kinship terminology. The child's position in the network of kinship terms is derived from its name. This means that it is not always obvious whom, outside the immediate circle of kin living with him, the child should call cross-cousin (for boys *txai* (potential brother-in-law) and *xanu* (potential wife), for girls *txaita* (potential husband) and *tsabe* (potential sister-in-law)); and whom parallel cousin (for both sexes *betsa* (brother or sister), or *hutxi* (older brother), *txipi* (older sister) and *itxu* (younger brother or sister)). At the age of *Nixpupima*, the child is supposed to have mastered the vast vocabulary of names of objects, animals and plants and the proper naming of his or her kin without addressing them directly by their personal names.

Nixpupima is a generalised "baptism" or naming of all beings existing in the world. Together with the naming of the world around them, the child's name is consecrated by means of its ritual evocation in song and fixed through the ritual 'eating' of *Nixpu*. Yet, the relation between the names enunciated in song and a specific initiating child is not made explicit during the ritual. The names of the children are evoked in an indirect way, interwoven into song texts that describe the whole meaningful world of the Cashinahua, from natural phenomena to artefacts and mythical characters.

The ritual songs called *pakadin*, sung in preparation for the child's first teeth-blackening, insert its name into all of the meaningful, that is ritually named and invoked, phenomena. The *pakadin* of the *Nixpu* ritual are a re-creation of the world through song, just as the blind *Nete* after the flood re-named the world around on her journey upstream with her children in preparation for their initiation. Only those beings and plants that have been named in song will have their *yuxin* present at this

collective consecration of the fabrication of a new young adult to be, and will thus contribute to the success of the ritual.

After this ritual, the public use of the child's name will no longer be appropriate and if used would cause shame and embarrassment. The name has become as intimate as the intimate parts of the body and only a lover or partner will continue to pronounce it in private¹³¹. The taboo on the public use of the initiated child's name signals the fact that it has already been fixed and totally incorporated into the child's body and personality. To repeat the name causes embarrassment because it casts doubt on this accomplishment. I gained an acute social awareness of this fact, once parents began to react with the same strong indignation when their children called me by my Cashinahua name (*kenan kuin*, "proper name") as when they called me *nawa* (stranger, enemy) at my early arrival.

Nixpupima is the ritualised passage from undifferentiated childhood, where both girls and boys are called *bakebu* (children), to a gendered adolescence where girls are called *txipax* and boys *bedunan*. The ritual hardening of the body and fixing of the name prepare the youngsters for gender specific initiations. However, the rite of passage itself does not separate girls and boys, but initiates them together. This uncommon feature is characteristic not only of Cashinahua, but also for other Panoan initiation rituals. The fact that the bulk of ritual treatment is the same for girls and boys, highlights specific aspects of Pano gender ideology. It signals the original equality of man and woman, and stresses the fact that they share the same basic features. Once this basis is solidified and fixed, subsequent 'initiation' rituals will work upon the differences¹³². These differences will be shown to be constitutive of gender interdependency, and of male and female productive and reproductive capabilities.

¹³¹ See McCallum, 1989a, on this topic.

¹³² Both McCallum (1989a:132) for the Cashinahua and Erikson (1996) for the Pano in general, stress the fact that there is not just one rite of passage but that there are subsequent initiations. The fact that, during the rite of passage, both sexes are mixed might be one of the reasons. Another, alluded to by both authors, is the fact that the fabrication of the body is considered by the Pano to be a slow progress of successive social interventions on the body

Notwithstanding the similar treatment given to children during initiation, a strong emphasis on gender permeates the whole atmosphere of *Nixpupima*. As if to better stress the difference between the 'state of being' of a person before and after initiation, young adults, and especially the parents of the initiates, alternate a serious and instructive attitude towards their children, controlling them in every detail of ritual obedience, with a hilarious and *carnavalesque* display of sexual provocation and excitement among themselves. Stress on work is systematically juxtaposed with the stress on sexual desire and excitement. This juxtaposition is not an accident, because, as we saw, the fabrication of a child is considered to be hard work, and hard work in general is considered to be feasible only when morale is high, and when there is enthusiasm.

The importance of high morale for work holds for the relationship between the sexes as much as for the whole functioning of the community. This equivalence between the motivation of a couple and that of a whole community is expressed by the generalised erotic excitement that takes hold of the whole participating community. Sexual insults and gifts of meat are not only addressed to one's actual permanent and publicly recognised partners, but also to other potential partners, sisters- or brothers-in-law (and, but less frequently, to affines of ascending and descending generations). During both fertility and initiation rituals extramarital affairs are expected and implicitly approved of, although they are never openly acknowledged. An exception to this rule is made for the initiates' parents, who are obliged to abstain from sex during the whole period of ritual re-conception of the child by the community¹³³.

Both kinds of ritual, initiation as well as fertility, are actually intimately linked. I would even suggest that all collective rituals allude to fertility and include elements of licentiousness, hinting at the hypothetical possibility of extramarital affairs¹³⁴. This

and social identity of the child and can therefore not be subsumed in one dramatic intervention.

¹³³ On the topic of extramarital affairs and discretion, see Kensinger's recently delivered paper "The philanderer's dilemma" (1996).

¹³⁴ The list of Cashinahua rituals include *Katxanawa* (the dance of the hollow tree, an increase ritual), *Txidín* (the song leader's, harpy eagle festival), *Buna* (banana festival), *Bakawa* (collective fishing expedition) and *Haika* (collective hunting expedition). The last two rituals

is due to the fact that the ritual elevates to a collective awareness activities that constitute the motivation, gratification and excitement in daily routine: the abundance of gardens, hunting, seduction, and the gift of meat as an invitation for sex. The flux of daily gifts and favours constitute relations of kinship and affinity. In daily life, women and men not only have to take their partner's wishes into account, but also those of parents and parents-in-law, children, and other related kin who expect to be invited for a meal when harvesting and hunting have been abundant¹³⁵.

Yet, during ritual, collective harvesting and hunting expeditions are organised and thus, through joined action an abundance of food is produced at community level. Women as a group send men to hunt, while men as a group, prepare the hunt by means of ritual propitiatory singing. As noted by Erikson (1996: 299-300) among other Panoans (Matis), great emphasis is placed upon group cohesion and gender solidarity and this ritual enactment of unity and the interdependence of gender creates an atmosphere of generalised fertility, and the mutual attraction of men as a group to women as a group¹³⁶. In such an atmosphere, to be openly jealous of one's wife or husband would be considered to be stingy and asocial behaviour. Yet, given the extreme discretion of Cashinahua lovers and the nature of gossip, it is impossible to know how much of this fantasy of licentiousness is actually put into practice.

During the *Nixpupima* ritual, a reshaping of the child's body and personality is undertaken by the joined forces of the whole community. The *Nixpupima* sequence is a metaphorical re-enactment of conception, gestation and the first care given to the

can be organised independently or as a part of bigger festivals such as the *Txidim* or *Nixpu* rituals.

¹³⁵ Only certain vegetables follow this logic of the 'abundant catch', while most of the vegetables are collected in the field only in accordance with the needs of the household. Their harvesting is permanent and a garden can therefore be considered to be a real storage place. This is the case for the vegetables that constitute the basic stock of daily food, such as plantains and sweet manioc. Vegetables with specific harvesting times always give rise to collective activities and sharing in the harvest. This is the case for peanuts, maize and sweet bananas. Cotton too is harvested collectively in August, while achiote ripens gradually and some ripe fruits are almost always at hand when needed. The abundance of seasonal harvests such as that of maize during the rainy season and of ripe bananas during the dry season, make them really well suited for ritual use.

¹³⁶ See McCallum, 1989a and 1989b.

newly born. If other Panoan initiations can be analysed as metaphorical sacrifices of the neophytes allowing them to be reborn as new people (Erikson, 1996)¹³⁷, Cashinahua initiation seems to combine both images: the image of ritual death and rebirth is systematically alternated with the image of re-creation and a metaphorical return to the womb. This is another reason why, during the ritual, emphasis on sexuality is explicit and takes a collective shape. It is actually the members of the whole community who, as a group, conceive the child, shape and remodel it, and finally deliver it, hardened and ready to enter a new form of existence, that conducive of gendered productivity and social responsibility.

Immediately following the rite of passage¹³⁸, *Txidín* and *Katxanawa* rituals are performed. These rituals will confirm the new identity of the initiate. In *Txidín* (the song leader's dance), the recently initiated boys will, each one in his turn, for the first time in their lives follow the song leader's steps and repeat the phrases he sings, one by one. For this occasion the initiate be clothed with the ceremonial dress, *tadi keneya*, and feather ornaments made of harpy eagle feathers. The girls will be taken by the women to dance (*katxanawa*) around the *tau pustú*, 'belly' of the *paxiúba* palm tree. The hollow tree trunk, being the place of the first creation of the *huni kuin*, is a image of fertility and can be decorated with bananas and manioc, hanging over it, in an apparent allusion to phallic force¹³⁹.

¹³⁷ This is Erikson's interpretation of the Matis imposition of tattoos on girls and boys. Comparative data strengthen his case.

¹³⁸ These rituals were traditionally performed after the piercing of lower lips and nasal septums of both sexes and of the boys' nostrils. The ritual piercing was named *buxkawakin* (to make the head), in contrast to the *Nixpupima*, where the body is modelled. Only after the 'making of the head' would they be invited to sing. In the past, to sing one needed to decorate the mouth with strings of cotton decorated with beads, beads, or pieces of cylindrical wood hanging beneath the lip. Boys and men decorated their nostrils with macaw tails, while girls used big bluish or white pearls in their nasal septums. Nowadays, the only piercing that has survived is that of the girl's earlobes at early birth. Only elderly persons still have their noses and lips pierced.

¹³⁹ See Kensinger (1987) and McCallum, (1989a:134). The *Nixpu pima* ritual I attended in the village of Moema, was abruptly finished after the children's liberation from seclusion, because a rumour about government money for retired workers caused half of the village, the song leader included, to go to the nearest town downstream to see what was happening. As this was a long journey, the normal sequence of activities was interrupted. Kensinger, however, attended another *Nixpu pima* ritual during his fieldwork among the Peruvian Cashinahua in

Unlike other groups of the region, such as their neighbours the Culina, who use hollow tree trunks for the preparation and serving of fermented manioc or maize beer, the Cashinahua *tau pustu* is empty. I was told that the empty hollow trunk serves as a recipient for the spit and vomit of men, ill from drinking and jumping around the tree. As I never saw anyone literally using the tree for this purpose, the spitting of men in hollow trees might be only metaphorical. The spitting of men might be a metaphor for ejaculation, an association explicitly stated in the following part of a *Nixpupima* song (*pakadin*), called *uma metsapa*, a women's song to take away the laziness of *uma*, "to make the brew strong". Women sing this song, calling their brothers-in-law. "If he is sleeping, you call him, you wake him up, hitting and shouting." (Augusto Feitosa)

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Nabaka debukii ee (2x)</i> | The headwaters of the <i>nabaka</i> river |
| <i>Txanabaka debuki</i> | The headwaters of <i>txanabaka</i> river |
| <i>Badiwaka debuki</i> | The headwaters of the <i>badiwaka</i> river |
| <i>Atsa debu nakaxun</i> | Chewing the headwaters of the sweet manioc |
| <i>Mitxu mitxu xinayê</i> | Thinking of the spitting, spitting |
| <i>Nawa tete peiwen</i> | With a feather of the harpy eagle |
| <i>Aku tadun tadunma (2x)</i> | Drumming, tun! Tun! Tun! |
| <i>Maxi kene dunu</i> | In the sand, patterns of the snake |
| <i>Bai kene dunu</i> | Patterns of the movements of the snake |
| <i>Hawen bake buyabi (2x)...</i> | Making her child... |

The setting of the song is at the headwaters of the rivers, their source. All the names of the rivers contain references to fish (*baka*), with their connotations of sexuality. The last of the headwaters or wells cited is that of "sweet manioc". The chant leader Augusto translated this sentence to me as follows: "the headwater of sweet manioc is semen, and chewing means having intercourse". The following sentence completes the meaning, "thinking of spitting, spitting", "thinking of spitting

1964-65, and kindly offered me his notes on the sequence of events. His notes mention the immediate following of the *Nixpu pima* ritual by the introduction of the freshly initiated boys into the singing of *Txidín*, and of the girls into the circle of women dancing around the *katxa*.

means ejaculation.” After this metaphoric description of the fertilising event, the song mentions the white harpy eagle feather, standing here as a metaphor for penis. The harpy eagle is a powerful bird and the sound of his wings when landing is akin to the trembling sounds of drumming.

The next part of the song looks at the beach, where the encounter took place. It says: “In the sand, patterns of the snake”, “patterns of the movements of the snake”. In this context it is instructive to remember the myth of origin of the snake during the great deluge. The flood transformed an intertwined couple into the huge cosmic anaconda, the prototype and origin of all constricting snakes. In this song, the traces left by a couple in the sand are compared to those left by a snake passing by. This association is confirmed by the sentence following that of the snake “making her child”.

After the first song leader’s dance (*Txidín*) and the first fertility dance (*Katxanawa*), other initiation rituals will follow. These subsequent initiation rituals, however, will not be public any more, but privately held. The rituals accompany the mastering of specific arts such as hunting and singing for men, and weaving and singing for women. As we saw above, private initiation rituals involve the ritual killing of a boa (*Yube xeni*) in the case of the hunting and weaving arts, or of a *txana* bird in the case of initiation in the art of ritual singing. The gender-specific initiation rituals related to the boa do not happen in the village, but are carried out at the fringes of the forest. They are surrounded with secrecy and taboos on sex and food (all foods related to a possible swelling up of the body are avoided: water, sweet vegetables, meat). The initiation happens in the company of a teacher, preferentially the namesake, the *xuta* of the neophyte.

The initiation of a new song leader, on the other hand, happens only at a mature age. When he has learned enough songs to lead a *Txidín* or *Nixpupima*, the apprentice song leader receives the recognition from his teacher, the song leader, by means of a ritual treatment of his tongue. The apprentice kills a *txana* bird and eats his brains raw. The skull of the bird is taken to the village. At the apprentice’s arrival in the village, the song leader takes the bird’s beak (called *xeta*, tooth), imbues it with chilli, and repeatedly strikes his pupil’s tongue with it, singing ritually over the saliva running

from the burning mouth. In this way the master strengthens the new song leader's saliva and voice, conferring on him his own and the bird's memory and knowledge.

4.2. Teeth and Beads

“Aunt, make bracelets and leg-bands for me squeeze medicine for design, medicine for design in my eyes make my eyes like beads, make beads from my eyes”¹⁴⁰
Nixpupima ritual song for girls, sung by women.

Teeth are considered to be the seat of vital force in many Amerindian cosmologies¹⁴¹. Cashinahua men, women and children use animal teeth as trophies, protection and decoration (*dau*). Children and women use monkey teeth to adorn themselves and cayman teeth as protection against snakebites, while men keep jaguar canines as trophies. Teeth are threaded into necklaces, where they are alternated with black seeds and beads and made into strings which cross the chest. Monkey teeth can also be woven into white cotton headbands and bracelets.

Yet, prestigious though teeth might be, as elements of decoration and as vectors of vital force, they are challenged by the famous glass beads. Glass beads are called *mane* and belong to the class of trader's goods. The many meanings of *mane* (metal, jewel, glass bead) turn the word into a designation of a class of objects that share the quality of being imperishable and of coming from far away. Imperishable objects are nowadays associated with *nawa*, traders, anthropologists, missionaries and voluntary workers, and they stand for the force of Western culture with its cities made of metal, glass and stone.

Because of their association with the imperishable and their eternal look of novelty, white glass beads, threaded on long strings to be wrapped into 5 to 10 cm-wide bands worn below the knees as well as around wrists, upper arms and ankles,

¹⁴⁰ “*yaya huxe waxunuuun; yaya huxe waxunun eee ee; yaya huxe waxunun; ea kene daun kene dau w(b)etxeswe; ea kene dahun kene dahurwetxeswe hee ee; ea mane beduwa mane beduwawee; ea mane beduwa mane beduwa teka ee hee*”

¹⁴¹ As an example of this widespread association between teeth and the vital source, we can cite the Yagua's habit of extracting the teeth of their enemies, killed in war, to use them in necklaces, and their associated myth of primordial humanity being weak and soft because they had no teeth (Chaumeil, 1983: 215). The Emberá too consider the teeth to be the seat of vital force (“they are the germination, seed of the womb”, Isacson, 1983: 157) and therefore used to blacken their teeth, whenever they were exposed during critical periods of transition (Isacson, 1993: 29).

have almost totally substituted the woven white cotton bands (*yumen huxe*) which were traditionally used when no beads were available. These bands support and call attention to a person's joints. They signal the invisible white bone structure that sustains the body and stress the points of articulation that make movement possible.

Along with the forehead and the eyes, the joints are decisive points of intervention in curing rituals. When a newborn suffers from high fever, herbal juices will be squeezed first on the forehead, then in the eyes and finally on each of the baby's joints. The same happens with ritual blowing and massage. In myth, the reconstitution of life for the dead follows the same scheme: the bones are joined, herbal medicine is squeezed on the joints, and the hero, a *yuxibu bake* (a child of *yuxibu*), blows over the skull and bones, calling the eye *yuxin* back into the body. As soon as the bones are joined and moistened with 'magical' liquid, a new skin will cover the skeleton and the person is reborn.

In mythic song beads are systematically associated with the *Inka* people, owners of the imperishable. This association makes them, as a social category, almost coincide with the *nawa* with whom they also share traits of character and behaviour. *Inka* and *nawa* are owners of goods that belong to urbanised civilisation. Their cities are made of stone, their roads are broad and clean, they are the owners of metal, of gold and of the brightly coloured glass beads. In myth, they owned fire and cultivated plants, in the history of contact, they own metal machetes, guns, knives and machines. Their behaviour is marked by cruelty, lack of reciprocity and stinginess. They are cannibals, eaters of raw flesh. They are the quintessence of alterity. By means of this symbolic conjunction with the white coloniser, the *Inka* figure has survived as a strongly emotionally charged and invested character¹⁴², and some myths about the *huni kuin*

¹⁴² Other Panologists worked on the Inca figure in Pano imagery. In contrast to other groups, like the Shipibo where the Inca figure is divided into two mutually exclusive characters, the cannibal and the Messiah, the Cashinahua *Inka* is one and the same, concentrating in its ambiguity the whole psychological complexity of the relation of the Cashinahua with the power of State and coercive force. Historical sources suggest that the whole region of origin of the Pano people (the Ucayali region), has been exposed to the Inca Empire (Renard-Casevitz, Saignes & Taylor-Descola, 1988). Yet, they never lost their independence, and they, like other inhabitants of the forest, used to disappear into the forest when they wanted to. The same

rebellion and the collective killing of a whole village of *Inka* people thus gain an almost contemporaneous and political dimension.

The way in which myths and a series of *Txidín* songs (*pakadin*) dedicated to the complex theme of the origin and maintenance of ethnic difference, characterise this difference brings the 'other', the powerful enemy, as close as possible to the real epitome of alterity: the dead. This association of alterity with death is basically achieved through a sustained contrast between the worlds of the perishable and those were the imperishable reigns. Since the enemy is associated with the imperishable, he is more and more distanced from humanity. Not only do they, the *Inka* and colonisers, as prototypical predators and cannibals or (and) as senders of illness (by means of poisonous winds), systematically inflict death upon the *huni kuin* (people), they also resemble death itself in the manifestation of their power and way of life.

If life in the forest is marked by processes of growth and decay, life in the villages of the dead is eternal and circular. And if fertility in the forest is obtained by the collaboration between complementary pairs and mutual 'predation', in the world of death there is no mutuality, death never gives, but only takes away through violence. Like a jaguar hungry for meat, death devours what it can get. A voracity ridiculed in the myth of the *Inka* who, having nothing left to eat, starts to eat himself. This image of voracity is also evoked in the image of the sun, the ever-burning fire of the *Inka*. Therefore, when a girl is menstruating for the first time, she is not allowed to leave the house with her head uncovered. If not, the sun, *Inka pintsi* (the *Inka* hungry for meat) will see (smell her blood) and cannibalise her from above.

Life in the cities resembles the villages of the dead in that both are marked by endurance and conservation. In the cities houses are made of stone and zinc, cooking vessels of aluminium, and memory is stored in tapes, books or films. The imperishable

tactics have been used by the Cashinahua in their dealings with rubber bosses. It was in this way that, at the beginning of this century, a group of Cashinahua, working in the region of the Jordão river, rebelled against their boss whom they accused of abusing their women. The rubber boss was killed, his weapons taken, and the Cashinahua disappeared into the forest. This group migrated to the Curanja river in Peru, giving origin to the Peruvian Cashinahua, contacted by Kensinger in the fifties (see Kensinger in Dwyer 1975; Aquino, 1977; McCallum, 1989a).

is what attracts people to the city, to get machetes, guns, aluminium vessels, ammunition and beads. The myth of origin of the separation of humankind mentions, as the cause of people's move in search of better lands, the bad quality of their clay. All their vessels would constantly break into pieces whenever they would be moved around.

The myth goes as follows. People decided to leave the forest and started to migrate in the direction of the east, downstream (*maikidi*) in search of territories with good clay, stones and minerals. After a while, they arrived at a big lake. Unable to traverse the lake, they decided to spend the night at its shore. During the night they heard the cayman singing (*yuxibu* communicate through song). The song said that he was hungry for meat (*pintsi*), that he needed meat to mix (*nai*) with his vegetables.¹⁴³ The people understood his song, because, as Edivaldo explained to me, "*Kapetawã*, the cayman, is our relative. His origin is told in the myth of *Yauxikunawa*, the stingy stranger. He went to get sweet manioc, in *Yauxikunawa*'s garden. *Yauxikunawa*'s wasp persecuted him and he fell into the river, becoming the cayman."

People listened the whole night to the song and when the sun came up they saw, near where they had spent the night, an enormous black cayman, crossing the whole lake with his body. The cayman agreed to let the people cross on his back, asking for game as payment. Each person crossing on the back of the cayman put the animal he caught into the mouth of the giant and crossed. Everything went well until one of the people did not find a better thing to catch than a little cayman young. Enraged with the death of his relative, the cayman turned his back and the bridge was gone. In panic, people shouted to each other across the lake to run from the wild cayman, "go in the direction of teeth!" ("*xetadabanã kayuwe!*") cried those who had crossed, and those who had stayed behind responded, "go in the direction of glass beads (metal)" ("*manedabanã kayuwe!*").

Those who were left at this side of the lake became the *huni kuin*, Indians living

¹⁴³ The cayman's song went as follows: "*hawen yumu naiki hai hai hai haida (2x); hawen tama naiki hai hai hai haida, hawen xeki naiki hai hai hai haida*". "To mix with his vegetables, *hai hai hai haida (2x)*; to mix with his peanuts, *hai hai hai haida*; to mix with his maize *hai hai hai haida*."

in the forest, while those who had already succeeded in crossing the lake became the *nawa*, non-Indians. Concluding the myth, Augusto explains: “the real strangers are our broken half from long ago” (*nawa kuin nukun bais xateni*).

If the myth started with a utilitarian motivation, that of finding better clay, it ends with a preoccupation that seems less so, that of obtaining the ingredients for adornments. Yet these adornments are meaningful, since they indicate the practical orientation and identity of their user. The liking for teeth (and feathers) is linked to an ethos of hunting and to the prestige derived from it, while the liking for beads reveals a fascination for goods that can only be obtained from traders. At one side of the great water there was the forest and its inhabitants, at the other the city and its goods. Jaime (who had recently arrived from Conta in Peru where his father was an acknowledged storyteller) told me a fragment of an old myth in which people travelled through the forest to find a huge tree, “similar to a lupuna tree” (*xunu keska*), which was full of beautifully coloured beads. In one tree you could find them all in abundance, red beads, blue ones, yellow ones, and white ones. Unhappily, this tree had been planted by the *Inka*, and he jealously guarded his beads.

