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Fashioning Plants: An Amazonian Materiality in Three Movements

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Resumen

Una de los rasgos más obvios y al mismo tiempo elusivos de los mundos sociales amazónicos es el grado hasta el que las tecnologís humanas dependen de la trasnformacion de las plantas en artefactos diversos: herramientas, armas, trampas, flautas, cestos, etc. Este artículo supone un análisis detallado de tres especies de plantas salvajes -- *máwi* (*Astrostudium schomburgkii*), *pwápwaa* (*tirita; Ischnosiphon spp.*), and *púpa* (*macanilla*; *Socretea eschorrhiza* Spp.) – usadas para hacer artefactos y an a´nalisis de la dimensión semiótica de estos artefactos entre los Wakuénai (Curripaco) , un pueblo que vive en la región alta del Río Negro en Venezuela. A partir de investigaciones recientes sobre las teorías indígenas amazónicas acerca de la materialidad y la importancia de los instrumentos de viento como "transformadores de energía", termino abalizando cómo los artefactos funcionan como significantes de la complementariedad y separación de géneros, la dación recíproca de alimentos entre afines y el poder del concocimiento secreto.

Palabras clave

Plantas, semitótica, Amazonía, Instrumentos de viento

Abstract

One of the most obvious yet subtly elusive features of Amazonian social worlds is the extent to which human technologies rely on fashioning plants into a variety of artefacts: tools, weapons, traps, flutes, trumpets, baskets, manioc presses, and so on. This essay provides a detailed exploration of three wild plant species -- *máwi* (*Astrostudium schomburgkii*), *pwápwaa* (*tirita; Ischnosiphon spp.*), and *púpa* (*macanilla*; *Socretea eschorrhiza* Spp.) – used for making artefacts and an analysis of the semiotic dimensions of these artefacts as signifiers among the Wakuénai (Curripaco) people living in the Upper Rio Negro region of Venezuela. Building on new research into indigenous Amazonian theories of materiality and the importance of musical wind instruments as 'energy transformers,' I conclude by looking at how artefacts function as signifiers of gender complementarity and separateness, reciprocal giving of foods between affines, and the power of secret knowledge.

Key words

Plants, Semiotics, Amazonia, Wind Instruments

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Fashioning Plants: An Amazonian Materiality in Three Movements

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1. Introduction

This essay provides an ethnographic overview of the multiple ways in which meaning and materiality are employed in making, using, and interpreting artefacts derived from wild plant species among the indigenous Wakuénai (Curripaco) people living in the Upper Rio Negro region of Venezuela (Figure 1). Each of the three plant species that form the main focus of the essay are heavily laden with mythic and other social meanings, and together the three species are fashioned into a wide array of artefacts: tools, weapons, traps, weirs, flutes, trumpets, whips, baskets, manioc presses, and so on. Emphasis is placed on the semiotic dimensions of these plant species as key materials that, when fashioned into artefacts, function as signifiers allowing indigenous people to effect three general kinds of social transformation.

"The Gift" explores the uses of *máwi* (Astrostudium schomburgkii) palms to make blowguns, fish weirs, and ceremonial flutes into cultural tools for transforming wild animal nature into products that are fit for social consumption and exchange. "The Meal" surveys the many uses of *pwáapwa* (*tirita;* Ischnosiphon *spp.*) in making baskets, manioc presses, guapas, and other artefacts in which plant foods – primarily manioc flour and breads but also wild palm fruits – are contained, sifted, transported, or otherwise processed into foods for domestic production and consumption. "The Secret" looks at *púpa* (*macanilla*; Socretea eschorrhiza Spp.) and other plant (hardwood bark and vine) species used for making sacred flutes and trumpets that capture the sounds of animal and bird species as part of a broader process of creating secrecy through privileging hearing and 'speaking' over seeing and being seen. Finally, an overview of ceremonial trumpets called *kulirrína* (or *surubí*, a species of large catfish with large black stripes) will demonstrate how all three kinds of plants come together into the fashioning of a single artefact that encompasses "The Gift," "The Meal," and "The Secret."