In another myth the conflicting desire of a couple, his want for teeth and hers for beads, provokes their separation. They are walking in the forest and at a crossroad he takes the path in the direction of the sources of the river, where his *kukabu*¹⁴⁴, the Yaminahua live, while she takes the way downstream. The myth starts with the significant detail that is the wife who was extremely beautiful (*hawendua txakayamanã*). They were discussing. ‘Let’s go in the direction of the teeth’ (*xetandabanã kanuwe!*), he insisted. ‘No’, she replied, ‘Let’s go in the direction of the beads’ (*manendabanã kanuwe!*). Thus it went, both calling each other, each trying to convince their partner to change his/her mind and to follow. But it was to no avail. When suddenly *Neabu* realises that he does not hear the voice of his beautiful wife anymore, he climbs in despair to the top of the highest tree he can find and calls her. No answer. She is so far away that she cannot hear him anymore. In distress, *Neabu* falls from the tree and when he gets on his feet again, he has become crazy. The only

thing he says is, 'en ainen, en ainen, en ainen' (my wife, my wife, my wife)'.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, *Neabu* continues his journey, looking for his uncles (*kukabu*), the *basabu keneya* (squirrel monkeys with design), a group of Yaminahua living at the headwaters. On his path, he encounters two women on their way to marry the *Inka*. When they see *Neabu*, they call him. They invite him to eat with them, but he does not say a word. He just sits there on the ground, with his head hanging, slumped against a tree. When the sisters go to sleep, they invite him to sleep with them in their hammocks, but *Neabu* does not react. When they are sleeping, he scrambles for the bones left over from their meal and chews on them like a dog, and then curls up on the ground to sleep. The next day, when they pack their gear and resume their journey, he follows them, hiding behind the trees. Yet (and the story teller smiles), when they finally encounter their *Inka* husbands, *Neabu* screams, "they are my wives! My wives!"

While the separation transformed *Neabu* into a silly crazy creature, his wife is on her way to becoming a stranger. No-one anymore sees her, for she has gone to never return. Her fascination for beads, so strong that it caused her to travel alone, abandoning her husband, was explained to me by the fact that her father had been among those who succeeded in crossing the cayman's bridge and that the real reason for her longing for beads was that she wanted to see her lost relatives (Augusto, Elias Lopes). Thus again, the motivation of a person's moves is the reunion with the closest of one's relatives and the institution of patrilocal exogamy is presented as untenable and problematic¹⁴⁵.

The goods of *Inka* and *nawa*, goods from the enemy, need to be conquered, or else, to be paid for at the price of, like *Neabu*'s wife, becoming oneself transformed into a stranger. Yet the goods one wants from the stranger constitute at the same time

¹⁴⁴ A man's *kukabu* are his maternal uncles: potential fathers-in-law.

¹⁴⁵ Yet, another time Augusto's explanation is different. "You see?", he says with an ironic smile, "this explains why women like beads so much, why all of them want you to bring lots of beads to make them happy (*benimai*). They want to be beautiful, as beautiful as the Shipibo, who have big and heavy strings crossed around their chests, like this, full of beads. We men, on the other hand, we want you to bring a lot of bullets for hunting and to make necklaces of

the most interior structure of social life and of the body. This knowledge of the constitutive presence of otherness in the most interior of self is explained in myth and ritual song (*pakadin*) during the *Nixpupima* and *Txidid* rituals. Ritual songs say the bones are made of *Inkan mane* (beads, metal of the *Inka*), of *xeki bedu* (the eyes, seeds of maize), *Inka's* food. Maize comes from the *Inka*, and semen is made from maize beer. From semen the bones of the child are made. Fire too was stolen from the *Inka*, and with fire culture was created and humanity born.

Pano dialectics of identity and alterity with their encompassing and encompassed moieties play tricks on the anthropologist's mind when trying to classify things and symbols as fixed categories. Because, if in terms of destiny and social philosophy the *Inka* figure is more exterior than *Yube*, the master of the water domain, and the *inu* moiety therefore more exterior than the *dua*, in the end, at an ontological level, the terms are inverted, and the encompassed element becomes the *Inka's* seed, while the encompassing element is its wrapping, *Yube's* skin. Thus, we can say that on one level, that of anthropogenesis, human beings are like 'children' for the owner of the water domain, because water (liquid) is their origin and *Yube* is called 'our parent' (*nukun ibu*), and like affines to the *Inka*, who is called 'our brother-in-law' (*nukun txai*), with whom the *yuxin* will marry after death. On the other level, that of ontogenesis, however, the relation between interior and exterior is inverted, since nothing is more 'interior', more 'own', *kuin*, to a human being than his bones, teeth and celestial eye *yuxin*. Nothing is more *kuin* than the *Inka*.

The encompassing becomes encompassed, while the encompassed becomes encompassing. Thus we see how Cashinahua dualism, instead of fixing the inevitable hierarchy involved in any existing difference, from moieties to age differences and gender, refuses to fix the contours of the balance and to find a vantage point, since a switching of viewpoints is elegantly played out at all levels of existence¹⁴⁶.

monkey teeth.”

¹⁴⁶ According to Dumont (1980), the possibility of an inversion of positions between the encompassed and encompassing elements of a pair is inherent to all hierarchical systems. This possibility manifests itself as soon as the totality to which the relation between the two elements refers is changed. That all dualistic thought systems attribute value to difference is not

Ambiguity in perception, signalling a permanent changeability of being, is played out in the figure-ground dynamics in weaving, while in ritual, gender role inversion lets man assume the place of woman and vice versa ¹⁴⁷. The ambiguity of the *Inka* concept, simultaneously the most self (*kuin*) and most other (*nawa*) of all beings, and the *kariera* kinship terminology, where grandchildren and grandparents call each other by the same terms, repeat the same message of potential equality in difference and opposition. Young and old, black and white, *dua* and *inu*, male and female, all are seen as intertwined pairs of interdependence, points of view and positions, capable of being occupied by any living being at some point, or at another level of existence.

The young will be old one day and the old have been young, but women will never be men, nor will men ever be women. Yet, ritual creates situations of *damiwa* (to cause transformation or to imitate) where people temporarily experience the point of view and actions of the other. Women 'play' (*beyuski*) at hunting and handle guns, bows and arrows, while men 'play' by wearing use skirts, rearing children and menstruating. Humans play or imitate all kinds of birds and animals through body painting, performance and the imitation of their sounds, while at each ritual, moieties constantly invert the constitutive positions of social life: that of host and visitor.

The latent possibility of an inversion in position between prey and predator is another way of not delineating clearly who is who in a given context of interaction. The myth of origin of ayahuasca is a reflection on the complexity of the predatory relation. The myth deals with a systematic inversion of vantage points where passivity and activity alternate rhythmically. The process of role inversion is operated by means of the *genipa* fruit, an instrument of mediation. We will see that it is by means of this fruit that the association between hunting and sexual seduction is made: it is through seduction that the hunter becomes prey.

alien to the data obtained among the Cashinahua. Yet, what this really specific type of dualistic thought reveals is a constant stress, not on the inevitable and openly recognised inequality between the two terms of a relation in their relation to a certain whole, but on the permanent possibility of inversion of roles and position as soon as one changes point of view.

¹⁴⁷ Lévy (1988) gives us an interesting illustration of the techniques used by Shipibo storytellers to indicate a switching of viewpoints in the story. The most common feature is a changing in the pitch of the storyteller's voice, a device also used by Cashinahua storytellers.

The sequence of actions can be summarised as follows: the hunter waits for the tapir under a genipa tree. To the hunter's surprise, the tapir does not eat the fruits, but throws them into the lake where he then 'fishes' a beautifully painted woman. Thus, the tapir 'fishes' the woman and is not shot by the hunter. The genipa passes from hunting bait to sexual bait. The tapir and snake-woman make love to each other. The snake-woman does not eat the genipa, but will use it to transform the fruits into a black paint for body painting. Painting that will, in its turn, serve as bait for the man through the power of seduction of the design.

The hunter, fascinated, forgets his prey and returns home empty-handed; he has become the prey of seduction. The next day he goes back to the lake to imitate the tapir. When the snake-woman appears, the hunter jumps on her as if she were his prey. At this moment, the snake-woman, inverting the game, transforms her predator into prey, enrolling herself, in the form of a snake, around his body. To get out of this perilous situation, the hunter speaks. By means of talking, the prey transforms his predator, the snake, back into a woman who agrees to have intercourse with him. The hunter, however, is therefore not less her prey. He is hypnotised (the snake puts medicinal drops in his eyes), is taken by the snake-woman to the aquatic world. This spell will only be broken at the end of the myth, through the use of *ayahuasca*, since it is under the effect of the brew, that the hunter suddenly realises he is not living in a village of people but in a snake's nest.

Yuxin is another example of the joining of opposites and the inversion of meanings. When seen in relation to the body, *yuxin* is an emblem of alterity, something not belonging to this world, a formless being wandering about without a place to stay. Nonetheless, *yuxin* is also that which makes a body a body, that which gives it its identity, since *yuxin* imbues every single part of the body with agency, meaning and life. "Without *yuxin*, matter turns into powder and ashes." As we saw in the opening chapter of this study, *nawa* too obeys the same logic. *Nawa* is pure alterity, the enemy in relation to *huni* (the people), yet *nawa* also gives its name to Pano sections and nations.

Inka, the supreme alterity, is also *Inka kuin*, a person's eye *yuxin*'s destiny, his coming to one's true self, a self-becoming as much as an other-becoming through

death. In Cashinahua eschatology, the *Inka* village of the dead is described as a village in the style of the ancestors (*xenipabu*). They are the apotheosis of proper being: totally adorned, accumulating all the possible *dau* (ornaments, medicine) one acquires during a whole lifetime. They are covered in the woven cloth with design (*tadi keneya*), wear macaw feathers in their nostrils and wear round earrings of river shells in their ears. *Inka* comes to receive the newcomer in full regalia. As the dead woman's new husband he receives his wife with an instrument only used in the context of sexual seduction: playing the flute. The *Inka* of death, therefore, is *huni kuin*, the most self of Selfness.

4.3. Maize and Nixpu

“(A) man was walking to his field carrying a basket of maize seeds to plant. A maize kernel fell to the ground on the path. The man did not see it and went on. The maize seed began to cry like a child. Another man came along and found it crying on the ground. He picked it up and ate it. In doing so, he saved it, showing he felt sympathy for it. The man who ate the seed planted his field and it yielded great quantities of maize. The man who had left the seed on the ground, planted his field, but nothing grew.”

Wari (Paaka nova, Rondonia), Beth Conklin, 1993: 84.

“But it seems that maize also has knowledge (*ciência*). A person eats maize and throws the cob in the forest, but what is left over turns into a person, because he has this *yuxin*, what do you call it, this seed. The seed stays in the person, it stays to be able to make a child.”

Edivaldo, village leader of Moema.

Among the Cashinahua, as among all Pano people, maize is the ritual food par excellence. It is the first product of a new garden and is the fastest growing of all plants cultivated in the region. The height and vitality of the maize plant is impressive and for this reason it is perfectly suited as an image of youth. It is therefore no accident that maize was chosen as the crucial vegetable in initiation rituals in the area¹⁴⁸. Thus, at the most critical moment of transition during the *Nixpu pima* ritual, the initiates are allowed to consume maize soup only, and this same maize soup will accompany them during the whole period of fasting until they are reintroduced into normal life where fish and meat will be allowed again.

There is only one harvest of maize a year. This contrasts strongly with other garden products which are produced and consumed all year round¹⁴⁹. The soft, green maize has to be collected at one time and needs to be consumed immediately, since the

¹⁴⁸ Erikson, 1996: 292-307. The association between maize, youth and initiation rituals is not unique for the Pano people. Viveiros de Castro (1992: 348-349) gives examples from the TeNetehara ('Maize festival' in Wagley, 1977: 195; Wagley & Galvão, 1949: 125-27) and Guarani ('Baptism of maize' in Nimuendaju, 1978: 107-8), where maize is equally used as the key symbol for rapidly growing adolescents. The same association can also be found among the Ge, as, for example, among the Kayapó-Xikrin (Vidal, 1977).

¹⁴⁹ Erikson (1996: 292) on the Matis and Romanoff (1984: 96-7) on the Matses.

ripe grains harden within a month¹⁵⁰. The 'time of green maize' (*xekitian*, from December to January) falls during the rainy season, which explains why both *Nixpu*, and *Txidín* are performed during the same month. The link between these rituals and the weather has been made explicit in the myth of the theft of the sun (fire) by the vulture.

The *Txidín* and *Nixpupima* songs elaborate an intimate link between maize and the *Inka* (*Inkan xeki*, *Inka's* maize), while the myth of the theft of fire and cultivated plants gives special attention to maize and fire as the most difficult of items to be stolen from the *Yauxikunawa*. A juxtaposition of the songs with the myth justifies the stipulation of a identity between the stingy *Yauxikunawa* and the *Inka*, original owner of maize.

The distinction between cultivated plants and products collected in the forest is a crucial one for the Cashinahua, a fact I was constantly reminded of each time I tried to ask in Portuguese: "What kind of plant is this? (*Que planta é essa?*)" and received the answer, "This is not a plant, this is a leaf from the forest". (*Não é planta, é folha de mato.*) If in Portuguese the correction of my question did not make sense, in Cashinahua it did, since 'plant' for them is more a verb than a noun, and it is important to know whether a certain plant has been planted by human hands and therefore owned by humans, or whether it has not been planted and belongs, therefore, to the sphere of *Ni ibu* (the owner of the forest). If plants grow without human intervention, they are the work and property of the *yuxibu* of the forest.

Following the associative chain of Cashinahua reasoning, several images of endurance and hardness (or processes of quick hardening) come to form a cluster and are classified under the rubric of *Inka* cosmogonic qualities, as opposed to those related to *Yube* and softness. Thus eyes and seeds are called by the same name, *bedu*¹⁵¹, and associated with semen (*huda*) and *yuxin* (*bedu yuxin*). It is because plants like maize and peanuts have seeds (eyes) that they have *yuxin*; they "want to become a

¹⁵⁰ Although maize is only part of the daily menu during the month of green maize, maize powder can be consumed at any time of the year and was the traditional food for travelling.

¹⁵¹ Cf. McCallum, 1989a.

person". This is why they stay in a person's body, while the rest of the ingested food is eliminated. The 'seeds', Abel explained to me, are *papa* (vegetable semen), like *huda* (semen), they stay in the body to become a child, "*Hawen huda damimiski*", "his semen (that of the plants consumed) always transforms itself (into something else)."

Maize is chosen as the key symbol for youth and initiation for two distinct reasons. The first is the rapid growth of its stalks, a quality the ritual intends to pass on to the initiates. Thus, when the children are running and jumping (*ixxiu*) with the adults (who hold them under the arms, making them jump), they are allowed to consume maize brew only. This jumping serves to make their bones grow and to enhance and test the physical endurance of the youngsters, boys and girls alike. At this point the child is compared, not with maize kernels, but with its tall stalks. Therefore, a strong child who grows quickly is said to have bones made of maize (*xeki xauyai*), while a youth who grows more slowly is said to have bones made of sweet manioc (*atsa xauyai*). The bones are ritually reshaped, both through forced jumping and shaking and also by means of the exclusive intake of the maize brew, which is a symbolic equivalent of the semen that shaped its bones in the mother's womb.

The second reason why maize is chosen as one of the principal ingredients of the *Nixpupima* is related to the teeth of the initiates. There is a formal resemblance between teeth and maize kernels (Cf. Erikson, 1996: 298-299), and the progressive transformation from weakness to hardness is shared by the maize kernel and the teeth. The astonishing speed with which a maize kernel hardens is linked to the quality of hardness that the parents of the initiates want to confer on the new set of teeth of their children. In contrast to the soft milk teeth, lost by the child after only a few years of use, the ritual aims to harden the teeth so as to make them as strong as beads, as strong as metal (*mane*), and to make them similar to *Inka's* seeds. That this result can be obtained through the ritual application of *nixpu* is explained in a short fragment of the myth called "*xeki Nixpupimaikiki*, (the maize who has been made to eat *nixpu*), *ana patximaki*" (and will therefore not be soft any more). This myth illustrates well the systematic juxtaposition of the initiate and a 'maize being'.

A pregnant woman was chewing *nixpu* while planting maize. Once the child was born, it wanted to eat the maize that had eaten *nixpu*, while he, the child, was in

his mother's womb. He found that maize 'interesting'. The people went to look for the maize the boy so much desired, and finally they understood what he was talking about. In the middle of the field of green maize (*xeki patxi*) there is always maize spotted with black. Thus they confirmed what had happened. It was not actually the mother who had eaten *nixpu*, but the maize kernels themselves that were being sowed. This occurred (concludes the story teller succinctly) because the maize (kernel) wanted to be a person.

This short story contains several clues towards understanding the initiation ritual. First of all, a child, or any being who wants to be a 'person', wants to eat *nixpu*. The result of this consumption is to become a being with the *keneya* (with design) quality. Since only *huni kuin*, people brought up following the proper (*kuin*) rules, use and know true design (*kene kuin*), such design and the associated *nixpu* become signals of a person's specific ethnic identity. Only after initiation will the child use *kene kuin* (true design). Before that it is only partially painted with *Yaminahua kene* (design from the Yaminahua). This said, we can understand the desire of the precocious child to eat, at once, the combination of maize with *nixpu* or the 'designed maize', in order to become a true, that is an initiated man.

The myth gives us the further information that not only the newborn, but also the maize seed, which is an animated *yuxin* being, wants to become a real person. This fact is illustrated by its eating of *nixpu*, through the planting hand of its planter, parent, owner, creator (*ibu*). It should be remembered that, when *Paketawã* wanted to treat his pets as if they were humans, he did two things. First of all, he gave them vegetables to eat from his gardens, and secondly he made them 'eat' *nixpu*. Both myths in this way stress the humanising, baptising character of the blackening of teeth. Yet, wild animals are said to also chew *nixpu* when they come upon it. This is so, I was told, because once, in mythic time they were *Nete*'s brother's pets and they never lost the habit.

Therefore, the contrast operating here seems to be more that between embodied (*yuda*) and disembodied (*yuxin*) existence, than that between humans and non-humans. *Nixpu* has to do with the strength of the body, with the vital force that is housed in the teeth, as well as with the fixing of the bones by means of their metonymical association with the teeth, which is a visual manifestation of the invisible structure that

sustains the flesh. The ritual of *nixpu* fixes a structure, thus consecrating the successful fabrication, modelling and creation of a new body. Since the word 'body' also stands for the person as a thinking, feeling and living being, it is obvious that we are not only dealing with its physical aspects. While the community is modelling the child's body, it is simultaneously shaping its habits, knowledge and thoughts. This is made clear by the fact that, together with the body's structure, *nixpu* also fixes the child's name and associated eye *yuxin*¹⁵².

Thus the *yuxin* being inhabiting the maize kernel ate *nixpu* because he wanted to become a body; he wanted to acquire embodied agency. At this point it is worth calling attention to the similarity between the act of conception and of sowing plants, a similarity also noted by Isacson (1993: 209) who describes "maize sowing", among the Embera, "as an act of 'sexual eating'." That the same interpretation can be suggested for maize sowing among the Cashinahua is not only suggested by this myth, but also by the ritualisation of the sowing of maize, as well as of peanuts. These plants are sown by men and women together. Men, in a line, make the holes with long sticks, followed by a row of women who throw the seeds in the holes (see also McCallum, 1989a). The piercing gesture of men can be understood as an allusion to the opening up, through sexual intercourse, of women, making them bleed to make them fertile, while the throwing of the seed into the hole might be an allusion to the 'oral insemination' (term borrowed from Viveiros de Castro, 1992) of men by women through maize soup, enabling them in this way to produce semen. The whole process is accompanied by ritual singing¹⁵³.

The epigram that opens this section mentions a similar myth collected among the Wari' of Rondonia. The myth highlights the necessity of respecting the seed for its potentiality to become a person. This attitude resonates well with the Cashinahua ritual obligation to never discard any seeds that have been left over after sowing. The seeds

¹⁵² McCallum affirms that: "Names are eternal. They are endlessly repeated despite the death of the bodies they are attached to. They are like seeds of corn,..., and as long as there are people with true names, the *Juni Kuin* will never end." (1989a: 138)

¹⁵³ The Matis too ritualise the sowing of maize. The planters are dressed in ritual garb, imitating a maize plant (Erikson, 1996).

have to be prepared in a maize soup since, says Edivaldo, “my father-in-law always says that what is left over will transform into a girl, or a boy. It has been left over exactly for this reason. That’s why you should never throw seeds away.”

Another similarity between the Wari’ and Cashinahua attitude towards maize is the care taken in its storage. As other ritual objects, the bundle of maize cobs must not touch the earth (Beth Conklin, 1993: 84). The cobs are tied together in bundles hanging from the roof. The same care is taken with the storage of peanuts, cotton, tobacco, feathers, and with the ritual stools before they are used by the initiates. In their storage place, peanuts and maize are said to live in families, while the different kinds of maize and peanuts are like persons, belonging to different moieties. Thus *Inkan xeki* and *kene xeki* are *inani* (the female branch of the *inu* moiety), while *huxi xeki* (a black variant) is *dua*. Among the species of peanuts, *txudi tama*, *awa tama*, *taku tama* and *dau tama* are *inu*, while *huxin tama*, *huxu tama* and *tunku tama* are *dua*. When a bunch of peanut plants is hung from the beam that supports the roof, a ritual song is sung, which says “*Inkan tsauxun*” (the *Inka* is seated). When the peanuts are taken from their storage place to be sown, a song is again sung over the plant. “Calling its *yuxin*”, explains Edivaldo, “we are baptising the peanuts.” Toasted and ground peanuts are mixed with the maize gruel served during the *Nixpu* ritual.

4.4. The ritual sequence

a. Opening songs

the opening songs of *Nixpupima* are performed in front of Augusto's, the song leader's house. The dancers perform two basic movements, one follows the stream, shuffling up and down along the river, the other circles around the fire. The first song of the first evening introduces the fire and is performed exclusively in the form of a slow encircling of and singing around the fire. The fire is made from pieces of burning wood brought by each participating family from its own hearth to the square in front of the song leader's house. The starting song is called 'the bringing of the fire'.

As I missed this first evening, and taped the song only a few days later, Augusto, the song leader, explained to me what happened that night in a solemn fashion and with few words:

"We sang *pakadin* to bring happiness. The stars had already started to twinkle. They brought their fire to my square. Thus we could begin. We were waiting for our people to arrive, making the stars happy with the first *pakadin*. The parents of the children shouted, happy with their children. I collected all kinds of pieces of burning wood, and piled them up."

The first phrase describes the song leader initiating the song: "the beautiful oropendola dances and sings (*inkaki*)". The name for song leader is *txana ibu*, 'owner (parent) of the oropendola birds (*txana*)', bird known for its capacity for imitating all kinds of songs of other birds. There are male and female song leaders, as well as specific female and male songs, depending on the activities they are intended to accompany.

Since male and female songs do not always coincide, the *Nixpupima* ritual should ideally be guided by two song leaders, a female and a male. During the ritual I attended, no female song specialist was available. The song leader chose his wife to perform that role and systematically whispered the text to be sung in her ear. Because of this limitation, songs that should have accompanied exclusively female activities were not sung properly. This fact limited my knowledge of the female participation in the ritual. The ritual attended by Kensinger in Peru in 1964, on the other hand, lacked

a male song specialist and stressed therefore more the female than the male role (personal communication).

A significant feature of the song consists in the systematic repetition by the group of dancers/singers accompanying the song leader of each phrase he or she sings. Since this feature holds for all songs, I have not repeated the information in the transcription of the text. The alternation of a sentence sung by a specialist with the collective repetition by a chorus resembles other situations where ritual knowledge is taught; such a repetition seems to make the knowledge hypothetically available to all. Nevertheless, to really learn the songs one needs to enter into a formal pupil/teacher relationship with a master, since a constant repetition of songs is needed for the pupil to master the enormous number of songs that constitute a ritual sequence. The pupil has to tie his hammock close to his master's to hear his songs during the night and during the early hours before dawn. He has to accompany the master on trips in the forest to learn about herbal medicine that enhances memory, and has to practice the songs, whenever he finds the time.