This empirically rich study of fashioning plants among the Wakuénai of Venezuela will bring together and advance two ongoing comparative theoretical projects in current Amazonianist ethnology. The first of these theoretical developments is the renewed attempt to identify "the basic tenets of what can be considered a native Amazonian theory of materiality and personhood" (Santos-Granero 2009: 3-4) by exploring how objects – both human-made artefacts and natural

things or phenomena – "are often attributed the role of primordial building blocks in Amerindian constructional cosmologies and composite anatomies" (Santos-Granero 2009: 3). A second theoretical project aims to develop comparative understandings of a specific class of material objects that are widespread among indigenous communities of Lowland South America and that are considered to have exceptional power and meaning: flutes, trumpets, and other wind instruments. Through comparing a number of intensive studies of ritual wind instruments and their music from Lowland South America, researchers are exploring the complex ways in which flutes and other ritual wind instruments are used to introduce natural sounds into human social contexts and to cross the boundary between verbal and non-verbal communication. They are also concerned with documenting and analyzing how these musical instruments and their music enter into local definitions and negotiations of relations between men and women, kin and affine, and insiders and outsiders (Hill and Chaumeil 2011).

The current rethinking of materiality in Amazonianist studies is underpinned by the widespread idea that there was no distinction between humans and objects in primordial mythic times and that objects in the contemporary world are often capable of crossing the line between subjectivities and objectivities.[1] The recent surge of interest in perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998) and shapeshifting (transformations of humans into animals and vice-versa) has foregrounded the importance of relations among humans, animals, and spirits at the expense of human relations with plants, artefacts, and natural phenomena. The latter are supposedly regarded by indigenous Amazonians as "secondary or derivative in comparison with the spiritualization of animals" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 472). In their passion for developing new ways of understanding human-animal relations in Amazonia, ethnologists appear to have unknowingly reinvented E. B. Tylor's famous theory of animism (1958 [1871]) as a spectrum that moves progressively away from human spiritual identities to animate life forms – especially large predatory species like anacondas, jaguars, and eagles – to other birds, fish, and animate life forms, only to 'trickle down' to plants, artefacts, and inanimate objects as 'secondary effects.' Perhaps it is worth asking if this anthropocentric privileging of animate life forms is not also a eurocentric projection of a specifically Western worldview (i.e., "the animal kingdom" versus "plants and material objects") rather than an accurate reading of Amazonian ways of conceiving relations

[1] Santos-Granero (2009) cites to Levi-Strauss's study (1969) of the myth of "the revolt of objects" against their owners in support of his general thesis that the meaning of objects and materiality deserves greater attention from ethnologists.

between humans and the material world? In western Amazonia, for example, the Jivaro-speaking Aguaruna consider tobacco and other vision-producing plants to have souls that are most closely related to humans (Brown 1985). More generally, why should human relations with plants, artefacts, and things be regarded as 'secondary or derivative'?[2]

Introducing the essays in *The Occult Life of Things* (2009), Fernando Santos-Granero argues that "objects are not derivative" and asks us to consider the questions of what things are most likely to become subjectivized, or animated? – how so? – and why? In an essay on "Materializing the Occult: An Approach to Understanding the Nature of Materiality in Wakuénai Ontology," Hill (2009a) searched for answers to these questions by exploring the polytypic sets of nouns placed together into grammatical categories, or numeral classifiers, that are used in everyday verbal expressions of quantity. Analysis of these grammatical features demonstrated how language and speech partake simultaneously in two complementary and mutually interdependent ways of producing meaning. On one level, numeral classification is an explicitly taxonomic process of putting kinds of persons, animals, and things into their proper places. As a taxonomic process, nominal classifiers serve as a parsimonious way of condensing and organizing a myriad world of sensuous objects into a finite number of semantic sets. Through arranging the 'mesocosm,' or the world-as-experienced on the scale of human sense perception (Delbrück 1986), into shared categories of meaning based on common interactive properties (e.g., edibility and utility), numeral classifiers provide a set of cognitive 'handles' on reality. At the same time, these explicit taxonomic processes are also the basis for linguistically marking species and objects that are especially powerful. At this level, numeral classifiers are a way of creatively reformulating the representation of objects through experientially based categories into implicit sub-sets of more dynamic, powerful species and objects. Analysis of these grammatical markings requires knowledge of mythic narratives that explain how the world came-into-being and how these transformative processes are episodically reenacted in shamanic singing, chanting, blowing tobacco smoke, and other ritual activities. Both the taxonomic and shamanic dimensions of numeral classification provide insight into how the experiential world of objects and species is subjectivized, or animated.