I was told by Edivaldo that for the *Nixpupima* to be properly executed, it would take more than a month to sing. The *nixpu* that was performed in the village of Moema lasted twenty three days¹⁵⁴. Not all of these days were taken up with intensive ritual activity. During the days of preparation, songs are sung only at night, but once the intervention on the bodies of the youngsters is at its height, both women and men are expected to sing almost the whole day long. All activities become ritualised. Any material, like water, maize, game, or wood, used in the ritual reshaping of the child's body has to be invoked in song. Because of the extreme importance and difficulty of their work, only older men and women will have acquired enough songs and knowledge to be able to cope with the task.

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Pakadin 1: Taewakinã, txikaimakinã</i> | First Song: <i>Overture</i> , Bringing the Fire to the plaza |
| <i>Txana dua inkaki ê e e</i> | The beautiful oropendola bird is singing (singing in the voice of the <i>Inka</i>) |
| <i>Inka beni kawana yê</i> | <i>Inka</i> is standing up and circling around |

¹⁵⁴ The ritual lasted from 25/12/94, already really late for the green maize, until 17/1/95 when it was abruptly interrupted.

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Inka beni kawana yê</i> | <i>Inka</i> is standing up and circling around |
| <i>Xawan dua Inka beni kawanê ê</i> | The beautiful red macaw is singing and dancing up and down |
| <i>Txana dua Inka beni kawanê êe</i> | The beautiful oropendola is singing and dancing up and down |
| <i>Inka beni kawana yê</i> | <i>Inka</i> is standing up and circling around |
| ... | ... |
| <i>Hawen hedetxia beni kawanê e e</i> | His fan is stirring the fire to high flames |
| <i>Inkan hedetxia beni kawanê</i> | <i>Inka</i> 's fan is stirring the fire to high flames |
| <i>Hawen metsa txia beni kawanê</i> | His fire to bring good luck in hunting is in flames |
| <i>Inka heman kaima nun kawê</i> | Let's go to the plaza of the <i>Inka</i> |
| <i>Heman betsan kaima nun kawê ee</i> | Let's go to another plaza <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Inka heman kaima nun kawê</i> | Let's go to the plaza of the <i>Inka</i> |
| <i>Hidi betsan kaima nun kawêe</i> | Let's go to another plaza |
| <i>Heman betsan kaima nun kawê e e</i> | Let's go to another plaza |
| <i>Txana dua inkaki ya</i> | The beautiful oropendola is singing |
| <i>Hidi txi biba inayê</i> | Let's take a piece of burning fire and carry it to another place |
| <i>Metsa txi biba inayê ê</i> | We are catching and carrying the fire to bring luck in hunting |
| <i>Daya txi biba inayê</i> | We are catching and carrying the fire of work |
| <i>Kene txi biba inayêe</i> | We are catching and carrying the fire of design |
| <i>Inka hemã kaima nun kawê</i> | Let's go to the <i>Inka</i> 's plaza |
| <i>Hema betsa kaima nun kawê</i> | Let's go to another plaza |

The first sentence of the song affirms that the song leader, called by the name of the oropendola (*txana*) bird, sings and dances. To ritually sing and dance is called *inka-ki*. As we have seen in the name of the *Katxanawa* ritual, to ritually dance and sing can also be called *nawa-ki*. The coincidence of this verb with the word for enemy on the one hand, and with the name of the *Inka* deity, on the other, is not an accident. A common characteristic of the *yuxibu* is to only move by means of dancing and to only speak and communicate by means of song. This also holds for their visual expression. As explained by Maria Sampaio, 'design is the language of the *yuxin*' (*kene yuxinin hantxaki*). Other beings speak another language, and specialists are needed to translate this 'esoteric' speech to give it a meaning in everyday language.

The second sentence of the song directly introduces the principal guest of the *Nixpu* ritual: the *Inka*. He is described as dancing in circles on the patio of his own house. The following sentence introduces another dancer/singer, the beautiful scarlet macaw, *xawan*. Macaws are 'intelligent' birds, they are almost as successful as the *txana* birds in the imitation of other bird's songs. They are equally important as furnishers of ritual material, since their red tails used to be indispensable materials for the fabrication of male costumes used for dancing. The tails were used as nostril

ornaments as well as to make the song leader's feather crown for the *Txidín* and in other headdresses for the *Katxanawa*.

After the invocation of the celebrating birds which are but metaphors for people, the song says that the *Inka* is stirring his fire into high flames. The fire of the *Inka* (the sun) is said to bring good luck in hunting. The song continues with the theme of visiting: people go to the clean and open square of the *Inka* village to ask for fire. In contrast to the myth of the origin of fire, where the theft of fire led to the killing of its owner and the dismembering of his body, this is a pacific encounter. Here the *Inka* is presented, not as an enemy, but as a generous relative, who shares his fire with his friends and relatives, as the mythical *Inka* did with the harpy eagle and the *txana* birds. The humans are oropendola birds for the *Inka*, not vultures. The visitors take the fire back with them to their home.

The fire is qualified as: "fire of luck in hunting", "fire of industriousness", "fire of design". The ritual invocation of the *yuxin* of fire and of its owner, the *Inka*, is intended to bring these agents of transformation to the centre of the village, where the initiating children are being prepared for adolescence. The principal qualities the singers want to transfer to the children are the industriousness of the *Inka*'s fire, and the gendered capabilities of design for girls, hunting for boys. These songs, sung by the parents of the initiates as they dance together around the fire, are not for the initiates' ears. Before the ritual of the fire begins, the children have to be taken to their hammocks, where they are asked to cover their ears. If an initiate were to listen to the songs of invocation of the *Inka* from the village square, *Inka*'s revenge would be to make the child both literally and morally deaf (*pantsanki*).

The second song brings to the scene the *Tene*, the feather adornment made of harpy eagle feathers which is worn on the back by the initiates at the moment of ritual jumping (*ixtiu*), 'like a basket containing game'. Besides being a description of the meaning of the materials used in the fabrication of this feather ornament, the song is also the first invocation of several proper names: *Yube*, a male name of the *dua* moiety, *Ibã*, another *dua* name, and *Maspan*, a female *banu* name, (the female branch of the *dua* moiety). *Tene*, a male *dua* name and principal theme of the song, is only indirectly invoked, since his identity is disguised by means of the metaphorical use of the word

basket (*peuti*) rather than the literal designation of the pendant worn to the back, *tene*. The personality of *Tene* is said to be that of a quick-witted, intelligent character who has a splendid memory. This quality is invoked in honour of the young initiates, so that they may become like the mythical character, renowned for his intelligence. One notes that, if the first song is dedicated to the invitation of the *Inka* people, associated with the *inu* moiety, the second song is dedicated to the *dua* people, who are preparing their ornaments to receive their guests.

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| <i>Pakadin 2: Pesketa, bixi benimainki</i> | Second song: dancing in circles, making the stars happy |
| <i>Pesketa, pesketa, sabidukun maimun</i> | Broken, broken, circling to the ground |
| <i>Pesketa, pesketa, sabidukun maimun</i> | Broken, broken, circling to the ground |
| <i>Nawa xumu pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The lupuna leaf was broken and is falling, swirling |
| <i>Pesketa peuti, sabidukun mainu</i> | The basket of broken leaves is falling, swirling |
| <i>Xawā dua pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The beautiful red macaw is broken, swirling |
| <i>Pesketa peuti, sabidukun mainu</i> | The basket of broken leaves is falling, swirling |
| <i>Xawā dua maspanee</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Xawā dua maspanee</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Xawā dua maspanee</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Maspan kene ede ede</i> | The Maspan, drawing and singing <i>ede ede</i> |
| <i>Nawa Ibā ni ni ee e e</i> | (We are calling) <i>Ibā</i> by his song <i>ni ni ee e e</i> |
| <i>Mai sene nawati, nawatibu pe e e e</i> | The song of the little <i>nambu</i> bird, his songs are <i>pe e e e</i> |
| <i>Mai sene nawati, nawatibu pe e e e</i> | The song of the little <i>nambu</i> bird, his songs are <i>pe e e e</i> |
| <i>Pesketa pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The broken leaf falls to the ground |
| <i>Yube hi pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The <i>Yube</i> tree is being broken, swirling |
| <i>Xina hi pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The tree of knowledge is being broken, swirling |
| <i>Pesketa peuti, sabidukun mainu</i> | The basket of broken leaves is falling, swirling |
| <i>Pesketa peuti, sabidukun mainu</i> | The basket of broken leaves is falling, swirling |
| <i>Pesketa, pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The broken leaf falls to the ground |
| <i>Nawa xumu pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The huge lupuna tree is being broken, swirling |
| <i>Bixi bedi bedi ma, bixi bedi bedi ma</i> | Making the stars twinkle, making the stars twinkle |
| <i>Bixi bedi bedi ma, sabidukun mainu</i> | Making the stars twinkle, swirling |
| <i>Yube hi pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The <i>Yube</i> tree is being broken, swirling |
| <i>Xawan dua pesketa, sabidukun mainu</i> | The beautiful red macaw is being broken, swirling |
| <i>Xawan dua maspanee</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Xawan dua maspane ee</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Xawan dua maspane, maspen kene ede ede</i> | The <i>crest</i> of the beautiful red macaw, Maspan drawing and singing <i>ede ede</i> |
| <i>Xawan dua maspane</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Maspen kene ede ede ee</i> | The design of Maspan sings <i>ede ede ee</i> |
| <i>Maspen kene ede ede</i> | The crest of the beautiful red macaw |
| <i>Nawa ibā ni ni ee e e</i> | (We are calling) <i>Ibā</i> by his song <i>ni ni ee e e</i> |
| <i>Mae sene nawati nawatibu pe e e e</i> | The song of the little <i>Nambu</i> bird, his songs are <i>pe e e e</i> |
| <i>Mae sene nawati nawatibu pe e e e</i> | The song of the little <i>Nambu</i> bird, his songs are <i>pe e e e</i> |

Two images are central to this song: the lupuna tree (*xunu*) and the feather ornament *Tene*, which is made from harpy eagle feathers (*tete pei*). The lupuna tree is one of the largest trees in the region. If not the tallest in height, the species is certainly the biggest in volume. It is from its tubular roots that the ritual stools (*kenan*) are carved. These stools will be used by the initiates when eating *nixpu*. The second image, the harpy eagle, is *Inka*'s messenger. During the ritual remodelling of the child's body, when the initiates are jumped around by young adults until they are totally exhausted, the children, both girls and boys, are covered in a harpy eagle costume. They are temporarily transformed into harpy eagles.

Harpy eagles are the most successful hunters among the birds of prey. In myth they are notably famous for stealing and eating young children who are left to play alone. When classified among other birds, harpy eagles are said not to be proper birds, but 'bad spirits' or more appropriately, 'harbingers of death'. The complexity of this image becomes manifest when we learn that, in dreams, this bird is not an enemy any more, but appears as one's own eye *yuxin* (*bedu yuxin*). If the dreamer shoots the harpy eagle, he might be causing his own death or that of a close relative. From the above we can conclude that in dream as well as in myth, the harpy eagle is a messenger of the *Inka* who longs for his eye *yuxin* to join him in his heavenly abode.

The ritual intervention is intended to transfer the harpy eagle's power to the initiates, making them in this way less vulnerable to *yuxin* loss and the callings from the world of death. Unfortunately this harpy eagle costume was not produced for the ritual I attended. The only picture of the costume in use was taken by Kensinger in the sixties (see annexed illustration).

The song opens with the image of leaves, falling from the top of the lupuna tree: "Broken, broken, circling to the ground." This phrase was explained to me by the following, descriptive translation: "the leaf is breaking, falling in circles like a feather, swirling like a feather, swirling and falling to the ground." The leaves of the lupuna tree are big and round at the top, their shape reminiscent of that of harpy eagle feathers (*xunu pei isa pei keska*), but this is not the only reason for the association of harpy eagle feathers with lupuna leaves. The harpy eagle, a bird which flies at great altitudes,

builds its nest in the crown of the lupuna tree and the lupuna leaves are his house, his covering.

From the top of this huge tree, leaves and feathers together fall as if they were floating in the air, descending in circling movements. "They fall in circles, as if dancing, as we do". Thus Augusto leads me from the leaves to the feathers, and from the feathers to the movements of the dancers. Further on we will see how the initiates are associated with the life process of the lupuna tree, the tree of life. At this point, they are compared with the broken feathers of the harpy eagle that are dancing around in circles.

The verb *peske-*, to break or cut in pieces, is mostly used in the context of hunting. The game is cut into pieces to be carried home in a basket. The rope is fixed around the carrier's forehead, while the basket hangs on his back. Like the ritual back pendant this rope is called *tene*. There are different kinds of rope: *dunu tene* (snake rope), *himi tene* (blood rope), *tene nixi* (vine rope). The association between luck in hunting and the harpy eagle back-pendant is obvious. It might therefore seem surprising that girls being initiated also use the *Tene* pendants while they are being jumped around by the adults, like little harpy eagles. The answer I received to this paradox was that girls need to work as hard as boys, and that they therefore need the same force given by the bird's *dau*, his feathers. "These feathers will be used by the child during the jumping that will make the child strong and healthy. Therefore, everything to be used on the child must be baptised first." (Edivaldo)

The song continues with a sequence of elements that need to be broken to produce the artefact that will adorn the child while it is being jumped around: from broken lupuna leaves (harpy eagle feathers) the song passes to the carrying basket itself (*peuti*), made in the forest from palm leaves, and from the basket to macaw feathers. The song lingers for a while on the crest of the beautiful red macaw, the crest, *maspan*, being a female name from the *banu* moiety. It mentions *Maspan's* song and design and then goes on to *Ibã*, *Maspan's* brother. "We are calling *Ibã* by his song." After *Ibã's* song come the beautiful songs of the little *nambu* bird (a wild version of the domestic chicken, almost unable to fly and the preferred prey of the harpy eagle). Finally the image of circling and dancing leaves, feathers and persons is repeated.

The stars are said to twinkle with happiness. At this point, the lupuna tree, first called *nawa xumu*, the huge lupuna, is called *Yube hi*, *Yube's* tree. Why should the lupuna be called the tree of *Yube*? The lupuna not only houses the harpy eagle, a messenger of the *Inka*, but in its highest branches also nestles *Yube xeni*, the boa constrictor, one of the manifestations of the mythical snake, *Yube*. Another link between *Yube* and the lupuna tree is the fact that this tree usually grows at the edges of lakes, the habitat of the master of the water world. Linking the sky with the water world, the lupuna tree becomes the mediating metaphor par excellence, as well as a metaphor for the human body itself. This will become evident later on during the ritual fabrication of the initiates' stools.

"Just like a tree with big, strong roots", Edivaldo explained to me, "we want the child to sit quiet and listen. To learn, one has to be able to sit quietly. The lupuna tree has its knowledge (*sua ciência*). It knows how long to live." The next sentence of the song supports this explanation, since at this point the lupuna tree is called *xina hi*, the tree of knowledge. The knowledge referred to is knowledge of life, as well as social knowledge, the knowledge of proper living. In contrast to a wandering *yuxin*, a true body (*yuda*) has a fixed abode. His self is constituted through his links with others. He has become used to the place where he lives and to the food he eats. To get used to another or new way of living is therefore called *yudawa*, 'to make his body (adapt)'.

The lupuna tree lives a lifetime of a human being. The tree is difficult to cut. Myths tell that it has a hard heart, a heart which doesn't die easily (*huinti kuxi*): each time one of the twins had almost finished cutting the tree, the tree recovered during the night. One of the principal intentions of the *Nixpupima* is exactly this: to give the initiates a *huinti kuxipa*, a heart that does not die easily, even when afflicted by illness. The tree, however, also knows when to die. This is another characteristic which the tree shares with humans: it grows, flourishes and, when its time has come, it knows how to die.

Like all the other items cited in this song, the tree of *Yube* is said to be broken. The song seems to invoke an atmosphere of sacrifice, conveying in this way the idea that to have life, one must kill. Just as an artefact is produced from materials that require the killing of birds and the cutting of trees and plants, the jewel amongst human

artefacts, a young child initiate, requires the sacrifice and transformation of other beings, from game and vegetables into mixed food, and from food into a new body¹⁵⁵.

The third song brings us back to a reflection on the relationship between prey and hunter. This song is called 'waiting for our people'. One is waiting for the visitors from other villages, coming from far away to participate in the *Nixpupima* initiation, while preparing a hunting expedition with the intention to catch the little fluorescent turquoise bird, called *xane* (identified by the Cashinahua as *sai-azul*), also a personal name of a person belonging to the *inu* moiety.

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Pakadin 3: Kaibu mananã</i> | Song 3: Waiting for our people to come |
| <i>Kaibu mananee</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Kaibu manana ee</i> | Waiting for our people <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Kaibu manana</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Kaibu manana</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun ee e</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu ee e</i> |
| <i>Xane siã kaimun</i> | We are leaving to find the tail of the shiny blue <i>xane</i> bird (<i>sai-azul</i>) |
| <i>Inka mane baniwen</i> | (It was killed) with the arrow of <i>pupunha</i> wood and <i>Inka</i> metal |
| <i>Hidi xubu pemaki</i> | To beautify the house of the giant |
| <i>Hidi xane tsakaxun</i> | The giant <i>hidi</i> went to hunt the little blue <i>xane</i> bird |
| <i>Hidi xane badiwã</i> | The giant <i>hidi</i> is drying the <i>xane</i> bird in the sun |
| <i>Dua nankepakeí</i> | The beautiful one continues blue |
| <i>Nanke nanke dakani e e</i> | Blue, blue, lying down, <i>e e</i> |
| <i>Nawa unani e e e e</i> | Knowing the prey <i>e e e e</i> |
| <i>Kaibu mananee</i> | Waiting for our people (3x) |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Kaibu manana</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun ee e</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Kaibu manana</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Xane siã kaine</i> | We are leaving to find the tail of the shiny blue <i>xane</i> bird (<i>sai-azul</i>) |
| <i>Inka mane baniwen</i> | (It was killed) with the arrow of <i>pupunha</i> wood and <i>Inka</i> metal |
| <i>Hidi isa tsakaxun</i> | The giant went to kill the bird |
| <i>Hidi xubu pemaki</i> | To beautify the house of the giant |
| <i>Hidi xane badiwã</i> | The giant is drying the <i>xane</i> bird in the sun |
| <i>Hidi isa badiwã</i> | The little bird of the giant is lying in the sun |

¹⁵⁵ See Van Velthem (1995) for the relation between artefact and the fabrication of the human body among the Wayana-Apalai.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Dua nankepakei</i> | The beautiful one stays blue |
| <i>Nanke nanke dakani e e</i> | Blue, blue, lying down, <i>e e</i> |
| <i>Nawa unani e e e e e</i> | Knowing the prey <i>e e e e</i> |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun e e</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun e e</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Kaibu mananee</i> | Waiting for our people (3x) |
| <i>Nawa mata tama</i> | Many people together |
| <i>Kutxadima kutxadima imun</i> | Chewing, chewing, <i>inu</i> |
| <i>Kaibu manana</i> | Waiting for our people |
| <i>Xane siã kaine</i> | We are leaving to find the tail of the shiny blue <i>xane</i> bird (<i>sai-azul</i>) |
| <i>Hidi xane tsakaxun</i> | The giant killed the <i>xane</i> bird |
| <i>Hidi xubu pemaki</i> | To beautify the house of the giant |
| <i>Hidi xane badiwã</i> | The little bird of the giant is lying in the sun |
| <i>Dua nankepakei</i> | The beautiful one stays blue |
| <i>Nanke nanke dakani ee</i> | Blue, blue lying down, <i>e e</i> |
| <i>Nawa unani ee e e e</i> | Knowing the prey <i>e e e e</i> |

The first sentences of the song depict the waiting for the singers' kin: "Waiting, waiting for our people". The repetition indicates the duration of time that is passing while the hosts are waiting. Then suddenly the visitors arrive, they are welcomed with an invitation to eat, expressed in graphic terms: "chewing, chewing, *inu*." The visitor addressed belongs to the *inu* moiety. Only older people call their younger kin by this term, *inun* (the nasalisation indicates the vocative use of the term).

The second image introduced is that of the hunting expedition to catch the little blue bird, *xane*. The scene is no longer the *Inka* village, nor a hunting scene under the lupuna tree, but the communal longhouse of the *hidi* giants. The *hidi* are the inhabitants of the forest before the deluge. Their arrow points are made of *Inka* metal, epitome of resistance and durability. The next two songs, chosen as a sample of a long series of hunting songs, will repeat the same theme, ritually invoking the strength of *Inka's* metal to be used in hunting.

In ritual song language, prey is systematically called *nawa*, enemy. This leads to a considerable ambiguity about what kind of prey the Cashinahua are really planning to hunt: do they mean game or human victims? From the perspective of ritual song,

game becomes human since ritual language deals with game at the *yuxin* level. The same ambiguity is manifest in this song. For the *hidi* hunters, the prey is a bird, the little blue *xane*. The *hidi* want to catch its whole beautiful blue body to decorate their houses. Yet, *xane* is also a person. Thus, we can pose the question the giants *hidi* are, in fact, hunting the initiate, *xane*, seducing him to come closer by means of the imitation of his own song: “*Nawa unani. Ee ee ee ee.*” “‘Thinking of the enemy. *Ee ee ee ee*’. This is how we call *xane*, by his song.”

Through the imitation of the *xane* bird’s song, the name of the namesake child is ‘presented’, ‘baptised’. Its *yuxin* will be present at the ritual operation to fix the child’s name. Not only will the *xane* bird’s name be present, but his feathers, his *dau* (ornament, medicine, power, brilliance) will be there too. If the *hidi* decorate their house with *xane*’s little body, having been dried in the sun, the *huni kuin* use the bird to decorate their harpy eagle costume (*tene*). And not only is the *xane* bird itself called by its song (*ee, ee, ee*), but its blue quality (*nanke*) is called too: “*Dua nankepakei ee ee*” (beautiful, it stays blue, *ee ee*). *Nanke* is a female *inani* name (belonging to the *inu* moiety).

With the feathers and body of the *xane* bird, colourful feathered ‘tails’ (*siã*) were made to hang as decorations on the *tene*, the Cashinahua back-pendant¹⁵⁶ or on the cloth of the song leader. *Siã*, the technical term for the feather ornaments just described, is also a personal name. Depending on the suffix, the name can belong to the *inu* or *dua* moiety. Thus *Siã kutxu* is *dua*, while *Siã dentumani* is *inu*. As a mythical character, *Siã* is famous for his sexual exploits and success in seducing women. The charm of the ritual object wearing the same name, expressed in the colored combination of feathers and in the radiant blue skin of *xane*, has the same power of attraction. Kensinger (1995) notes that in *ayahuasca* sessions, a person’s ‘aura’ or vital power is visualised as a coloured feather crown, decorating the head.

Augusto’s explanation for the use of *dau* (medicine, charm) to decorate the

¹⁵⁶ For rich illustrative material and detailed descriptions of the fabrication of these ornaments, see Kensinger (Dwyer, 1975), and Reina & Kensinger (1991: 40-49). Also see Rabineau who made a museological study of Cashinahua feather art, based on Kensinger’s material (Dwyer, 1975: 86-109).

ritual apparel of the singer is that it gives luck in hunting (*metsapa*): “catching his good luck, making feather tails (with it)” (*hawen dekuya bikinā, Siā wankin*). Small though it might be, *xane* is considered to be a special bird, worthy as an example among all other birds (people). This is why its name was chosen to designate the village leader, *xanen ibu*, “leader (owner, father) of the *xane* birds.”

Myth explains how his beauty is the result of his courage and initiative. The colour reflects an ‘aura’ obtained in a significant during the theft of fire and cultivated plants, that marked it forever (just as *Yube* the moon was marked forever by the genipa of his sister). When the stingy stranger (*Yauxi kunawa*) was shot to death by the joint effort of the inhabitants of the forest, some of these beings were transformed into birds.

The *kumā isku*, *txixka* and *tikun* birds hit the target, and as a result got their beaks painted red with the blood of their enemy. Once dead, the humans/birds cut him open. The scarlet macaw was the first to bathe in the enemy’s blood, which thus painted his whole body red. The others liked his painting very much. Therefore they suggested to try out the gall, but *Yauxi kunawa*’s gall was enormous and nobody had the courage to take the initiative. However *xane* took the gall, tore it apart and bathed himself in its blue liquid. *Xane* became splendid. All the others wanted to become blue too, but there was not much left. The *jacamin* bird (*nea*) came running, in a hurry to share in *xane*’s bath, but he slipped and fell in the ashes, and that is why his posterior is white.

The gall is the seat of social knowledge. A *taxpi yauxi*, a stingy gall (Camargo, 1995: 95) is supposed to be extremely bitter. Paradoxically, a character known for its generosity and sociality, the little turquoise bird obtained its charm, its *dau*, from its opposite, the most bitter gall that ever existed. Thus we have again the recurring image of a continuous mutual predation of one domain over the other. The lack of generosity of the Stingy Giant was seen as a provocation which needed to be avenged with stealing and killing, and *xane* was not afraid of the war painting to mark their victory.

“Leaders are called *xanen ibu*, because others follow them. Wherever the *xane* bird goes, the other birds go. This is so because the *xane* is the highest flying of all birds. He goes far. The others follow because he knows where to find food. He always finds fruits, *pama*, *manixi*, *xana*. The others did not know. That is why they went with him, wanting to eat with him. Thus it is that *xanen ibu* came to signify leader.”

(Edivaldo, *Xanen ibu* of Moema)

b. Working songs

The first three songs were sung around the fire by the parents of the initiates during the opening days of the ritual. On the fourth night the scene changes. The visitors expected have arrived and the singing of a long series of *metsabuabu* songs can begin. *Metsa-* means 'to have completion in one's work', referring especially to hunting and fishing for the boys (*huni metsapa wakin*), but also to weaving, design (*ainbu keneya wakin*) and cooking (*bawaya wakin*) for the girls. The songs, I was told by Alcina, the song leader's wife, are also intended to make the children knowledgeable and gentle (*enaya, yudaya*) and, ultimately generous with food. The *metsabuabu* songs invoke renowned hunters of the animal world to bring their good luck to the children. Thus songs are directed towards the harpy eagle, the river otter (*ariranha*), the bat, the jaguar, the heron, the porcupine and the *hidi*. At the end of the sequence, during the preparation of maize soup, a "maize song" is sung, and finally a "vegetable song"¹⁵⁷.

At nightfall, men and women, most of them parents of the initiates, gather in front of Augusto's house, each carrying a long stick. Men form a line along the upstream side of the square, while women form a line along the downstream side, with the river on their left. They face each other, singing the same song, while shuffling up and down along the river. The men start to sing, repeating the sentences sung by the male song leader, while the women follow the song of the female song leader.

After finishing the first part of the song, men and women lift their sticks and start shouting and hooting, imitating bird and animal calls. They jump and sway in

¹⁵⁷ The names of the songs are: *tetepa metsabeabu* (to make the harpy eagle successful), *hene inawa metsabuabu* (to make the otter a great hunter), *nawa kaxin metsabeabu* (to make the big bat into a good hunter), *txana duã metsabeabu* (to make the oropendola bird a good hunter) *inawa metsabeabu* (the felines, *imu*), *Imu keneya metsabuabu* (the spotted jaguar), *Txaxu imu metsabuabu* (the red jaguar), *Dantan Bitxu metsabeabu* (the heron Dantan, a *dua* child, to take away laziness), *Isapa metsabuabu* (the porcupine), *Mani mani isa baunka* (all kinds of birds, getting their food), *hidi bitxuwa* (the hunting success of the *hidi* giants), *uma metsabuabu* (for the girl to learn to make maize soup, see the quote from song cited above), *yumu bitxuwa* (the harvesting of all sorts of vegetables, sweet manioc, banana, potato etc., as

each other's direction and when they meet in the middle of the square, men and women attack each other with their sticks, shouting and laughing with excitement. Each person imitates, through cries and gestures, a specific animal, associated with the person's name. Thus several *inani* women (named *Uma*, *Pada Aquani* and *Nete*) of the section of the "people of the tapir" (*awabu*), imitate the harpy eagle, shouting "bins!, bins!". They run in the direction of their cross-cousins and attack them with their sticks. Their cross-cousins (named *Yuka*, *Buse Yawa bitxi xeta*, *Yube*, *Bixku*, *Tene*) belonging to the section of "people of the white-lipped peccaries" (*yawabu*), respond with a growling sound, imitating the red jaguar (*txaxu inu*), "Hu! Hu! Hu!", jumping on them, showing their 'claws'.

The song leader named *Isaka*, a name belonging to the section of the "people of lightning" (*kanabu*), imitates the sounds of a deer, "Xe! Xe! Xe!", shuffling towards his wife, called *Same*, a name belonging to the section of "snake people" (*dunubu*). His wife responds with the call of the oropendola bird, "Txan! Txan!" Other men imitate monkeys, while their cross-cousins respond with still another bird's call. Edivaldo comments: "Each one imitates an animal that combines with another one. This is the meaning of two. It is complete because there are two. All animals and birds that exist in the forest have their songs (calls). And so do all the different persons that exist."

This ludicrous game of mutual provocation, imitation of animals and piercing is called *damiwa* (to make one transform), or *bitxuwa* (to poke and provoke one's cross-cousin). To encourage some of their more timid friends, the women call: "Come on! Poke! Let's pierce our cross-cousin!" (*Bitxuwe! Nukun txaita txatxi we!*). The fact that women are associated with birds might be linked to this sexual meaning of piercing. Men say that in fertility rituals, women sometimes use necklaces decorated with bird's (toucan) beaks to suggest erotic aggressiveness. Men say that the sight of a woman with these scratching instruments to be exciting¹⁵⁸.

well as of the non-edible cultivated plants, cotton, achiote and tobacco).

¹⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that, depending on the gender of the anthropologist, different information on the meaning and use of the toucan beak is given. Kensinger understands a knife-shaped instrument, made of toucan bill or anteater claw, and called *ainbu pepa wati* (wife-cause-to-do-thing) to be a 'Wife Discipliner': "The wife discipliner is kept suspended

Laughing, men and women return to form a line, this time swopping positions, the women standing upstream in relation to the men. They start to sing again, and when the song is finished, the animal calls and hooting starts anew. Men and women jump and wiggle in each other's direction until, suddenly, they throw their sticks on a pile. Some men start to hoot, turn their behinds towards the women, and hold their buttocks while hopping. Women also turn their behinds to men, slightly lifting their skirts. Some men strip off their trousers so as to better provoke the women who scream and laugh in excitement.

Up to this, the initiates have been waiting on the patio, watching their parents' play. The play, however, ends quickly and soon the mothers take their children by the arm, leading them to their houses to put them in their hammocks. This is done because the second part of the ritual singing of 'working songs', called 'to make the heron', or 'to pierce' (*bitxuwa*), is forbidden to children's ears. The consequence of disobedience to this rule would be the failure of the ritual's procedure: the *nixpu* paint would fail to blacken the child's teeth and the child would become restless, like a heron, and without the patience to sit and listen to the elders. But before we go to the heron's song, let us have a look at a classical example of 'working songs' (*metsabuabu*).

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Pakadin 4: Tetepã metsabuabu</i> | Fourth Song: The song of the Harpy eagle to bring good luck in Hunting |
| <i>Habi mukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (3x) |
| <i>Nawa tete tenke tabite</i> | The harpy eagle is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi mukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| <i>Tete huxu tenke tabita</i> | The white eagle is shaking its head (2x) |
| <i>Habi mukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Maspan bidi tenke tabita</i> | The eagle with huge crest is shaking its head (2x) |
| <i>Maspan bidi tenke tabite</i> | The eagle with huge crest is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi mukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (5x) |
| <i>Teuinka tenke tabita</i> | He shouts <i>teun!</i> , shaking its head (4x) |
| <i>Habi mukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| <i>Imu bida tenke tabita</i> | The children of the jaguar are arriving, shaking (2x) |

from the eaves of the house as a reminder to the woman of her husband's expectations with regard to her behavior. It may be also worn by men as an ornament in the fertility ceremonies." (Kensinger in Dwyer, 1975: 226) Thus both men and women can use the toucan bill as an ornament during the *Katxanawa* festivities. I would therefore suggest that the 'wife-cause-to-do-thing' seems to refer more to a sexual context than to a work context.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Matxi inu tenke tabita</i> | The <i>gato maracajá</i> (small feline) shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| <i>Txaxu inu tenke tabite</i> | The red jaguar shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Nawa daten tenke tabita</i> | With fear of the enemy, shaking (2x) |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Inu huxu tenke tabite</i> | The white jaguar shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| <i>Himi xidu tenke tabita</i> | Wet with blood he is shaking its head (2x) |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Xatan kaman tenke tabita</i> | The wild dog is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| <i>Matxi inu tenke tabite</i> | The <i>gato maracajá</i> (small feline) is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (3x) |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Nawa ketsin tenke tabita</i> | The <i>gato listrado</i> (small feline) is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Txaxu inu tenke tabita</i> | The red jaguar is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Inu huxu tenke tabita</i> | The white jaguar is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (5x) |
| <i>Kapa inu tenke tabita</i> | The skunk is shaking its head |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabite</i> | With him we are shaking our heads |
| <i>Maka inu tenke tabita</i> | The heron shaking its head (2x) |
| <i>Habi nukun tenke tabita</i> | With him we are shaking our heads (2x) |
| ... | ... |

The song starts with the typical movement of a harpy eagle, shaking its head, looking for its prey, and invites the singers to accompany the bird in its hunting dance. After the harpy eagle (*nawa*, the largest of its kind) other eagles are invoked, the white eagle, the high-crested eagle, each turning its head in search of their prey. The eagle screams when he finds his catch, shaking its head in contentment. At this point, the theme of the song switches to the 'children of the jaguar' (*inu bakebu*), who are said to be arriving. Augusto describes the scene:

"All the children of the jaguar are shaking their heads. The jaguars are shaking. They have found their catch, and they are sticking out their heads. The collared eagle has found a lizard, the lizard is walking and *bux!* The jaguar's mouth, when he kills, is always wet with blood. That is why we sing this song, to make the boys lucky in their hunting."

The next song is sung on the same evening, but only after having played 'the

piercing of cross-cousins' (*bitxiwakin*) and 'the showing of buttocks' (*puinkimei*). The children have been put to bed by their mothers and the song leader lights the fire with the sticks thrown on a pile by the dancers. This next part is not sung along the river, but is danced around the fire, just as the chanting of the previous nights. Men and women circle the fire slowly, for about an hour and a half, holding hands and repeating the names of enemies, game (*nawa*) to be caught.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Pakadin 5: Tetepã bitxiwakin</i> | Fifth Song: "Making the heron" of the harpy eagle |
| <i>Bakã hewã txuduai</i> | The big fish making waves in the water (2x) |
| <i>Txuduin tanai ee (i: yê)</i> | The waves are accompanying (the fish) like a track, waiting <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Bitxu hewã inkaki ee</i> | The little heron swinging, swaying |
| <i>Inkãn kudun tadi sawwexu</i> | It wears <i>Inka</i> 's beige cloth |
| <i>Inka dankupakei aê ee</i> | The <i>Inka</i> sits down, <i>aê e</i> |
| <i>Inka xankada dainkayê ee</i> | The <i>Inka</i> is rattling with a hoarse voice |
| <i>E e e e e ê</i> | <i>E e e e e ê</i> (means it is taking a long time, waiting) |
| <i>E e ê e</i> | <i>E e e e e</i> (waiting, calling the game) |
| <i>Hawen nawa txi ee</i> | The fire of the enemy (of his prey) <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Inu atxi inane ee</i> | She took it and gave it to <i>inu</i> |
| <i>E e e e ê</i> | <i>E e e e ê</i> (waiting) |
| <i>En atxin kebude</i> | Looking at the jacu bird leaving its hiding place, Calling <i>kebu! kebu!</i> . (2x) |
| <i>Kebu dani kebude e</i> | The body feathers of the jacu bird <i>e</i> |
| <i>E e e e ê e</i> | <i>E e e e ê e</i> (waiting) |
| <i>Nawa yamanê e</i> | There is no game <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Nawa yama yama nê e e</i> | There is none, there is no game <i>nê e e</i> |
| <i>Nawa yama yama nêe</i> | There is none, there is no game <i>nêe</i> |
| <i>E e e e ê e</i> | <i>E e e e ê e</i> (waiting) |
| <i>Hawen nawa uin e e e ê</i> | Looking at its prey <i>e e e ê</i> |
| <i>Hawen nawa uin</i> | Looking at its prey (2x) |
| <i>Tidi nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy stamping its paws |
| <i>Tenke pake aia</i> | Shaking its head |
| <i>Txana hi mebiki</i> | On a branch of the <i>txana</i> tree |
| <i>Nai kuke mebiki</i> | On a branch of the <i>kupen</i> tree |
| <i>Edawadi mebiki</i> | On a branch of the <i>edawadi</i> tree |
| <i>Sedekainkidanxun</i> | One after the other, in a line, leaving the branch |
| <i>Hawen nawa uin</i> | Looking at his prey |
| <i>Tidi nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy stamping its paws |
| <i>Maxa nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy with the messy hair |
| <i>Haxu nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy with the smell of a menstruating woman (2x) |
| <i>Yenki nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy grinding its teeth |
| <i>Si nawa uin</i> | Looking at the enemy with its "si! si!" whistle |
| <i>Tenke pake aia</i> | Shaking its head |

The first sentence describes the scene of the heron waiting for its catch to appear. Augusto: "The singers jump and cause the water to move. In this way they call the prey". The song describes the movements of a big fish approaching, and the heron shakes its head with satisfaction. From the shaking of the head, the connection with the song leader, whose movements and song are intended to provoke the appearance of his prey, is made explicit. The song leader, says the song, is wearing *Inka's* cloth. This sentence refers to yet another important item in the preparation of the song leader's outfit: his long woven robe with design (*sampu*). One of the preferred motifs used on the song leader's ritual robe is the enemy's design (*nawan kene*), a name that can as well refer to the prey (*nawa*) as to the the most dangerous and bloodthirsty of all hunters, the *Inka nawa*.

The dress used by the song leader during *Nixpupima* can be qualified as a cloth 'with medicine' (*tadi dauya*). This means that it can be decorated with coloured feathers sewn on the woven cloth (among others, the feathers and body of the famous blue *xane* bird). The long cloth is covered with another piece of cloth (*pauti*), equally woven with design. I did not see this piece of fabric, but Augusto described it to me as being similar to a tubular piece of woven tissue used by women to carry their baby and always covered in design (*haxkanti*).

Since to dress in the clothing of another being means to become oneself transformed into the owner of the apparel. Thus the song signals, by means of such phrases as "wearing *Inka's* cloth, *Inka* is singing", that it is *Inka* who is actually guiding this hunting song. He is 'rattling with a hoarse voice'. The rattle, made of snails, and attached to the song leader's feet, is also part of the ritual outfit. The sound of the rattle is said to call the game. Finally, in this part dealing with the presence of the *Inka*, the song calls attention to the fire around which the dance is performed: the *Inka's* fire is a fire waiting for its prey.

The music evokes the long periods of waiting that are involved in the search of game through onomatopoeias "e e e e e". The song says that a man of the *inu* moiety is eating food cooked by an *inani* woman, of the same moiety. Suddenly the *jacu* bird

leaves its hiding place, betraying itself by its song: *kebu!*, *kebu!*. The feathers of this bird are used in the fabrication of arrows. A new period of waiting is introduced until finally the first big game appears. In this song only two kinds of game are called, the tapir (*awa*) and the spider monkey (*isu*). The tapir is invoked by the following descriptions: “enemy stamping its paws”, “enemy with the smell of a menstruating woman”, “enemy grinding its teeth” and “enemy with its “*si! si!*” whistle”. The spider monkey, “the enemy with the messy hair”, on the other hand, is only called once. This feature of increase songs of never calling the prey by its common name, but of describing it with a wealth of nicknames, is not unique to *Nixpupima*, being recurrent in other ‘game calling’ rituals (*Haika*) where it is not clear whether they are really calling game or preparing a war expedition.

On every evening of *metsapa* ‘working songs’, the session is closed with the same song, the song of the final killing of the game and its arrival in the village. This song is said to “call the death of the prey.” The song called ‘piercing’ (*bitxuwakin*), describes the ritual presentation of the game, called *hantinka*. *Hantinka* designates the open mouth of the prey. This is the ritual way in which a hunter presents the head of his prey to his brother-in-law during an increase ritual or collective hunting ritual: with the mouth held open by means of some piercing object. Sometimes the prey’s head is also decorated. A popular way of presenting one’s brother-in-law with a monkey’s torso is to decorate the smoked animal with a banana in its open mouth and one arm on its head. Thus the hunter is sure to provoke the laughter of all.

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| <i>Tun! Em, daka bitxu tain</i> | Tun! (hooting of the heron) The heron is down, <i>Tain!</i> (sound of a flying arrow) |
| <i>Em daka teten bitxu tain</i> | The harpy eagle’s heron down, <i>Tain!</i> |
| <i>Habaka hantinka</i> | Fish (bone) in the roof of its mouth (3x) |
| <i>Mane kanu hantinka</i> | The metal bow in the roof of its mouth |
| <i>Mane pia hantinka</i> | The metal arrow in the roof of its mouth (2x) |
| <i>Mane haxin hantinka</i> | The metal spear in the roof of its mouth (2x) |
| <i>Xawan hina hantinka</i> | The macaw’s tail in the roof of its mouth |
| <i>Isku hina hantinka</i> | The <i>japó</i> bird’s tail in the roof of its mouth |
| ... | ... |
| <i>Uke nai yukea</i> | It is there in the sky (2x) |
| <i>Nai mexu medanu</i> | The black cloud in the sky |
| <i>Nai mina medanu</i> | Inside the sky |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Hau kea butuxun</i> | Already coming from there, already coming down |
| <i>Hawen nawa keyuxun</i> | Finishing with their game |
| <i>Inka mane benima</i> | Making <i>Inka</i> happy with its metal |
| <i>Kapa hutxa benima</i> | The squirrel's torn feet make him happy |
| <i>Inka xuya benima</i> | <i>Inka</i> happy with the mouse |
| <i>Inka xeu benima</i> | <i>Inka</i> happy with the vine |
| <i>Inkan kama benima</i> | <i>Inka</i> happy with his dog |
| <i>Hawen nawa keyuxun</i> | Finishing its game (2x) |
| <i>Ata nai mantiã</i> | He hunted and piled it all up in a corner |
| <i>Nawa kebi mantiã</i> | Singing, accompanying, piling it all up |
| ... | ... |

The first phrase of the song is paradoxical. Up to this moment, the heron (*bitxu*) songs served to represent the heron as a successful, tireless hunter, so obsessed with fishing that children should not be allowed to hear its song, for fear that they too become as agitated and obsessed with working as this bird. Yet, to close the heron chapter, he himself becomes the prey of the *Inka*. The *Inka* has come down from the sky to kill all his game. At this most dangerous moment of the invocation of the art of killing, it is better to keep the initiates, easy prey, away from the gaze of the *Inka*, looking for his game.

c. Kenan, Initiation stools

During the night, working songs are sung, whereas during the day men and women prepare and 'baptise' all the ingredients for the festival. In the morning, men gather in front of the village leader's house for an expedition to the lupuna tree. They form a line, holding each other's shoulders, with their machetes in one hand. Shouting "Yeah!", they start to walk across the patio, following Augusto, while repeating every phrase he sings.

It is from the tubular roots of the lupuna tree that the initiates' ritual stools will be carved. The stools will be sculpted and died yellow with wild achiote paint by the fathers of the initiates, to be painted with black design afterwards by the mothers or grandmothers of the initiates. The form of the sculpted stool represents the basis of the human body: two legs with a hole in between. It is on this that the child will rest in between the jumping sessions held to harden its body and to make its bones grow quicker. The child will also rest on its stool to be bathed with herbal 'working'

medicine, as well as when its teeth are blackened with *nixpu*.

The sculpture of the stool from the roots of the lupuna tree is a miniature of the human body. The sculpting of its form (*damiwa*) by the father reflects the sculpting and modelling of the child by the father in its mother's womb, a process of form-giving equally called *damiwa* and belonging to the sphere of male gendered activity. When the sculpture is finished, the men will hand it over to the women who will 'fix' its shape through 'body' painting. Only after having been painted will the stool be ready for ritual use. The same treatment given by the initiate's mother will be given by her to the child: it will be painted with black designs before it undergoes the ritual interventions on its body.

The lupuna out of which the stools are carved, possesses qualities which the parents want to pass on to their children. The tree owns the knowledge of how long to live a proper life: it lives as long as a human being. The lupuna called tree of knowledge. Its social knowledge consists em creating strong roots and spend all its life where it has been planted. The tree also possesses the knowledge of the perfect form, reason why it is called the tree of design. The design of the tree's crown is perfectly round and its trunk is strong. These are the characteristics that turn the tree into a the tree of life.

But the tree also has knowledge of life and death, since it is in its crown that the *yuxin* of the eye rest. As long as the *yuxin* live in the tree, there is still chance for them to return to their bodies. Once they have left the tree to enter the path of the *Inka*, they will have gone forever. The disembodied state of the human 'souls' (*yuxin*) who live in or visit the village of *yuxin* who are housed in the lupuna tree, is a state in-between life and death. This is why people are warned of the risk of falling unconscious when passing under the lupuna. When the tree darkens the eyes of people, the eye *yuxin* is liberated to visit other *yuxin* and *yuxibu* who live in the lupuna and might not return.

In the junction of ritual stool and ritual garment one also finds a juxtaposition between the figure of the 'tree of life' with the harpy eagle, messenger of the *Inka*.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <i>Txana dua inkaki yêe</i> | The beautiful oropendola is jumping from one side to another (swinging like a macaw) |
| <i>Inka benikawana yêe</i> | <i>Inka</i> gets up and goes |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Tepumawã inkaki yêe</i> | The parrot is jumping from one side to another |
| <i>Inka beni kawana yêe</i> | <i>Inka</i> gets up and goes |
| <i>Hanamabi awa baneee</i> | Underneath the people of the tapir were born (2x) |
| <i>Inka yami teukin teubainêe</i> | Placing our <i>Inka</i> axe on the shoulder, carrying it, we go (2x) |
| <i>Nawa xumu xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the huge lupuna tree, we go towards it |
| <i>Tepumawã inkaki yêe</i> | The parrot is jumping from one side to another |
| <i>Inka beni kawana yêe</i> | <i>Inka</i> gets up and goes |
| <i>Hanamabi awa baneee</i> | Underneath the people of the tapir were born |
| <i>Inka yami teukin teubainêe</i> | Placing our <i>Inka</i> axe on the shoulder, carrying it, we go (3x) |
| <i>Yube hi xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the tree of <i>Yube</i> , we go towards it |
| <i>Nawa xumu xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the huge lupuna tree, we go towards it |
| <i>Tepumawã Inka xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the parrot of the <i>Inka</i> , we go towards it (2x) |
| <i>Yube hi medeenkibi hi</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> is shrieking, singing |
| <i>Nawan xumu medeenkibi hi</i> | The huge lupuna tree is shrieking, singing |
| <i>Xinan hi medeenkibi hi</i> | The tree of thought is shrieking, singing |
| <i>Hanamabi awa baniii</i> | Underneath the people of the tapir were born (2x) |
| <i>Inka yami teukin teuwainêe</i> | Placing our <i>Inka</i> axe on the shoulder, carrying it, we go |
| <i>Yube hi xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the tree of <i>Yube</i> , we go towards it |
| <i>Nawa xumu xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the huge lupuna tree, we go towards it |
| <i>Kene hi xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the tree of design, we go towards it |
| <i>Tepumawã inkaki yêe</i> | The parrot is jumping from one side to another |
| <i>Inka yami teukin teuwainêe</i> | Placing our <i>Inka</i> axe on the shoulder, carrying it, we go (2x) |
| <i>Nawa isa inkayêe</i> | The bird of the cliff swinging |
| <i>Inka yami teukin teuwainêe</i> | Placing our <i>Inka</i> axe on the shoulder, carrying it, we go |
| <i>Yube hi medeen kibi hi</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> is shrieking, singing |
| <i>Nawa xumu medeen kibi hi</i> | The huge lupuna tree is shrieking, singing (2x) |
| <i>Hanamabi awa baneee</i> | Underneath the people of the tapir were born (2x) |
| <i>Yube hi xinankin xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the tree of <i>Yube</i> , we go towards it |
| <i>Xinan hi xinanki xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the tree of thought, we go towards it |
| <i>Nawa xumu xinanki xinabainêe</i> | Thinking of the huge lupuna tree, we go towards it |
| <i>Yube hi meden inumen yê</i> | <i>Yube's</i> tree shrieking |
| <i>Xina hi meden inumen yê</i> | The tree of knowledge shrieking (2x) |
| <i>Yube hi meden inumen yêe</i> | <i>Yube's</i> tree shrieking |

As in the preceding songs, this song starts with the image of the “one who begins the song”, the beautiful oropendola bird dancing (*inkaki*). The next phrase juxtaposes the oropendola’s character with that of the *Inka* himself, who is said to get up, ready to leave in the direction of the lupuna tree. For the third sentence I received two translations; on the one hand, the parrot (*tepumawã*) of the *Inka*, accompanying the dance and the expedition, and on the other, *Inka's* pleasant-sounding voice (*tepumawã*), singing.

With the fourth sentence we are already under the lupuna tree and learn that it

was under this tree that the people of the section of the “people of the tapir” (*awabu*) were born. To explain this sentence to me, Edivaldo told me the myth of *Huan Kadu yuxibu*, the son of a virgin, who was impregnated by the *yuxin* of a hollow tree while she was cutting firewood. *Huan* is a tree, appreciated for its long-burning firewood (*kadu*). The *yuxin* of this tree appeared to her in the form of a handsome man, who seduced her and made love to her. When her pregnancy became visible, people were curious to know who the father was, but the girl kept her mouth shut.

The girl was living with her brother and his wife, and like all pregnant women, was easily ‘hungry for meat’ (*pintsi*). One day she did not resist to her desire to eat more than had been given to her by her sister-in-law, and took another piece of deer from the hiding place in the roof. The brother’s wife noted the missing piece and asked her husband, “Did you take the meat?”, “No, I didn’t”, was the answer. So the wife started to complain about her sister-in-law. “Why did she have to become pregnant if she has no man to take care of her?” The girl heard the outburst and felt hurt. She felt that nobody loved her and became very sad, thinking nobody loved her. Finally she decided to leave the village, “She was feeling as if she wanted to die”.

Inside her belly, the child started to speak, showing her the paths to follow. He told her he knew the way to the village of his *kukabu*, his uncles. On their way, the child showed his mother all kinds of perfumed flowers, asking her to pick them for him so that he could play with them when he would be born. Thus they went until suddenly, while picking the perfumed *bunka* flower, a wasp stung her right in the eyes, on her hand and on her arm. Exasperated, she told her child that from now on she no longer needed his advice.

But soon she started to ask again, “Which way now my son?”. But no answer. She kept asking and he remained silent. Finally they arrived at a crossing of roads. She had the choice between two broad and beautifully decorated ones, and one narrow one, full of thorns and bushes. As she would discover later, the narrow one was the right one, that of their relatives. One path was decorated with snake skins, all beautifully painted with design, that was “the path of the snake people” (*dunubuaibun bai*). The other was decorated with all sorts of coloured feathers, macaw feathers, toucan feathers, blue parrot feathers. This path was really broad and clean. The girl chose that

one, and walked until they almost arrived at the village.

Suddenly the voice in her womb started to speak again. "Now you are going to die", he said. (She had chosen the *Inka* path.) "What!", exclaimed the mother, "Why didn't you tell me that from the start? Now you listen to me boy, we are going right until the very end!" "In that case," answered the boy, "go to your right, my aunt lives there." When she arrived in the *Inka* village, she was received well by her sister-in-law, who told her about the *Inka*'s custom of welcoming newcomers with a ritual asking them to eat their lice. These lice, however, warned the sister-in-law, are 'in reality' (that means, in the eyes of earthly inhabitants) huge beetles (*pui babe*).

The newcomer started to walk around the village, visiting every single household, and at each hearth she came to, she would be asked to eat the host's lice. The sister-in-law prepared a basket of charcoal for her earthly visitor. She would pretend the charcoals were the 'lice' and in this way avoid offending them. But the *Inka* village was big, and at every new hearth she was asked to eat more lice. When she arrived at the last hearth, there were no charcoals left and she tried to eat a 'real louse'. Not able to swallow the beetle, the woman vomited and thus offended her hosts. They took her and killed her. The *Inka* jump on the corpse to devour it raw, while the aunt makes use of the opportunity to save the child, wrapping it in cotton and hiding it in her cotton basket (*xapun txitxã*). (Jaime Salomão Mateus, Nova Aliança)

The child, being a *yuxibu* child, grows at an exceptional rate and soon starts to run around, shooting little birds and wanting to know everything. One day he is lying with his aunt in the hammock. His hand is wandering over her body. "What is this?", "This is my mouth", "And this?", "This is my shoulder", "And this?", "My belly", "And this?", "This belongs to your uncle", she answers. But the woman enjoys the boy's caresses and lets him continue and they end up making love.

The next morning the boy keeps on asking about everything. His aunt has become tired of his constant questioning. But the body suddenly asks, "Do people die?", "Yes, they do", she says. "Can't they be made to come back?". Irritated she replies, "Boy, you are asking too much!". If this had not happened, the storyteller explains, the people would know how to come back to life, they would know the herbal medicine that can be put in a dead person's eye and cause him to come back to

life. The aunt's irritation, however, made her silence and that is why people die.

Finally his aunt tells him what happened to his mother. The boy, already an adolescent, decides to avenge his mother. He sets up a catapult made from a tree bent backwards and tied with a rope. This done, he takes up position under the tree and pretends to every passer-by that he is being bitten by wasps. When the *Inka*, each one in his turn, approach to help him, he unleashes the bow and transforms them one by one into wind.

After killing all the *Inka*, the boy asks his aunt where the *Inka* left the bones of his mother. "Under the roots of the tree", she answers. The boy goes to find the lupuna and when he finds the tree, sees a pile of bones between her sky roots.

"The boy squeezed juice on each joint of the bones of animals he found, until he discovered his mother. Thus, first of all, ran xae, the anteater. He looked carefully at it and saw it was an anteater who ran away. The anteater thus came back to life again. It had already been eaten, but since the boy was a *yuxibu*, he made *damiwa* (made it transform). Then he made another, who turned out to be a monkey (*du*), and thus it went until he got hold of the bones of his mother. His mother came, and he spoke to her, "Look mother, I told you not to come to this place, but it is all right, you came anyway. But now we go away. My aunt stays. She feels sorry for her people." (Edivaldo)

Because his aunt does not stop crying, the boy decides to bring the *Inka* back to life. He blows in the direction of the dead *Inka*, who jump up and run home. *Huan Kadu* and his mother go away, looking for the path of his uncles, *kukabun bai*. But before they go, *Huan Kadu yuxibu* makes all the animals he has resuscitated blacken their teeth with the *Nixpu* plant. This procedure is intended to fix the structure and form of the beings brought to life by the mythical hero. In the same way, the form and structure of the initiates' bodies, which have been collectively remodelled through ritual intervention, will be fixed with *nixpu*, at the end of the ritual.

The themes of death and resurrection dealt with in this myth are meaningful in the context of our presentation of the ritual. First of all, we have the pregnancy of a virgin who has been fertilised by the *yuxin* of a hollow tree. This mythic theme is a symmetrical inversion of the mythic theme that locates the origin of humanity in a hollow tree. If, in the myth of the hollow tree, the tree represents the female role of the womb, in this one, the hollow tree performs the male role of fertiliser. The myth of

immaculate conception lets a *yuxibu* being substitute human men in their role of reproducers. In combination with the ritual stool which is produced through ritual actions that make it into a replica or miniature of the human body, the two myths of human conception through the interference of the trees and tree *yuxibu* enhance the evidence of a community of 'life essence' between human beings and trees. Yet, the resulting being is not a proper human being; it is a *yuxibu*.

Other important theme in this myth is the image of paths to be followed in life. The image of paths and the importance of following only those one knows, is a key metaphor in Cashinahua thought about proper living. To choose the right paths means to avoid the dangers of the forest, such as otherness, and death. All the processes of other-becoming, to become a *yuxin* being when getting lost in the forest, a stranger (*nawa*) when following the path of beads (*manendabanã*), or a prey in the claws of cannibalistic *Inka* people, are explained by one's wandering around too much and alone in foreign territories. The person gets lost and his loneliness makes him want to die. Thus the person can become tempted to follow the lure of glittering beauty and forget that the paths that lead to one's kin, are different; they are narrow and small.

Bai means path as well as garden and stands therefore for known human space, one hewed from the surrounding dark and unknown forest. Design (*kene*) is composed of paths (*bai*) that cover the woven fabric or painted body. The layout of design on the decorated surface suggests a continuation of the patterned and labyrinthine paths of design beyond their support and points in this way to other territories still to be mapped. The word for design (*kene*), on the other hand, also means that which encloses (like the walls of a house), that which protects and marks off the known space from the unknown.

Design can be a guide, drawing paths to be followed (as in *ayahuasca* sessions where the song is said to draw paths for the eye *yuxin*, or in the warning that one should stay 'inside design' in order not to lose oneself in the *yuxin* world). However design can also delude, causing the eye *yuxin* to follow paths that will lead to death. The synaesthetic capacity of song to draw paths in front of the listener's eyes is not restricted to the context of *ayahuasca*. When following the calling of *yuxin* animals, the same is said to happen: the *yuxin* animal 'prepares for you the pathway of the sky'

(*mia nai bai wai*). Thus looking and listening are intimately linked for the forest wanderer seeking to find a way out of the forest. The inherent danger is in using a path that will lead to unknown territory, which is the case in the myth recounted above, where the decorated paths led the visitor right into the village of the enemy.

The mother is killed, but her bones are left intact under the lupuna tree. At this point, the myth catches up with the sentence in the song: “underneath the people of the tapir were born”. Because the bones of *Huan Kadu*’s mother had not been toasted, ground, and consumed¹⁵⁹, her eye *yuxin* was still living in *Idudia*, the village of *yuxin* housed in the crown of the lupuna tree. The *Idudia* village represents the intermediate stage and resting place for the *yuxin* of the dead on their way to the sky village of the *Inka*.

Only the *yuxin* who, through their name, belong to the tapir section (*awabu*) of the *inu* moiety, go to live in the lupuna tree. Other *yuxin*, like the people of the peccary section (*yawabu*) of the *dua* moiety, go to live in *Senendia*. This is the village of the dead situated in the *copaiba* (*buxex*) and *cumarú* (*Kumanewan*) trees. The logic of this division can be explained by the trees’ specific characteristics: the lupuna tree belongs to the *inu* moiety because the tree is considered to be ‘larger’ than the *copaiba* and *cumarú* trees.

The *Inka* village in the sky can never be visited by the ‘souls’ (*yuxin*) of the living. Once the *yuxin* enters into relationships of sharing (through food and sex) with the *Inka*, there is no way back to the living. This is not the case for human *yuxin* visiting the villages of *Idudia* and *Senendia*. The eye *yuxin* of seriously ill people are said to travel to the villages in these high trees where they visit their dead kin on transit. The recovered patient comes back with stories about how they are doing. I was told by one woman that she had been there once, during a temporary loss of consciousness due to high fever. She told me that the village of the lupuna tree was beautiful.

¹⁵⁹ The toasting, grounding and consumption of a dead person’s bones used to be the traditional procedure for detaching the eye soul from the dead person’s bones in Cashinahua funeral rituals. Montag, R. Montag, S., & Torres, P. 1975. *Endocanibalismo Fúnebre de los Cashinahua*. ILV, Yarinacocha (Datos Etno-Linguísticos No.45).

The choice of the wood of the lupuna for the fabrication of the stools is partially explained by this myth. According to Edivaldo, the myth explains why the lupuna is called 'tree of life'. *Huan Kadu* resuscitated dead animals and his own mother from their bones and made them blacken their teeth with *nixpu*. All this was accomplished with the lupuna tree and all its inhabiting *yuxin* and *yuxibu* as witnesses and accomplices, since the *yuxin* to be recovered were actually living in the lupuna's crown. The lupuna allowed them to descend and come back to life. To express his gratitude for this generosity, *Huan Kadu* promised the tree a long and healthy life:

"He baptised the *xunu* (lupuna) because he discovered his mother there. When he took his mother back, he told the *xunu* that it would be all right for the rest of its life, that there would be no problems for it. Sometimes the tree falls or rots, but only if it is standing in soft clay, than the tree rots. But normally the tree is really resistant. The lupuna tree is tall and heavy. It stays where it belongs and does not wander to other places. It has knowledge. It is also part of his knowledge not to stay alive for too long. Every *xunu* has the life of a person; they stay alive as long as old people do." (Edivaldo)

Since the tree is considered to be so strongly imbued with consciousness and *yuxin* agency, the song is thought to be indispensable to invoke the benevolence of the tree, announcing the woodcutters' arrival. Besides its capacity of sending dizziness, the tree is also known for its poisonous sap, out of which an extremely toxic brew, called *xuma* or *xumpa* was prepared¹⁶⁰. This brew was only prepared by powerful shamans, Leôncio from Conta assured me, because one needs strong songs to call the drunken person back. Those who take the brew become like crazy people. They run crying into the forest, and climb into the lupuna tree where they communicate with all kinds of *yuxibu*. They vomit a lot and, after a few hours, fall unconscious. "It is dangerous, yet many bird songs were learned this way" (Leôncio)¹⁶¹. About the walk towards the lupuna, Edivaldo still explains:

"The lupuna tree already knows we are coming, because it has been baptised. It speaks to us through its song. When the tree wants to sing, wind plays through its

¹⁶⁰ I collected several comments on this brew from Antonio, Augusto and Leôncio. Cf. Capistrano (1941: 172-173).

¹⁶¹ Shipibo shamans are reported to make poison from the tree's sap. This poison was used against their enemies (Roe, 1982: 118-9; Karsten, 1964: 198-202).

leaves and you can hear wailing from its branches. Every tree has its own song. That is how they communicate with each other.”

But let us return to the song. The men are armed with machetes called the *Inka's axe (Inka yami)*, go in the direction of the tree, calling the tree by its various names: “tree of *Yube*”, “huge lupuna”, “tree of thought”, “tree of design”. These names are alternated with the names of the singing/dancing birds (a metaphor for the human dancers). Only one of the lupuna tree’s names still needs further explanation: that of “tree of design”. “This design has been given to the person who went to look after it”, says Edivaldo, the principal interlocutor during this part of the transcription. Thus, when *Huan Kadu* ‘baptised’ the tree by showing him how one recreates a being from its bones, the tree offered him its design in return. This design will be painted on the initiation stools.

“The crown of the lupuna is round like a straw hat. None of the tree’s branches stick out. They are all aligned, and therefore its design is perfectly round. The tree can grow very tall, but its crown will always be round. In the same way we want to sculpture our children’s stool, like a *xunu*’s crown. Later our wives will paint them with its design. He gave it to us. That is why we use it.” (Edivaldo)

After the song quoted above, the men leave the village to cut the stools of their children from the tubular roots of the lupuna tree. They run to the forest in a line, while shouting loudly. Arriving at the lupuna tree, they smear achiote on their foreheads to protect them against *yuxin* attacks, take their machetes and start cutting hunks of wood out of the tubular roots. At every strong beat, the woodcutters emit equally strong, victorious cries. The basic shape of the stool is cut *in loco*, under the tree.

When almost ready, Augusto arrives. Bark is stripped from a nearby tree and ropes are made to hang the stools on the cutters’ back. The song leader initiates his song and the others follow. This song is sung by the woodcutters on their way back to the village, carrying the stools from their shoulders.

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|----------------------------------|--|
| "Hiiii! He! Hi! Heee!"Hiiii! He! | Hiiii! He! Hi! Heee!"Hiiii! He! Heee! |
| <i>Txana dua Inkaki heee</i> | The beautiful oropendola is swinging <i>heee</i> |
| <i>Xina hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of knowledge is coming and going |
| <i>Yube hi sakukainêe</i> | <i>Yube</i> ’s tree is coming and going |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i>Txana hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of the oropendola bird is coming and going |
| <i>Xane bawa dixinêe</i> | The fluorescent blue <i>xane</i> bird, (has a) red macaw star (on the beak) |
| <i>Tamanee kainêe</i> | Going, always going <i>eee</i> |
| <i>Tamane kainêe</i> | Going, always going |
| <i>Yube hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> coming and going (2x) |
| <i>Xina hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of thought coming and going |
| <i>Kene hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of design coming and going |
| <i>Daya hi sakukainêe</i> | The tree of work coming and going |
| <i>Xane bawa dixinêe</i> | The fluorescent blue <i>xane</i> bird, red macaw star |
| <i>Tamane e kainêe</i> | Going, always going (2x) |
| <i>Xawan dua Inkaki eeee</i> | The beautiful red macaw coming and going <i>ee ee</i> (2x) |
| <i>Xane bawa dixinêe</i> | The fluorescent blue <i>xane</i> bird, red macaw star |
| <i>Tamane e kainêe</i> | Going, always going (2x) |
| <i>Nawa xumu sakunkainêe</i> | The big lupuna tree coming and going (3x) |
| <i>Yube hi sakunkainêe</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> coming and going |
| <i>Xina hi sakunkainêe</i> | The tree of thought coming and going (2x) |
| <i>Nawa xumu sakunkainêe</i> | The big lupuna tree coming and going (2x) |
| <i>Toixwã Inkaki he he</i> | The <i>curupião</i> bird goes jumping, from one side to the other |
| <i>Tamane enkaine</i> | Going, always going (2x) |
| <i>Nawa xumu sakunkainêe</i> | The big lupuna tree coming and going |
| <i>Yube hi sakunkainêe</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> coming and going |
| <i>Xina hi sakunkainêe</i> | The tree of thought coming and going (2x) |
| <i>Hi!, Hi!, Hu!, Hu!</i> | <i>Hi!, Hi!, Hu!, Hu!</i> |

The 'tree' (stool) is said to dance and jump around, going, always going. Thus the stool is carried from the forest to the village. The stool is called by the names: "tree of knowledge", "tree of *Yube*", "tree of *txana*", "tree of design", and "tree of work". These are the qualities one wants to transmit to the children. Beautiful birds, metaphors for the beautiful children, are called too, alternating with the names of the tree. In this context in which the pieces of sculpted wood are addressed as if they were living trees, it is useful to call attention to the fact that the stools are not cut from a felled, dead tree, but from the tubular roots of a tree that is still alive. The metonymic link of the different stools of each child to be initiated with one and the same big mother trunk is important here. The lupuna tree has been 'wounded', but she stands firm after the stools, her children have been carved from its flesh.

When the men arrive back at the village, they hang the stools from the beams of the roofs of their houses and they rest from their heavy labour. That night chants are sung again, songs in which game, fire and firewood are invoked: "Make firewood!

Make firewood!” (*Kadu amawe! Kadu amawe!*), “Make the oropendola’s firewood, make the arrow’s firewood”. The closing sentence of the firewood song is a sending away of the *Inka*: “the *Inka* have gone, they have gone to the middle of the sky” (*Inkan naman kaxubin nai naman kaxibi eee*).

The next day, men take their stools with them to an abandoned house at the edge of the village. There the finishing touch is given, far from the eyes of the children and the women. When the stools are ready, they are brought into the village. The men form a line, with the song leader at the head. They sing:

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| <i>Tasa deti kenaneeee ee</i> | The stools in a line <i>eeeeee ee</i> |
| <i>Tasa deti kenane</i> | The stools in a line |
| <i>Tadan kumun kenanee ee</i> | The stool of the mushroom on a rotten tree <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Tabebaya kenaneeee</i> | The stool with two legs <i>eee</i> |
| <i>Tada mai kenane</i> | The stool sinking into the ground like rotten wood |
| <i>Tada mai kenaneeee</i> | The stool sinking into the ground like rotten wood <i>eeee</i> |
| <i>Tapeseti kenanee e</i> | The stool with two legs and a hole in between <i>eee e</i> |
| <i>Tapeseti kenane</i> | The stool with two legs and a hole in between |
| <i>Tasa deti kenaneeee</i> | The stools in a line <i>eee</i> |
| <i>Tada mai kenaneeee e</i> | The stool sinking into the ground like rotten wood <i>eeee e</i> |
| <i>Tapeseti kenane</i> | The stool sinking into the ground like rotten wood |
| <i>Tasa deti kenaneeee</i> | The stools in a line <i>eee</i> |
| <i>Yube hi kenanee e</i> | The stool of the <i>Yube</i> tree <i>ee</i> |
| <i>Nawa xumu kenane</i> | The stool of the big lupuna tree |
| <i>Adu hiti pakexun eeeee</i> | It’s already finished, ready to be hung <i>eeeeee</i> |
| <i>Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi Hi!</i> | <i>Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi!! Hi Hi!!</i> |

At this point the parallel between the little initiates and their stools has become complete. If in previous songs the initiates were associated with both predators and prey, alternatively occupying each position, at this point of ritual song and action the idea of the conception and reshaping of their body becomes central.

When ready, the stools are shown to the women and children. The stool is a replica of the lower part of a person’s body, basic structure resumed by the song as: “a stool with two legs and a hole in between.” The stool invokes the stability of a rooted being. Like a tree the child has roots in its village. Its self is made from the ties that bind it to its kin, it is “an adapted, accustomed body” (*yuda yudaya*).

The initiate's body is the most beautiful of all artefacts, produced by means of

the same techniques as other products of human industry. The father models the foetus in its mother's womb like one models figures in clay, or he sculpts it like one does with wood. The fluids are cooked to form a baby in the mother's womb, in the same way as raw vegetables and meat are transformed into food, the food that will become a person. The skin around the bone structure is woven like women weave hammocks, skirts and other cloth.

If the body is an artefact, it can also be said that the artefact is a model, a miniature of the body, or an extension of it. Thus the back-pendant (*tene*) is compared with a carrying basket, with swirling leaves falling from a tree, swirling feathers broken from the bird's body and with the dancers swirling in circles. This image might be an allusion to the dancers who are actually singing the song around the fire, but also to the initiates who will use the back-pendant when being jumped around violently until they are completely exhausted and unable to stand on their feet, that is, almost 'broken'.

The same juxtaposition occurs in this song. The stool stands on the ground like two legs, or like a mushroom resting on a rotting tree. It can also be said that, just as mushrooms nourish themselves on rotting trees, the stool, once cut from the tree and therefore transformed into 'rotting trees', nurtures the initiate.

All food and artefacts maintain a link with their owner, with the hand that made them, as well as with the material from which they were made. To make this link operative for the purpose of the ritual, the owners and processes of fabrication of items used on the child are invoked through their appropriate songs. It is in this way that the ritual becomes an eloquent synthesis of the basic principles of Cashinahua ontology, since it is a re-creation of the Cashinahua cosmos through the ritual naming in song of all the artefacts, plants, animals.

After showing the stools to the community and hanging them from the beams of the roof, the men start bombarding the women with wood chips and clay, who respond with more clay, mud and grass and a lot of animosity¹⁶². The next day, the men take

¹⁶² Kensinger's report (field notes) on the final touch given to the stools, however, is slightly different. The men finish their work on the stools near to the dance area. The men drink

the stools to the river to bathe them. In the same way as the initiate will be washed and painted with achiote and real design (after the black genipa design, still signalling their transitory position, has been washed away), the stools will now be ritually washed in the river and dyed yellow with wild achiote, the bark of the *maxepa* tree, planted by *Ni ibu* (the owner of the forest). The bathing is said to give ‘voice’ to the newly produced creature.

Augusto starts to sing and the men walk, singing, to the river:

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|---|--|
| <i>Yube hi sakukaini he</i> | The tree of <i>Yube</i> goes walking, dancing, <i>he</i> |
| <i>Txana hi sakukaini he</i> | The oropendola tree goes walking, dancing, <i>he</i> |
| <i>Nawa xumu sakukaini he</i> | The big lupuna tree is arriving, swirling, <i>he</i> |
| <i>Txana hene imei sakukaini</i> | We are bathing (it) with oropendola water, arriving, swirling |
| <i>Hui hene imei sakukaini he, he, he</i> | We are bathing (it) with the water of the voice, swirling, <i>he, he, he</i> |
| <i>Badiwaka namaki, he</i> | We are going to the middle of the <i>Badiwa</i> (Envira River, the sun river), <i>he</i> |
| <i>Badiwaka namaki butute</i> | We are descending into the river of the sun, in the middle |
| <i>Txana hene namaki butute</i> | We are descending into the oropendola water, in the middle |
| <i>Xuduaka namaki butute</i> | We are descending into the middle of the <i>xuduaka</i> river |

The owner of the stool is invoked through its names, “tree of *Yube*”, “tree of the oropendola”, “huge tree”, and the stool is washed in the “water of the oropendola”, “the water of the voice”. The stool is again hung from the roof to rest for one more day, after which it will be painted with design by the women. Like a initiate, painted with real design when the transitory period has passed, the stool is painted with real design (*kene kuin*)¹⁶³, using a forest leaf (*txaxuanti*). The motifs used on the stool are

fermented manioc beer and laugh with each others’ sexual jokes and insults. Intermittently they repeat the “display of buttocks” (*puinkimei*), not to provoke women this time, but to provoke their brothers-in-law. The showers of grass, wood chips and clay already began during the work on the stools. The picture painted by Kensinger enhances even more the link between the sculpting of stools and the sculpting of their babies’ bodies.

¹⁶³ It should be noted that this painting does not correspond to the first introduction of a newborn, since the baby is for that occasion painted black, with designs only on its face. Upon leaving its seclusion, the initiate will not be decorated in this way either. It is only when totally reintroduced into normal social life, when the black paint has been washed off and when the child is allowed to eat normally, that he or she will be covered with a thin layer of achiote and

called "lupuna's design" (*xunu kene*). These designs cover the lupuna stool with round angular designs that adjust themselves to the circular surface, "just like the twigs and leaves in the crown of the lupuna tree". But inside this global frame, the same motifs are used as those used on people: "where to place the placenta" (*xamanti*), "cayman's tail" (*kape hina*), parrot's eye (*txede bedu*), thorn (*maemuxa*), monkey's arm (*isu meken*) etc. Waiting to be used, the stools are again hung from the beam of the house.

d. The preparation of food

Once the stools are ready, men prepare themselves for a collective hunting trip (*Haika*). Such a hunting trip can last from one or two days to almost a week, depending on the quantity of meat required for the festival. Since this *nixpu* ritual was held in a rather small village with few visitors, the men limited themselves to a one day hunting trip¹⁶⁴. Because the ritual initiative for the hunting did not come from the men, the *Haika* was said to be Yaminahua. Among the Yaminahua, I was told, it is the women who explicitly send the men off to hunt for them, asking them in song and metaphorical language for specific kinds of game. Thus to ask a man (usually one's cross-cousin) to bring mushrooms (*Txaitan, yamede ea kunu benaxun!*), actually means that one is asking him to find and kill a turtle, while to ask for a fallen tree means that you want a cayman to eat (*Kukan, yamede ea tada benaxun!*).

At the end of the day, when the women hear the armadillo tail trumpet (*yaix hina*) sounding from the forest, they know that the men are arriving and gather to make themselves up to receive the men. They paint themselves with achiote and lipstick. The designs used are not the traditional 'proper design' (*kene kuin*) used in the increase, song leader's and teeth-blackening rituals, but are *Yaminahua kene*, also called "designs to make one happy" (*benemai kene*)¹⁶⁵.

the 'real' genipa designs, *kene kuin*, designs used by those who 'already have their own voice'.

¹⁶⁴ In contrast, during the *nixpu* ritual attended by Kensinger, the men went hunting for several days and came back with smoked meat. Upon their return a women's increase ritual, *Katxanawa*, was held as an intermezzo between the *Nixpupima* activities.

¹⁶⁵ At this point it is important to clarify that the *Nixpupima* initiation ritual is a long ritual sequence that lasts from twenty days to a month, and in which other more punctual rituals can be inserted (it could therefore even be called a festival instead of a ritual). Collective hunting

During the day, the women have prepared all kinds of vegetables, sweet manioc, banana and maize. All these activities are also accompanied by *Nixpupima* songs. One of the principal characters invoked in the “vegetable songs” is the squirrel *yuxibu* (*kapa yuxibu*). This mythological character gave the knowledge of vegetables to his wife's family. At that time people had *Nete*'s knowledge of planting, and were forced to live on clay like animals. The son-in-law ‘transformed (made) all sorts of plants (*yunu xadabu damiwaniki*) and people lived in abundance.

Yet, each time the industrious squirrel-husband was absent, working in his garden, his wife betrayed him with her human ex-husband. At night, the *yuxibu* of the squirrel, distrusting his wife, transformed himself into a bat (*nawa kaxi*) and flew home. From the height of the roof he saw his wife, lying down in her hammock with her lover, under the eyes of all her close relatives. Infuriated, the *yuxibu* came down, cut its rival's penis and disappeared in the night. The next morning, coming back, in human shape, from his gardening expedition, he offered his wife a packet made of banana leaves (*kawa*), containing the lover's penis, mixed with that of a tapir. Not aware of what was happening, the wife eats the meat and dies.

People tried to shoot the man, but the squirrel *yuxibu* had already transformed himself back into a bat and the arrows only hit the vegetables. Flying away, the squirrel *yuxibu* also took with it the *yuxin* of the plants, and all the vegetables ‘wounded’ by the lost arrows rotted away.

The *pakadin* song invokes the Master of squirrels (*kapa yuxibu*) and asks him to make the vegetables grow. Another song is meant to make the *Hidi* giant ancestors happy (*nukun hidi benikawanee*), they too are protectors of the plantations. (“When the *Hidi* are happy, the *Inka* makes the sky thunder”, goes a saying). And finally, the songs invoke the *Inka*, asking them to be generous with his maize. The preparation of the

expeditions form part of the preparatory procedures of every ritual or festival held by the Cashinahua. All collective hunting expeditions are preceded by the ritual calling of game by the hunters on the eve of the expedition. The ritual procedures and songs of this preparation and of the distribution of the catch vary however. The increase rituals (*Katxanawa*) are one way of organising collective hunting expedition, the *Haika* expeditions are another way. *Haika* rituals are nothing more than the ritualisation of the collective hunting expedition. There are several modalities of *Haika*. This one is said by the Cashinahua to be a Yaminahua version because the

ritual maize soup to be offered to the initiates calls for more singing than the other vegetables. When the women go to harvest maize, they sing:

“Hey, sun, what kind of maize is this? (*he hawa xekimen badi?*). Bees are hiding in the leaves of the maize of the sun, there are a lot of them (*badi xeki peiki mani mani nikabu samuntaniii*).” And, “What kind of maize are you? (*min hawa xeki xekima*), design maize (*kene xekiki*)? Design maize, wrapped up in your leaves. There are lots of them. What kind of maize are you? *Pani xeki* (the type of maize that ate *nixpu*). You are *Inka* maize...”

When the women go as a group to the river to fill their kettles with water, they paint their foreheads red with achiote. They also paint two thin lines from the ears to the side of their mouth with the red paint (Kensinger fieldnotes). The achiote paint belongs to the domain of *Yube*. Achiote paint is used whenever one enters into contact with beings from the forest and the water world. Thus we saw that when trees are cut, the men used achiote as protection. Men who take *ayahuasca* also paint the foreheads of their wife and children with achiote to keep them from appearing in their visions, since that would put their health at risk. While going down towards the river, the women sing:

“I found it in the sun river (*en badiwaka betxia he he he*). I found oropendola’s water (*en txana hene betxia*). It makes the *Inka* beads jump up (*Inka mane itxumaki*). Go and take water in the *txanawaka* river (*txanawaka beatã we*). It makes the *Inka* beads jump.”

The *Inka* beads are, as we would imagine by now, the maize kernels cooking in the boiling water. When the women arrive with the water, they go to the first house to fill the first cooking pot. Then they return again to the river, coming back with their water pots to fill the second pot, and so on, until the pots of all the village houses have been filled with water. Once the water is ready, it is time to sing over the fire:

“stirring up the fire (*txi ketinku ketinku*). Stirring up the fire. The long beautiful neck of the little child. I am stirring up the fire. Strong and fat (*paen xua xua*). Gathering the fire...”

After cooking, the maize is ground. Kensinger (in his notes on the *Nixpu* ritual he witnessed in 1964) notes a significant ritual gesture that I did not see in Moema: the

women send the men off to hunt.

rubbing of ground corn on the hands and between the breasts of the older women by younger women and vice versa. Although I have no further data to confirm this interpretation, this gesture seems to me an indication of a possible link between maize and mother's milk. Thus maize would not only produce semen in men, but also milk in women. The grinding of the maize kernels on a heavy canoe-shaped piece of wood, called canoe (*xaxu*), also receives its proper song:

“The canoe of the oropendola is lying down (*txana xaxu dakaki e e e*). We are grinding the kernels of maize into a paste (*xeki bedu denexun bixanputu awe*). We are grinding the eyes of the beautiful macaw, grind it (*xawan dua beduã bixãputu awe bixã mawa wawe*).”

If, in the song of the water, the maize kernels are compared to *Inka* beads, here they become the eyes of the beautiful macaw. The comparison at this point is due to the sweet taste of both the green, fresh maize and the eyes of the bird, considered by Cashinahua culinary standards to be a delicacy. In the end, the maize paste is lifted from the wooden ‘canoe’ into the ritual vessel for serving maize soup and the macaw appears again: “with the long macaw tail spoon (*xawan hina bitin ee*), mix the maize brew (*mia uma tuen wanke we e e*).”

Traditionally, the edge of the ritual soup pot (*kenpun*) was decorated with macaw tail feathers¹⁶⁶. As we have seen throughout this study, the scarlet macaw tail is a phallic symbol, representing the penis of *Yube*, which causes the women to bleed at new moon. The liquid food in the pot has been produced by female effort. Once consumed by men, the soup will transform into sperm. Thus the pot contains that which will become sperm, and is thus a metonymical sperm-container. The instruments used to transfer the liquid to the serving vessels are represented by the decoration on the edges of the pot. On the one hand they represent spoons, on the other they represent penises. The parallel is complete. Like a spoon transporting maize soup into a vessel, the penis transports semen into the womb.

There is still another parallel at work, that of the modelling of the body: like the building up of the foetus through sex during gestation, the child's body is now being

¹⁶⁶ Augusto, song leader of Moema; also mentioned in Kensinger's fieldnotes; see photo in

modelled through food. The maize soup will complete the work begun by the child's father's semen, since both semen and soup are meant to strengthen the bone structure, making the child grow quickly. During this critical phase of remodelling, the child will be forced to lie still in its hammock, as in a womb, when it is not being jumped around by its parents. The jumping around is seen as a way of sculpting the body, it is a literal and physical stretching of the bones. This ritual intervention on the body belongs to a whole range of increase techniques used by the Cashinahua (and other Panoans, see Erikson, 1996; and Melatti, 1992: 151), said to strengthen and take away laziness. During the increase ritual (*Katxanawa*) dances, men and women can hit each other with nettles, a technique also used on lazy children, and women can attack men with burning leaves.

During the jumping around (*ixtiu*), the child is dressed in harpy eagle feathers which is said by Augusto to be already enough reason for the child to 'fast' (*samake*), for it is a phase of vulnerability for the child, a phase in which meat and sweet food are to be avoided, as during all moments of drastic transition in life (delivery, first menstruation, recuperation from illness, etc.) Processes of transition provoke changes in one's body that need to be controlled by reducing the intake of potentially dangerous food.

That the process of jumping and *nixpu* eating is considered a highly transformational process in a person's life is expressed through the little figures (*dami*) of lizards (*nixeke*) and toads, modelled on the cups used by the initiates when drinking the maize soup¹⁶⁷. The only context in which the same figurative modelling on ceramics returns is the cooking vessel, in which the corpse of a dead relative is cooked.

Dwyer, 1975.

¹⁶⁷ Personal communication Kensinger. My own fieldnotes (obtained from the old and by now deceased Dona Teresa), mention the traditional painting of the cups with designs named *xakada kene* (frog design), *teu kene* (salamander design), and *dunu kene* (snake design). All of them are evident symbols of transformation, as much as the figure of *nixeke*. Yet, as we saw above in the chapter on design, image and *yuxin*, there is a big difference in concept between *kene* and *dami*. The use of *dami*, a figurative representation, instead of a graphic invocation, connotes a much stronger sense of transformation and is extremely exceptional in Cashinahua artistic expression. Personally I had only heard of its use on the cooking vessel of the dead. Since the Cashinahua I worked with no longer produce ceramics, I was unable to check this

The figure of a lizard, an animal that changes its skin, on the funeral cooking vessel, refers to the process of profound transformation undergone by the body while it is being cooked: by means of the cooking process, the body *yuxin* detaches itself from the corpse, in the same way as, later on, when the bones are burned, the eye *yuxin* will escape from the bones. This process of transformation of a being into another being was not operated by the *Inka*, but by the dead person's closest relatives themselves, who used to cook, cut and eat the corpse, thus disconnecting in a definitive way the *yuxin* from its earthly remains (Cf. McCallum, 1996b).

This ritual demonstrates, once again, the Cashinahua concept of personhood and the profound consequences produced by corporeal interventions. Since it is the 'body that knows' (Kensinger, 1995; McCallum, 1996a), it is through bodily operations that the person has to learn about and realise the profound changes undergone at the crucial stages of a life cycle. The same holds for the *nixpu* rite of passage.

e. The ritual remodelling of the initiates

Kawa

At this point, the preparations come to an end and the initiates become more directly involved. They are gathered in the song leader's house where they tie their hammocks and sit to listen to instructions from the adults on proper living¹⁶⁸. This will be the night of *kawa*, the night in which the children will 'return to the womb' to be 'cooked' as foetuses in their hammocks. The verb *kawa* means to wrap up, and is best represented by the idea of "making a packet of banana leaves" in which small game (small fish, shrimps), mushrooms (a substitute for meat), and special delicacies such as liver and heart, or herbal medicine are steamed over the fire or smouldered in the ashes. The use of the term *kawa* to designate a specific ritual action of the *Nixpupima* complex, however, can be understood to mean the swinging of the hammock in which the initiate is wrapped up to be symbolically smouldered or cooked.

information in the field.

¹⁶⁸ In Kensinger's notes, the initiates are separated into two groups, depending on the moiety to which they belong.

Mothers and other women, invited to help, will sit the whole night beside the initiates' hammocks, rocking and swinging them to and fro, all the while singing, for girls:

"*kawa, kawa, kawa, kawa* (smouldering, smouldering), *mapi bake* (shrimp child), *kawa; kawa, kawa, kawa, kawa, xantxu bake* (crab child), *kawa...*",

And for boys:

"*kawa, kawa, kawa, kawa, awa bake* (tapir child), *kawa, kawa, kawa, txaxu bake* (deer child)."

The songs invoke the names of the game to be hunted by the children in the future. For the girls, the game is reduced to fish, shrimps, crabs and mushrooms, while for the boys the biggest game is invoked first, and later the smaller species (Alcina Pinheiro).

Thus *kawa* refers simultaneously to the smouldering of the children's catch on the fire and to the metaphorical re-cooking and re-shaping of the initiates themselves. While the women swing the hammocks and sing the whole night through, the men dance around the fire. The dance of the men stops around midnight, whereas the women without respite until dawn, all the time swinging the hammocks, *kawa, kawa, kawa, kawa...*

From this moment on, the children will not be allowed to leave their hammocks without covering their head with a cloth. An exception is made for the moments of ritual jumping when their head or should have been covered with harpy eagle feathers. The children only leave the house with adult assistance. They are supposed to move as little as possible, since at this stage all movements will have an effect on their future bodily shape. This idea is clearly expressed in relation to the *kawa* night: "If the child were to sleep in a crooked position, it will be crooked for the rest of its life". The same logic holds for the child's movements during the day. If, during the time the seclusion lasts, it were to look at the swirling or swaying leaves on the trees, or leave its head uncovered under the open sky, the vulture would see it, and it would soon (like the vulture) lose all its hair. If it were bitten by an insect, it would later be bitten by a snake. The seriousness of this stage in the ritual contrasts with the carnival-like atmosphere that accompanied its preparation.

The day before the evening of *kawa* was spent in two principal activities: the painting of all the participants with *genipa*, and the gathering of the herbal medicine with which the children are washed in the early morning after *kawa*. Many people accompanied Augusto on his walk through the forest to gather the twenty different sorts of medicinal leaves. The bath given to the child is meant to enhance its resistance and energy for work and is therefore called “work medicine” (*daya dau*). To explain the use of the herbal bath and its effect on a person’s thoughts to me, Edivaldo made the following comparison:

“We use this medicine for the child to become more ‘baptised’, for him to understand better the words spoken to him. It is like believers in a church. They sit there and listen, they sit there and study. They do not want to drink cane any more. They are just sitting and paying attention to what is said by the priest. The same thing is done by this medicine we are showing you.”

Thus, just as words work on a Christian’s mind, plants work on the mind of the initiate, who will listen and understand better what is being taught. This is yet another example of how it is the body, including all its pores, that learns and not just the ears.

The first plant of the collection of ‘working medicine’ is *kutan dau*, a herb said to “hide the body from illness”. Illness is seen as an agency, *yuxin*, “as a person entering one’s body.” Most of the plants used in the herbal bath share this quality of making the child invisible to the attacking agencies of illness. The *Kutan dau* herb also helps a girl to prevent early pregnancy, working on the delay of menstruation. Dieting and seclusion are a precondition for the use of this medicine.

Some of the ‘work medicines’ such as “crab saliva” (*xantxu kume*) and “snake achiote” (*dunu maxen*), and the *nixu* herb are specifically intended to protect the child from the weakness and dizziness (*nixun*) that is caused by the *yuxibu* inhabiting big trees, by the smell of burned monkey hair, or by the meat of certain kinds of fish and crab.

Other plants of the infusion, like the vine *tama xai mexupa* and the leaf *kumawã pena* are described as ‘vitamins of the forest’. They are meant to darken the body (*mexu dau*), making it grow fat and strong (*xua dau*). Darkness and fatness stand here for strength and the protection from the intrusion of pathogenic elements.

Closely linked to this group of plants to strengthen the child's body, are the "white vine" (*nixi huxu*) and "axu tree leaf" (*axu pei*), used to give the child a strong heart (*huinti kuxi daukiaki*). To have a strong heart means to live a long life, with a strong resistance, even when suffering from illness. Examples of a strong heart, resisting death, are the lupuna tree and the turtle. The only plant whose name refers directly to working, the *daya dau*, belongs obviously to the same class of hardening, strengthening and thickening medicines.

Other plants such as *sada dau* and *kumawã pena*, are understood to cause a general well-being in the child, and, when burned, produce a scent that helps to calm down an agitated dream. The *bedudu* plant and *xete kuta dau*, *yapa pawã*, *maxe paxa* (green achiote), *hepe xanku* (*jarina* sprout) and *taku dexni* (nose hair of the *saracura* bird) are all said to make one "travel tranquilly". The *bedudu* plant is frequently used for the same purpose during *ayahuasca* rituals. Plants which care for the child's well-being also include those that keep the snakes away, such as *dunu xepun* (snake smell), a plant also said to stop children's desire for eating clay.

Finally we have two specific leaves, *bawe* and *mani pei keneya* (banana leaf with design), used to help in learning design. For boys, *bawe* gives luck or 'an eye for' hunting.

Bawe is also a name of a complex motif, used only in weaving. This is one of the last weaving patterns a girl learns when initiated in the art of weaving. Just as with the eating of *nixpu*, this is not the last time that a girl is expected to squeeze the burning *bawe* juice in her eyes. It is only the first of many times. When learning to weave with design, the girl's master (preferentially her namesake), will squeeze the juice of three combined leaves (*bawe*, *dunu make* and *mani pei keneya*) in the eyes of the girl. She will sit in front of her loom each night of her training, until she almost faints with fatigue, until one day, when she goes to sleep, she will finally dream with the old *Sidika*, *Yube's* wife, who comes to her in her sleep, handing her over all the design she had been learning and asking for during the previous weeks of training.

After the collection of the plants, women go back to their houses to get small cooking pots in which the leaves will be cooked for hours. Augusto divides the leaves into little equal amounts to be cooked separately by the mothers of each of the children

to be initiated. After the pots with *daya dau* have been taken home by the mothers, men and women gather in front of the song leader's house to start singing over the cooking pots. Men go from house to house to sing over and encircle the boys' medicine, while women follow in row, singing over the girls' medicine.

During the same day, the women organise a collective painting session. The *Nixpupima* designs do not differ in pattern or form from true *kene kuin* designs, but they differ in the way they are applied, as well as in the width of the painted lines. The design is called "broad design" (*huku kene*) or "badly done design" (*tube kene*). The genipa designs on the face of small children and on the bodies and faces of adults are executed with a fine pencil made of a splinter from the roof. The point is wrapped in cotton so as not to scratch the skin while painting. The designs of the initiates, on the other hand, are much broader and much darker. They are made with a maize cob or with the fingers.

The reason for this "broad web" (*malha grande*) as Edivaldo called it, is to be found in the relation between design and the teeth-blackening *nixpu*. The darker and thicker the genipa lines in body and face painting, the darker will be the *nixpu* on the initiate's teeth. This statement establishes the link between teeth and bones. The pattern covering the child's body is like a bone structure, since the maize cob, instrument with which the design is painted, stands for and has the same width as bones. Thus it seems that during this ritual not only the teeth, but also the bones are understood to be blackened and thus strengthened and protected against decay.

This interpretation becomes more plausible when juxtaposed with an information given at the end of the ritual. After ten days of fasting and seclusion, enough time for the genipa designs to have disappeared from their bodies and the black paint from their teeth, the children are made to vomit. If they do not vomit, it is said, they become yellow and weak, because of the *nixpu* that has stayed inside. The strengthening force of *nixpu* would turn into its opposite.

The design is painted in big lines for the *nixpu* to stick to the teeth and for the propitiatory songs to enter the child's body. After these songs have entered, the child will think about them, they will guide its thoughts.

"The songs that are sung over its body, these prayers go into its body. From

there they pass into the head. He will be a great worker, a great thinker. That is why he is not painted black. The design is made to make the songs enter and stick.” (Edivaldo)

The adults are painted too. But their design is only for adornment. The parents are painted because of their children, explains Edivaldo. But the web of their design is like a fine filigree, and therefore the songs do not enter the body.

The children need to be painted before their ritual re-cooking during the *kawa* swinging, as well as before being bathed with herbal medicine. The broad net traced on their bodies is there to channel songs and medicine into the child’s body. The bathing also serves to fix and enhance the colour of the genipa paint. The adults, in turn, make use of the long night of vigilance to finish their own and others’ paintings (some women paint themselves with the help of mirrors and men let themselves be painted by the women).

Another difference between the initiates’ and the adults’ paintings is the fact that the latter use black lines on a reddish achiote surface, while the initiates are painted black on their naked skin. The combination of black design on a red surface, marked off by white bands on the wrists, ankles and shoulders, is the perfect image of a complete decoration. This decoration contrasts with the different kinds of painting applied to children and persons in phases of transition. The body is painted red with achiote immediately after birth and during a girl’s first menstruation. After the umbilical cord has dried up and fallen off, the baby will be washed and its body will be totally blackened with genipa paint.

When leaving the seclusion after the blackening of their teeth, the initiates have, as the newborn and the girl after her first menstruation, their body painted black. The black serves to hide and protect the body during the first days of (re-)entering normal social life and daily activities.

After having passed through the *Nixpupima*, the initiates will be allowed to use the “true design” (*kene kuin*). Before this, children’s faces are only partly decorated, mostly with *Yaminahua kene*. They may have their foreheads painted, or their chin and cheeks, but not their entire face. The pattern in the form of a labyrinth, covering their whole face, is only used by initiated adolescents and adults, and was traditionally completed with beads, cotton strings and feathers inserted in the lips, nasal septums

and nostrils.

Ixtxiu

Returning to the ritual sequence, we are at the point where the *kawa*, hammock swinging night, comes to an end. Before dawn, the initiates are woken by the singing of the fathers, who are outside, in front of Augusto's house. The mothers leave to their houses get the medicine bowls who are heated until lukewarm¹⁶⁹. Men dance outside in a line, with their backs to the river, while women dance inside the house, behind the hammocks of their children.

The children are removed from their hammocks and bathed, first of all by their same sex grandparents, and afterwards by other adults, who are considered to be 'responsible persons' and 'hard workers'. Again, as during the ritual blackening of the babies, those who apply the medicine pass on their qualities to the child. After the initiates have been thoroughly bathed with medicine, other people ask to be bathed with what has been left over, always by people more experienced than themselves, men preferentially by the song leader, women by older "women with design" (*ainbu keneya*).

After bathing, *bawe* leaves are squeezed in the eyes, first of the initiates, then of other persons who ask the application, again, by experienced people. The juice of the *bawe* leaf gives girls an eye for learning design, both in weaving and in body painting, and boys a sharp eye in the search for game. The anthropologist was asked to apply *bawe* on those who were eager to learn to read and write.

After bathing, boys are taken to lie on palm leaf mats, covered with a mosquito net. Men, renowned for their good luck in hunting, take a fire fan made of harpy eagle feathers and fan the boys, while singing "let us fan" (*payanun*) songs, intended to transfer the fanner's (and harpy eagle's) luck in hunting to the initiate. The initiates are taken to their hammocks to rest and are given maize soup to drink. The parents gather to eat fish and manioc.

¹⁶⁹ In Moema they were aluminium vessels, while Kensinger's notes mention them being decorated with design.

Later the same morning, fathers and mothers take the young initiates under the arm and parade them around the plaza (In Kensinger's notes they are dressed in harpy eagle feathers). Women start to jump with the children on the plaza, in front of the song leader's house. Afterwards the children are taken, by the men, to the open square (football field), just behind the village, to start the fast skipping jump (*ixtiu* or *saku*). Young men and women join the dancers to help the parents jumping around the children. In the beginning, the jumping and running is ordered: pairs of men hold a boy between them, while pairs of women hold a girl. In the end, long chains of jumping men and children are formed and the women repair to the edges of the field to observe the game.

The jumping is rough and the children are carried until they can no longer stay on their feet. When too tired to run, they are taken by their mothers to their hammocks to rest, only to run again later. Any weakness shown by the children is understood to be a bad sign for the jumping is considered to be a sort of health test for the youngsters. It is said that a child who does not resist the jumping will die young. After the violent treatment given by the men, women take over to finish the jumping session in front of the chant leader's house, with a slow jumping around of girls, while the men stay with the boys.

In the afternoon, the *ixtiu* jumping session stops and girls and boys are seated on their painted stools. In Kensinger's notes, the boys' heads are still covered with feather headdresses, while the girls carry baskets (*txitxan*) on their heads. At this moment, Augusto starts to sing the "forest clearing song" (*bai sepakin*). Long lines of men and women with the initiates - heads covered - in between, walk in serpentine movements around the houses, singing. The men beat the houses and bushes violently with sticks, imitating machetes as they go. The women follow, with the girls carrying baskets on their heads. These baskets invoke the fact that during the period of clearing and chopping the gardens, men do not go hunting. This is the time when women gather meat or substitutes for meat. Thus they may catch shrimp and crabs in the river, or collect mushrooms in the forest. The baskets are meant to store the mushrooms. Another reason for the allusion to mushrooms at this stage of the ritual is the fact that mushrooms grow on rotting felled trees.

Following an exhaustive day of ritual activities and running, the children are taken to their hammocks and given maize soup to drink. The next day, the children are taken from their hammocks early, to sing the garden chopping song (*bai dedaka*) with the adults. The girls cover their heads with baskets, while (in Kensinger's notes) the boys cover their heads with feather headdresses. Girls and boys dance in different lines, the former guided by the women, the latter by the men. The line of men and women follow the same path as the day before, encircling all the houses of the village. Men carry axes or machetes with which they hit the houses, beams and floors. They hit hard, hooting.

After this ritual clearing of the garden (where the houses represent the trees to be felled), children are again taken to the field behind the village to be jumped around by the men. During the intervals between running, girls are taken aside by the women who sing about the planting of peanuts and the grinding of maize for the preparation of huge quantities of maize soup to be drunk by the initiates, as well as by the other participants. The women dance and sing over the kettles filled with maize soup, 'to make the kettles happy' (*kenti benimai*). During these two days of the symbolic preparation of the gardens for planting, the adults only consume dishes prepared with small pieces of meat, mixed with plantains (*beten*), or with manioc, manioc leaves and, if possible, palm hearts (*yutxi*). This meal represents the time of scarcity of game associated with the male activities in the garden.

The ritual activity of the next day is the "planting of maize", first product of a new garden. People rise early, before dawn, have breakfast of mashed plantains and drink maize soup. The men suddenly jump up, while some of them overturn the cups of soup (Cf. field notes of Kensinger, 1964), a possible allusion to the ritual event that will soon follow this one. The men take the children for another skipping jump (*ixtiu*) until they are exhausted and put in their hammocks.

Men gather on the downstream side of the patio, while women form a line on the other side. Each group forms two lines, one composed of young women, another of mature women. The same happens to the group of men. The youngest group is called 'daughters' and 'sons' (this group includes the parents of the initiates), the other 'mothers' and 'fathers'. The younger line dances in front of the older line. The four

lines, two at each side, walk up and down in the direction of the middle of the patio while facing each other.

The daughters hold ears of corn, one in each hand, with the husk pulled back. While singing the *taku taku* song, they wave the corn up and down. The mothers stand behind them, singing with their hands on their heads. On the other side of the square, the younger men prepare their miniature bows and arrows to shoot the women, while the older line stand with empty hands behind them, singing. The 'daughters' start the attack, running towards their cross-cousins with their maize cobs. The 'sons' run away, trying to get enough distance to shoot their attackers in their skirts. The 'fighting' ends up involving the majority of men and women of the village, having fun, shouting and laughing. When tired, the 'daughters' shell kernels of the cob and toss them on the ground, imitating ejaculation. Again, they are attacked by the arrows of the opposite sex. The whole game lasts about one hour.

The women gather in the house of Maria Antonia and Santa, wives of Edivaldo, taking the smoked meat from the hunting expedition with them. This meat had been set apart for this moment. Sitting in a circle, the women start to tear the meat into pieces, putting the pieces in their own cooking pots. Suddenly the men arrive. Some of them jump on the meat, calling "*kesh! kesh! kesh!*" and they then steal a big piece. In a corner, they devour it 'like wild beasts', behaving like jaguars, hungry for meat.

The women laugh and cry, trying to hide the meat. Augusto sees one of his youngest sons jumping on a beautiful hunk of meat and complains: "You should not be taking this meat, you are not a great hunter (*min huni dekuyamaki!*)" And in fact, looking at who takes the biggest pieces, I noted that only respected hunters are allowed to demonstrate the gluttony of a real predator. The *meti* invasion (*Metibikanikiki*, stealing a big piece of meat) in this way becomes a public consecration of respected providers.

After this 'carnival' as the Cashinahua call it, the children are taken from their hammocks to be jumped around one more time. When both children and adults are tired, the children are allowed to rest in their hammocks and given maize soup to drink. To strengthen the meal, the children also receive some manioc and a piece of ground, toasted peanut paste (*metu*). In the afternoon, people go to the forest to find different

kinds of *nixpu* in the forest.

At this point, a long sequence of songs 'to make the *nixpu* happy' (*nixpu benimai*) should have been sung, along with a series of songs invoking the animals that are accustomed to eating *nixpu*, to make them happy too. Since Augusto's voice was by then totally hoarse, the singing was weak. Augusto blames this weak invocation of *nixpu* for the lack of strength in the colour of the children's teeth after the application of *nixpu* the next day. "When *nixpu* is really happy", he says, "the teeth become shiny black and beautiful. Thus they become strong and healthy." Another hypothesis for the weak blackening of the teeth, also suggested by Augusto, was the fact that he suspected the initiates' parents of not having obeyed the ritual prescription of sexual abstinence during the whole period of initiation.

The teeth-blackening with Nixpu

After three days of intense running and jumping, the time comes for the application of *nixpu*. Before dawn, the initiates are taken from their hammocks and guided (with covered heads) to the patio in front of the song leader's house, where they have been sleeping since the night of *kawa* hammock swinging. They are laid down on palm leaf mats. The men polish the children's teeth with little round stones, while the mothers hold their children's head on their laps.

The girls are gathered by their mothers and female helpers and covered with a mosquito net, while the boys are gathered under another mosquito net. They have baskets covering their heads. Under the mosquito net, the girls are made to sit on their stools. On one side she has a basket with *nixpu* shoots, on the other a small bowl for spitting (called *nane kenti*, genipa bowl). Mothers and helping women tap the *nixpu* stalks against the girls' teeth. The girls are also made chew the shoots to blacken their tongue and lips. The chewing and hitting is alternated with spitting. When the children's teeth are black, they are taken to their hammocks, with their heads covered with mosquito nets.

Once more the parents play the game of sexual antagonism, hooting and jumping imitating animals and throwing clay at each other. Some men strip off their trousers so as to better provoke the women who scream and laugh, running to attack

the men with their sticks. During this last manifestation of the buttocks-displaying play, Kensinger (fieldnotes) witnessed an even more explicit scene than those witnessed during the previous evenings. This time the men had painted their behinds red with achiote, imitating female menstruation¹⁷⁰.

¹⁷⁰ The *puinkimei*, the male display of their buttocks to the women, is a recurrent event during the whole *nixpu* sequence, a fact that demonstrates its ritual importance. The daring of men in their theatrical imitation of female fertility rises to a crescendo during the ritual sequence, culminating in the painting of the buttocks. Kensinger notes that the achiote represents “birth blood” according to the men, and “menstrual blood” according to the women.

This performance of male menstruation is only one of the contexts in which men imitate women and vice versa. In the village of Nova Aliança, I also witnessed a women’s increase ritual, *Katxanawa*. During this ritual, gender roles are systematically inverted. A group of women of one moiety invades the village, each covered in palm leaves so as to not be recognised by their hosts. Their sisters-in-law of the opposite moiety run to encounter them, armed with guns. Their ‘sisters-in-law’ surround them and guide them to the square where they dance for about ten minutes, at which time the invaders take off their palm costume and display their human identity. The receiving moiety (or village) leads the visitors to the patio in front of the leader’s house and has them sit down. At this moment, the distribution of food begins. From her cross-cousin each woman receives a dish with meat, preferably the head of the animal, served with manioc and boiled bananas. In the meantime, men, dressed as women, take care of the babies and wait for their turn to eat. “This is our carnival”, the village leader, beautifully decorated and dressed like a woman, explains to me, visibly enjoying himself with the imitation of female gestures.

The female increase ritual is a symmetrical inversion of the classical increase ritual where men invade the village, dressed in palm leaves, while women wait for them with the children. In this female *Katxanawa*, it is also the women, and not the men, who open the dance around the hollow tree after the communal meal. The owner of the trunk (*katxan ibu*), the person who went to the forest to cut the *paxiuba* tree, opens the dance. Although the women begin, the dancing only really becomes animated when men join and the mutual insulting of sexual organs begins (*xebi itxa* and *hina itxa*) (see McCallum, 1989, for a more detailed analysis of the *Katxanawa* increase ritual).

As an example of the “vagina insults”, I quote the song of Manuel Sampaio, *xanen ibu* of the village of Nova Aliança. This song was really popular during the women’s *Katxanawa* I attended, and was repeated over and over by the male chorus. The women in turn attacked the men vehemently, trying to brake up the circle of dancers: “Hem, hem, vagina, vagina, the vagina is hairy, hem, hem (*Hem hem hita hita tapa tapadania hem hem*) (2x); It is smooth, it is smooth, it is very smooth (*ha bixtun ha bixtun ha bixtun ha bixtun*); Hem, hem, vagina, vagina, the vagina is hairy, hem, hem; It is smooth, it is smooth, it is very smooth; Its edge is smooth, its edge is smooth (*kebixtun kebixtun kebixtun kebixtun*); It is smooth, it is smooth, it is very smooth; Hem, hem, vagina, vagina, the vagina is hairy, hem, hem; Pass on the smoothness to her anus, Pass on the smoothness to her anus, pass on the smoothness to her anus (*txibixtun txibixtun, txibixtun txibixtun, txibixtun txibixtun*); Hem, hem, vagina, vagina, the vagina is hairy, hem, hem.”

Finally, exhausted and covered in clay, men and women go to the river to wash themselves. When they come back, they take the initiates from their hammocks and make them sit on their stool to pour water over their heads to wash the *nixpu*. Thus the black colour of *nixpu* is enhanced through bathing, in the same way that the *genipa* paint becomes more vivid in colour when washed with water after having dried.

In normal conditions, the children are expected to stay in seclusion in their hammocks for ten days. They are only supposed to go when the *genipa* and *nixpu* paint have totally disappeared. During this time they are allowed only to eat boiled plantains, sweet manioc, roasted peanut paste and maize cakes. The period of seclusion in Moema was reduced to one day, because of an unexpected emergency requiring people to travel downstream to the city of Manuel Urbano. Thus, the initiates were woken early in the morning, the day after having eaten *nixpu*. They were taken to the village leader's house where they were made drink several bowls of thin green maize soup.

Edivaldo, the village leader, had prepared toad secretion (*kampun xuku*). The children were burned three times on their upper arm with a hot coal. The blister caused by the burning was broken and the fathers applied the toad poison to the open wound. Soon the children began to vomit. Since people had to travel and the supply of toad poison was limited, the effect of the toad poison was less dramatic in Moema than the application described by Kensinger (fieldnotes, 1964) in Peru. Kensinger notes that the children started vomiting after four minutes, and fell quickly into unconsciousness, "thrashing and writhing on the ground." The effect lasted for ten minutes. This violent emetic is understood to be an agent of purification and fortification, and is also used on other occasions. Men use *kampun* to strengthen their bodies and enhance their luck in hunting, while women apply it when they wish to become pregnant.

After vomiting, the children are bathed and have their bodies painted black with *genipa*. The foreheads of the girls receive the same design as when they were born, the cotton seed (*xapu hexe*) motif, while the boys are painted with the *nambu* bird's feet (*kuma tae*) motif. The first food they will be allowed to eat is fish. "They have to start lightly", it was explained to me, "because the way they eat now will determine the way they will eat for the rest of their life". Thus the parents urge their children to eat calmly

and to chew well. After the first fish (*piabinha*), they are allowed to eat *beten* (a mixture of small pieces of meat mixed with bananas), and finally they are allowed to eat real meat, like young, healthy adults.

4.5 The Meaning and Interpretation of the Initiation Ritual

We have seen that the ritual reshaping of the initiates' bodies works simultaneously on the child's bones and on its skin. The bones, which are the invisible vital structure that sustains the body, are represented by the teeth, the central focus of ritual attention. While bones and teeth are strengthened, the bodily posture is shaped. The sculptural effect of the collective ritual intervention on the child's body is understood to have long-lasting effects.

From the first *kawa* night of ritual swinging of the children's hammocks by the women to the blackening of the children's teeth, the movements of the child are controlled. When it is not being jumped around, the child is resting on its ritual stool or in its hammock. Ideally, both girls and boys should be covered in harpy eagle feathers, an outfit that obliges them to follow the strict diet of maize soup, food for the bones.

The attention given to the skin, however, is as significant as significant as that given to the sculpting of the child's bones. The child is covered with the *Nixpupima* painting, characterised by broad black lines drawn with maize cobs. These "broad webs of design" have the function of absorbing the prayers and the medicinal qualities of the infusion with which the experienced elders bathe the children. The child's body is considered to be "open" to receive the bodily knowledge transmitted by adults, renowned for their industriousness and knowledge.

The collective intervention on the body of the initiate can be understood in terms of a ritual re-cooking, thus turning the cooking process into a key operator, productive of transformative processes in the Cashinahua universe. We encounter the role of cooking as a vehicle for the transformation of beings and bodies at several instances in this work. Legitimate food is cooked food, and no meat should ever be eaten raw or with a trace of blood. The importance of cooking is also stated in myth: humanity itself was born through the event of the theft of cooking fire. Human beings are themselves created by means of a process of cooking in the womb, while being sculpted through repeated intercourse.

The image of collaboration between male and female reproductive capacities

appears clearly during the ritual reshaping of the child. We saw an allusion to the male sculpting of the foetus in the male fabrication of the stools. The treatment given to the stool parallels that of the ritual introduction of a new socialised body into the community: the stool is washed in the river, painted with wild achiote bark and then painted with black body design by the mothers. The jumping around with the children, alternated with the drinking of huge quantities of maize soup, can be understood to be an allusion to the intra-uterine modelling of the bone structure by the father.

While the mothers were swinging the hammocks of their children throughout the night, the fathers were dancing around the fire. The fire is considered to be a gift from the *Inka*, a source of light during the night, producer of heat when it is cold and a power that transforms matter. This transformative power is invoked when the fire is called 'fire of work', 'fire of knowledge', 'fire of design' and 'fire of game'. In this way the men were kindling the fire, while the mothers were cooking their children, wrapped in their hammocks. The name of the 'hammock swinging', *kawa*, induces an association with the cooking process, since *kawa* means steaming food, wrapped in banana leaf.

If a new body is the product of a transformation operated on raw matter through the process of cooking, the body can be said to be 'food to be'. To become edible, however, it will have to be transformed again by means of the cooking process. The result of the 'cooking' of the child during gestation and during the initiation ritual is a living body, while the result of real cooking is not a body but food. Thus we can see that the joining of liquid and fire during the transformative processes of cooking can have two opposite results: the process can produce something new resulting from the fusion of previously separated substances or it can dissolve the amalgam back into separate units.

The first process is operated during gestation and is ritually re-enacted during the initiation ritual, the second during the traditional funeral ritual. The body, locus of physical relatedness and memory, and point of reference for the body *yuxin* (released after death but still emotionally attached to its dead body), needs to be dissolved by cooking. The cooking process disentangles the *yuxin* that still permeate and inhabit the flesh from the bodily remains that need to become transformed into mere meat. After

twelve hours of cooking, this process is completed and the flesh is turned into meat. The meat, however, was still potent food that needed to be neutralised with vegetables.

The Cashinahua logic of endocannibalism resembles that of the Wari. The reason for the necessity of corporeal transformation in order to bring about the required separation between the dead body and the living lies, according to Conklin, in the following fact:

“Wari” corpses are potent embodiments of identity, social relations, and interpersonal bonds. Body transformations were a primary symbolic focus in traditional mortuary rites that aimed to restructure relations between the dead and the living.” (Conklin, 1993: 86).

The same holds for the Cashinahua. The important changes in the growing process and in the social status of a person are incorporated and expressed by the body, reason why these processes require a direct ritual intervention on the body. Physical transformation is understood to bring about a transformation of personhood and vice versa. This is the cognitive basis for ritual action during the initiation ritual and during the traditional funeral rituals.

Conclusion

“Yet the conceptions held by others are available to us, in the sense that when we truly understand their conception of things we come to recognize possibilities latent within our own rationality, or existent in the history of our own reason, and those ways of conceiving of things become salient for us for the first time, or once again. In other words there is no homogenous “backcloth” to our world. We are multiple from the start.”

Richard Schweder, 1991: 5.

The basic question around which the themes treated in this thesis revolve is that of the relation between fixed and unfixed form. Even the problem of identity and alterity can be approached from this angle, since, as we saw, the idea of ‘stranger’ or ‘enemy’ can be subsumed under the rubric of ‘free-floating being without a fixed abode’, or, in other words *yuxin* or *yuxibu*. What interests the Cashinahua is reminiscent of what chroniclers tell us about the first encounters between Colonisers and Amerindians. If the former were puzzled by the question of whether or not the Amerindians had a soul, the latter tried to discover whether the whites had a ‘real’ body or not, that is, a body subject to putrefaction (Lévi-Strauss, 1973).

Cashinahua ideas on similarity and difference focus on the body and on the modus of its production. Ethnic identity and difference will therefore be expressed in terms of how one lives and how one’s body is modelled by others through conviviality and sharing with those one lives with or encounters on one’s travels. Wanderers are people seen as almost lacking the prerequisite for humanity, since they seem to live without any relatedness or interwovenness with close others. Not having any roots or social feeling of belonging, brings them close to the invulnerable and solitary *yuxibu*. The ideas of fixedness of form and of dwelling place are intimately linked in Cashinahua ontology.

To live alone, far from one’s relatives, is what turns kinspeople into strangers, say the Cashinahua. They eat different food, share others’ habits and thus their thinking bodies become transformed, they become the bodies of others. Thus identity is understood to be a process, inscribed in and on the body. The community of close kin with whom one lives is called “our body” (*nukun yuda*). In the long run, people

who live closely together end up 'belonging' to the same collective body because of the memories and substances exchanged and shared. The frequency with which collective meals are organised (whenever there is game available), along with a systematic sharing of goods and productive activities, creates a consciousness of interdependence which is responsible for the idea of one's community as "our body".

People with a similar social practice and alimentation are said to have a similar body. Depending on the totality to which the comparison refers, the speaker can only include in this category the people of his community, or extend the category to include all the Cashinahua, or all other Panoans and, if contrasted with the whites and city life, even all indigenous people known to the speaker. This flexible use of categories of sameness and difference, or of inclusion and exclusion, reveals the importance of context in Cashinahua classificational thought. The principle endeavour is not so much to classify beings in closed and well defined classes, as to situate and circumscribe them in relation to the perspective from which they are being observed.

This perspectival approach allows for a constant awareness of the possibility of role inversions, and of changing perceptions that depend on a modification of position, or of intention on the part of the perceiver or on the part of the perceived being. Many factors can be held responsible for a modification in the relation or of the perception one has of another being with whom one is engaged in an exchange relationship. This slippery ground for classification reveals a profound awareness of the intricate interwovenness and intrinsic or potential equality in agency and power of all animated beings. All living beings have their equivalent or *yuxin* side which can at some point reveal itself and invert the positions in a given hierarchical relationship.

Thus the hunter can become game, kinspeople can become strangers or other beings (animals or *yuxin*), and strangers or enemies (like the *Inka*) can become representatives of everything that is the most proper to and valued by the community of humans. An awareness of the interdependence of living beings is thus translated into a cosmology that places transformational processes in the centre of reflection. Thus the question of what it means to be similar or different is transformed from a classificational device into a philosophical paradox. Categories or concepts that refer to 'others' are conceived in such a way that, in the end, they end up referring as much

to the category of otherness as to the category of self.

Thus *nawa* means as well enemy, *Inka* and white coloniser, as a person belonging to one of the name-giving sections of a Pano group, to which a Pano self necessarily belongs. The suffix *-nawa* with a qualifier (*yami-* (axe), *yawa-* (peccary), *kaxi-*(bat)) also refers to different groups of similar people, who share the common denomination of *nawa* groups. And although only 'others' call them Cashinahua (an originally offensive name), it is the only name by which they can be distinguished from their neighbours. The auto-nomination of 'true human beings' (*huni kuin*) is not at all unique to the Cashinahua.

So as for the pair of key concepts (*nawa/huni*) dealt with in the first part of this work, the same ambivalence also holds for the other pairs or triads of key concepts that have been discussed. Human beings, for example, are bodies, but they can produce (and become) *yuxin* as soon as the integrity or activity of their body is put in danger or once their body is at rest. *Yuxin* and *yuxibu* beings, on the other hand, can have a body, although their relation to a body is different from that of a human person and its body. In contrast to the human self who is his or her body, the relationship between a *yuxibu* and its body is transitory. It is this transitory character of its relation to the fixed shape of a solid body that marks the difference between a *yuxibu* and a human being.

The same idea has been elaborated in the last section on key concepts where we discussed the relation between the three concepts of the Cashinahua lexicon that refer to the appearance of visual phenomena: the patterned and stylised bi-dimensional design, called *kene*, on the one hand; the figurative, stylistically unrestrained design that can also assume a tri-dimensional character and which belongs to the category of transformation, of visionary experience and of modelling, called *dami*; and finally, the 'real' image, *yuxin*, vivid and perfect, but elusive. *Yuxin* might well be the most perfect image of being, a mimesis coinciding with its model, or the model itself, and that which gives shape to materiality; yet it is also the disembodied *yuxin* without fixed abode, pure wandering energy, permanently subject to the winds of mutation and displacement.

As a reaction against this cosmic context of constant effacement of the frontiers between different kinds of beings and phenomena, Cashinahua ritual praxis reveals an

obsession with the fixation of forms. If the world is inhabited by powers of 'excessive fertility' and fluidity, the human world and the bodies produced by human agency go towards the opposite pole. Human bodies are characterised by their heavy, fixed and slowly evolving form, and are gradually modelled by the constant intervention on the body of other thinking bodies, wanting to shape this other body in the image of their own. It is for this reason that experienced and successful adults are asked to massage, bathe, or paint a child's body. Their hands pass on their bodily knowledge to the child. To enhance the effect of this sharing of qualities, those who have been requested by the parents to perform the protective ritual on the child, rub their hands on their forehead and under their armpits to catch their sweat and pass it too to the child (the same ritual can be performed on weak or sick adults).

Two techniques, belonging to the exclusive domain of female productivity, are used to fix the multiplicity of forms that inhabit the world of images, a world of *yuxin* that reveals the many suggestions of other possible worlds and bodies to be lived, created and visited in the cosmic space inhabited by kin as well as by strangers. These fixing techniques are; firstly, the patterned and highly stylised design system of *kene*, and secondly, the cooking process, the principle means of bodily transformation used by the Cashinahua during crucial stages of transition in a life cycle.

Since we have already dealt with the role of the cooking process as a processor of ontological transformations in the conclusion of the previous chapter, I shall limit myself here to the second means of fixation of form, which is *kene*. *Kene* is the basic structuring language of the Cashinahua society and cosmos. The visibility of the world depends on a structuring framework to circumscribe phenomena as potentially knowable and therefore visible. This ordering of perception is realised through the presence of *kene*.

In social life, *kene* marks certain objects and decorates bodies and faces. Woven cloth and basketry are partially patterned. Design on a hammock, for example, does not cover the whole surface, but is arbitrarily cut off when the decorated band is alternated with a non-decorated band of 'real weaving'. This interruption of a pattern that suggested its infinite continuation is an effective visual device to make the eye (or eye *yuxin*) creatively perceive the continuation of design where 'materially' it is no longer

there. The mental eye, having understood the design, can see its continuation beyond the effectively decorated medium.

Design is present in the Cashinahua daily environment. Many hammocks are partially woven with design, one or another person of the family or visitor will have his or her face, arms or legs painted with design, and on the beams that support the roof one can see small baskets used to store small possessions and cotton, decorated with some woven pattern in relief. The surrounding world is also marked with little reminders of design: a patterned leaf or butterfly, the filtering of the sunlight through the trees (said to be the design of the sun), a snake's skin, or the shell of a turtle. All these phenomena are said to be "with design" (*keneya*).

The patterned labyrinth that characterises Cashinahua design is also said to be present in the nightly world inhabited by *yuxin* beings. Although the design seen in *ayahuasca* visions is said by Cashinahua men not to be totally the same as the designs produced by Cashinahua women, they are definitely said to be designs (*kene*). The men use these designs as a guide on their journeys through unknown worlds. The design pattern, covering the whole visual field of an *ayahuasca* vision, frames the vision and fixes the excessive fluidity of forms perceived. Once the key of 'true' design, the ordering framework of visual perception, has been applied to vision in the effort of understanding, the vision of *ayahuasca* stops being a pure frightening 'lie' of the Master of *ayahuasca* (the cosmic snake). Whirlpools and coiling snake movements are replaced by a recognisable scenery of 'true' people, who are decorated with 'true' design and are living in painted houses.

A man who does not 'walk inside design' during his visions, will get lost on his journey into the unmapped and non-signifying worlds. The same danger that awaits the *ayahuasca* traveller, threatens hunters who do not follow and mark the paths and crossroads followed during the persecution of the game. Design circumscribes known space and inscribes the world as it is perceived and understood, mapped by men as well as by women. If men see design as guidelines and ordering frames during their journeys, only women can draw them effectively, inscribing the patterns on their artefacts and bodies.

Kene is that which delineates and orders perception, just as the walls of a house close off the interior space of a community from the world around. True design is only applied to a healthy body that has already passed through certain phases of transition. Thus a child will receive a real design for the first time only after the black paint that characterises the last phase of the initiation ritual has been washed off. Once it has already been completely reintegrated into normal social life, the child will be painted with true design to dance with the adults. A recurrent context for body painting is also the arrival of kin who have been travelling, or of visitors. The person arriving takes a bath and is painted by one of the women of the host household, thus marking the fact that he has regressed into the delimited space of his home or guest house.

The framing and fixing role of design as opposed to the fluidity of *yuxin* and *yuxibu* agency, is intimately linked to the Cashinahua conception of embodied knowledge. A Cashinahua self is an embodied self, circumscribed through interpersonal relations that associate the person with a certain community and with a specific place to live and to return to. Yet, embodied existence also implies processes of growth and decay and, finally, death. This last characteristic, that of temporary existence, is the last demarcation of the Cashinahua human condition to be made. If the human condition characterises itself through the fixedness of form and body, it is not less marked by growing processes, and by processes of decay.

Thus, the crucial difference between humanity and the celestial beings is the fact that human beings age and that their skins become old. This is, according to the myth of the origin of death, the reason they die. Thus we can see that, if humans are fixed and solid in comparison with the vague and fluid *yuxin*, images, strangers and wanderers, they are nonetheless mortals in comparison with the celestial beings. In this way, it is the heavenly bodies who are the epitomes of fixedness and repetition. Since they are removed from the cycle of exchange of vital essences between the water world and the inhabitants of the earth, their bodies have become pure light and their movements are the infinite repetition of the same circular dance of eternity.

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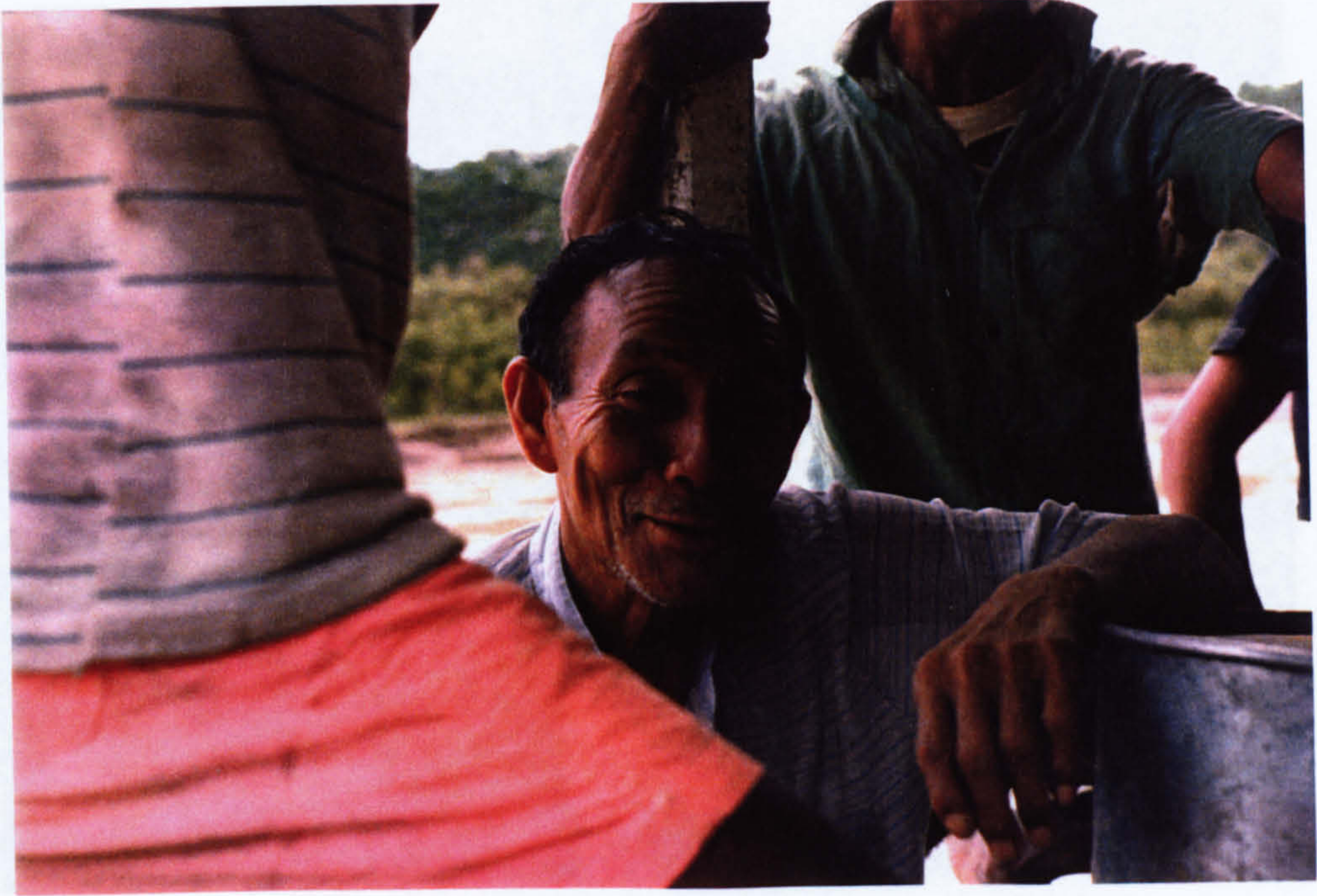
Zen Stories, 1978. New York, Basic Books.

Annexed illustrations

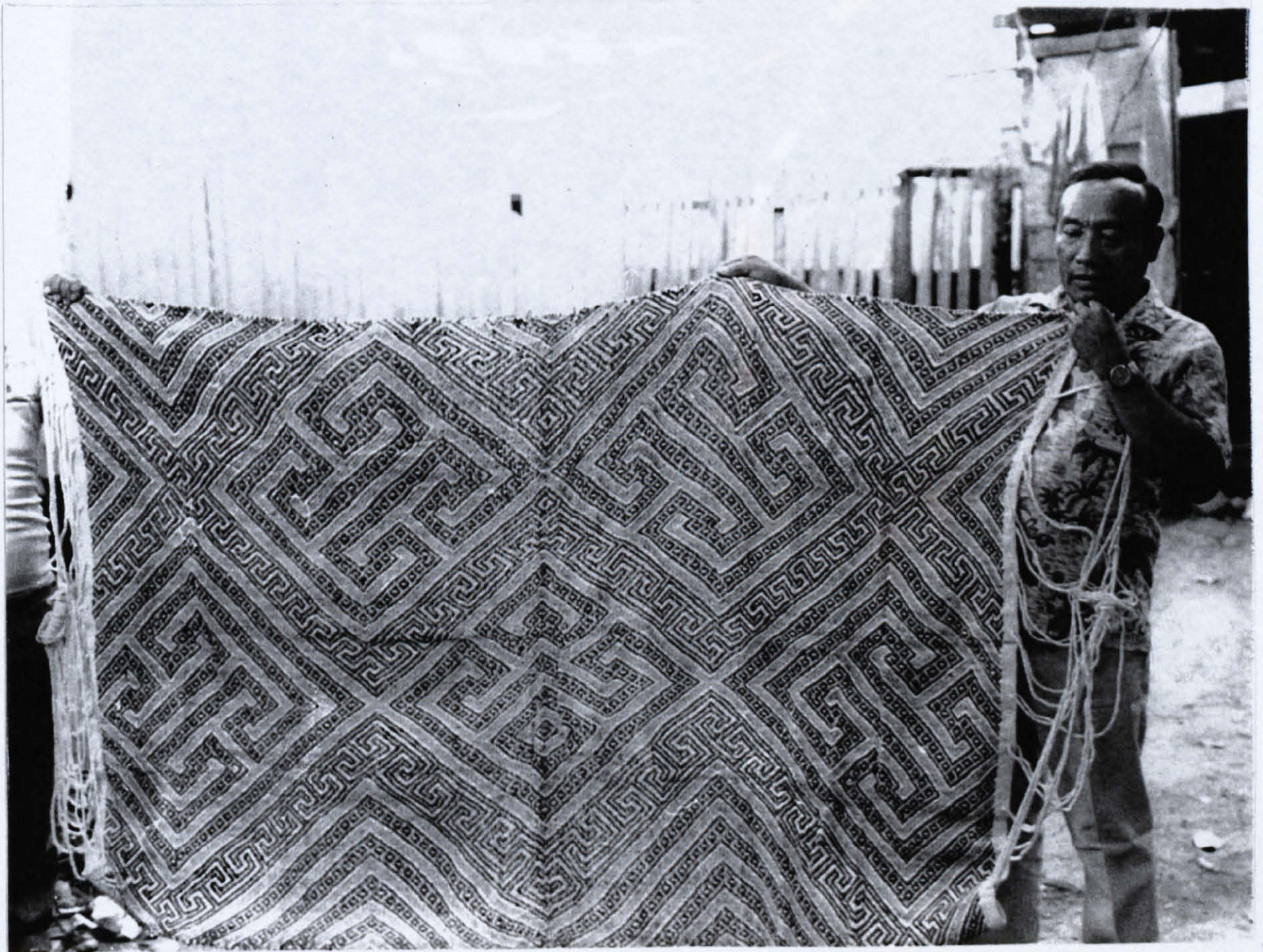
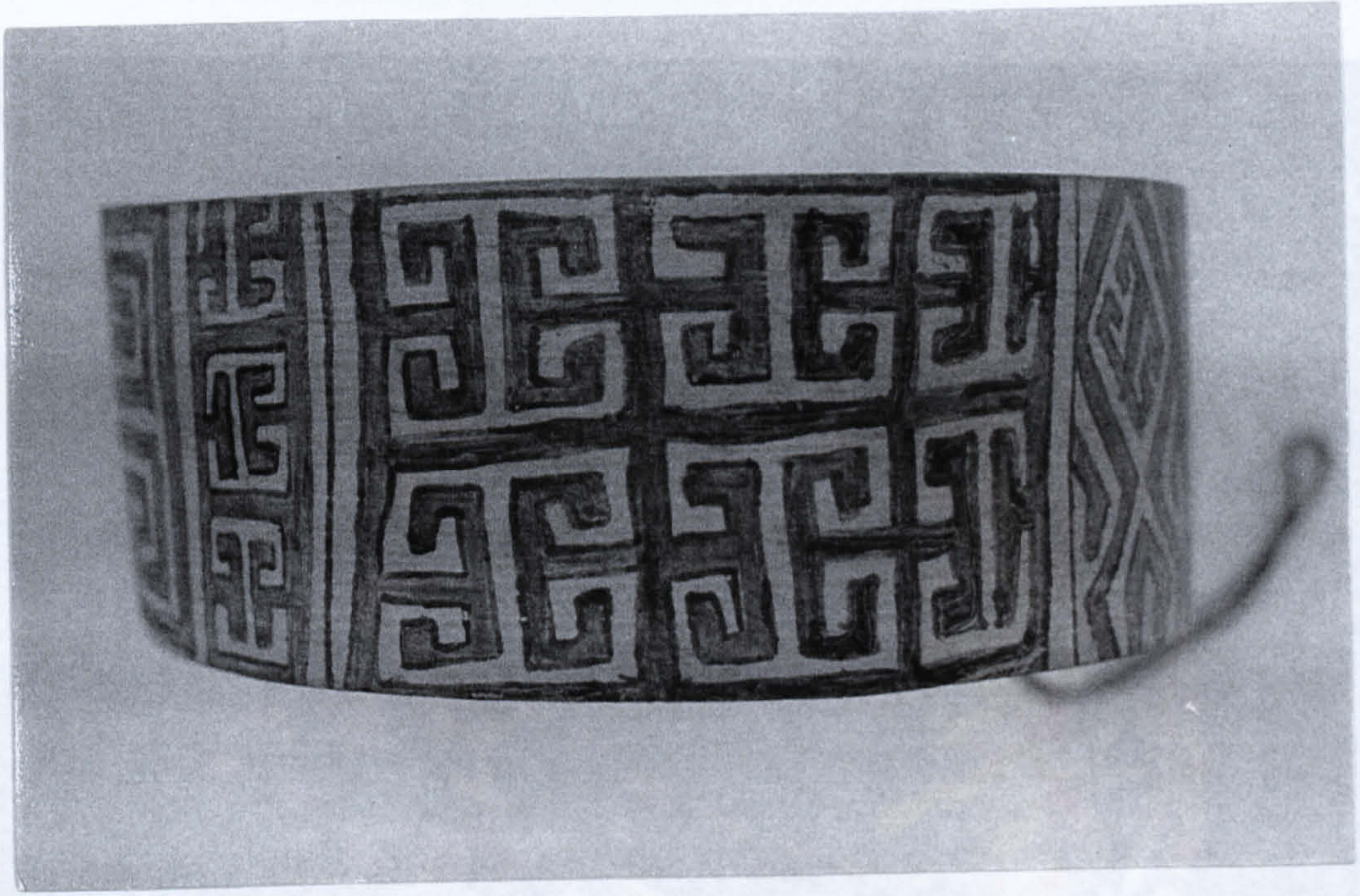
1. Above, Augusto Feitosa, song leader of the village of Moema; below, Alcina Pinheiro, Augusto's wife, painting a stool (*Nixpupima*), with *xumu kene* (lupuna pattern).
2. Above, Casilda, with child; below, Antonio Pinheiro, Casilda's husband. Casilda's face is painted with the typical crossed *kene kuin* (real design) pattern, painted with genipa on the reddish surface of achiote paint.
3. Above, bamboo crown, painted with *nawan kene* (stranger's design); below, hammock with several patterns: *xamantin* (enclosed design); its lines or paths (*bai*) filled with the *txede bedu* (parrot's eye) pattern. The patterns *nawan kene* (stranger's design) and *kape hina* (alligator's tail) are around the central design, and *baxu xaka* (fish scale) at the edges.
4. *Tene*, song leader's back pendant. (Photo taken by Kensinger, reproduced from Dwyer, Ed., 1975: 64).
5. Above, *tadi keneya* (song leader's cloth with design); below, *tadi dauya* (song leader's cloth with 'medicine' or 'decoration'). Note how the woven design continues, almost invisibly, beyond the coloured pattern. This technique of weaving with design without the use of contrasting colours is called *umin kene* and is considered among the most difficult of all patterns. The woven cloth at the top of the page is also a good example of the use of the *punctum* detail in weaving. (Both illustrations have been reproduced from Dwyer (1975: 115, 121) and belong to Kensinger's Haffenreffer collection, Philadelphia).
6. Initiating girl in traditional outfit (headdress and back pendant made of harpy eagle feathers). Reproduced from Dwyer (1975: 107), photo taken by Kensinger).
7. Above, figurative design (*dami*) by fifteen year old Pedro Maia; below, representation of the cosmos (*dami*) by Arlindo. Note how different worlds are represented as houses with doors to be entered and paths linking the different contained spaces (worlds, houses, bodies).
8. Above, design made by Alcina Pinheiro; below, design from Teresa Lopes. The design below represents the figure of a monkey (*isu*). The author of the design mixed a figurative representation (*dami*) with a patterned one (*kene*) to explain a specific pattern. The angular spiral or geometric curl in the corners of the design above are called *isu meken* (monkey's claw): they represent the stiffened grip of a monkey's claw when its body hair is being burned over the fire. The central pattern of the design on the top of the page is called *xantima* (with line joining two halves) and its 'wrapping' *txede bedu* (parrot's eye).

9. Above and below, designs made by Marlene Lopes. The design above represents a typical pattern used on hammocks (*disi kene*). The central pattern is called *bawe* (name of a medicinal plant used to enhance the capacity of women's weaving with design). At the edges below and above: *kape hina* (alligator's tail). On the illustration at the bottom of the page we see a central design *xantima* (with line joining two halves), around which another design called *tau pei* (palm leaf); at the edges *xantxuwan tae* (river crab's paw).
10. Above and below, designs made by Marlene Lopes. Name of the design: *dunu mapu* (snake's brain).

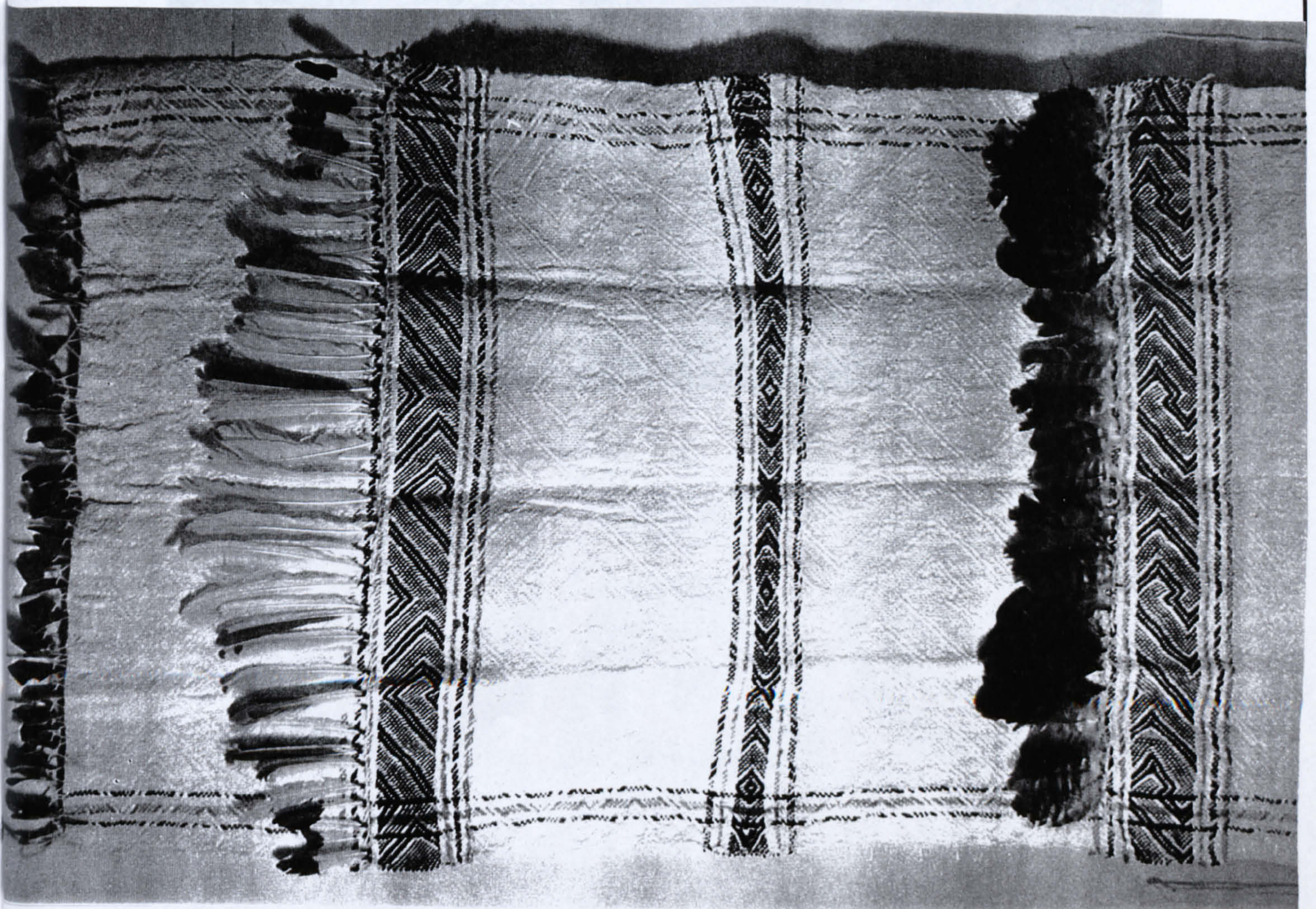
Photos inserted at page 104: above, Edivaldo Domingos, village head of the village of Moema; below, mother with child in the village of Nova Aliança.













ALDO MA