By arranging the mesocosm into more and less powerful or dangerous kinds of things, Wakuénai numeral classifiers exemplify a culturally specific mapping of the distribution of cognition in the material surround of the body, or an "extended, situated embodiment" (Sinha,

[2] Anthropological researchers working on animistic beliefs and associated exchange practices in Melanesia have raised similar questions (see, for example, Mauss 1954, Strathern 1988, Gell 1998, Godelier 1999, Stasch 2009).

Rodríguez, and Vang 2008). Numeral classifiers and their analysis according to underlying taxonomic and shamanic (transformative) principles provide insight into an indigenous Amazonian way of answering the questions of what material things become subjectivized, how so, and why? Things most likely to become subjectivized are those that come into bodily contact through eating, using, and touching; things that come in pairs or that are otherwise involved in quantitative expressions; and things that are believed to have exceptional power to cause harm in ritual and myth.

If grammatical categories and lexicality provide a way of understanding intersubjectivity, or how and why some kinds of things are subjectivized, how can we approach the complementary process of how human subjectivities become 'thing-like' or materialized? Such interobjectivity is not centered on language and lexicality *per se* but on ritual and ceremonial activities of sound production, such as singing, chanting, speaking, exhaling (tobacco smoke), playing musical instruments, drumming, rattling, and making objects. Materializing the occult is a process of awakening the senses through auditory stimulation that then becomes visible through bodily activities, such as dancing or blowing tobacco smoke, which in turn double or reinforce the primarily auditory creation of political, ritual, historical, generational, developmental, and gender-inflected social spaces. These processes of materialization are dramatized in shamanic curing rituals, or contexts in which shamanic singing, rattling, and blowing tobacco smoke give audible, visible, tangible, and olfactory substance to the fear and anger of sorcery victims whose body-souls have been taken away and to the shaman's efforts to restore their patients' health by bringing their spirits back to the world of the living. Shamanic singing is not a performance *about* moving or traveling around the cosmos; rather it *is* a set of journeys away to death and back to life, a harnessing of the collective physical energies of the living that transforms subjectivities into materialities, a materializing of the occult. For the Wakuénai, materiality is as much about transforming subjective relations of thought and emotion into materials, or at least 'thing-like' entities, as it is about bestowing animateness or 'subject-like' properties on material things and beings.

The privileging of sound and hearing over sight and vision is a basic principle of Wakuénai mythic narratives, cosmology, and ritual practices. More generally, sound production and auditory perception are regarded as the main sense modes for mediating between humans, animals, and spirits throughout Lowland South America (Seeger 1987; Hill 1993; Menezes Bastos 1995; Beaudet

1997; Chaumeil 1993; Gebhart-Sayer 1985; Basso 1985; Hill and Chaumeil n.d.). Among the Wakuénai, the sound of shamanic blowing of tobacco smoke as a voiced, aspirated rush of air ("h-h-m-m-p-f") from inside to outside ritual healers' bodies is the prototypic act of materialization. As the shamanic breath-sound becomes visible in a cloud of tobacco smoke, it gives material substance to the shaman's power to link together a world of invisible spirits – spirits of the dead, forest spirits, and other disease-causing spirits – with a visible world of ritual objects: foods, tools, weapons, musical instruments, patients' (and their families') bodies, and even visiting anthropologists and their cameras and tape recorders. The central importance of blowing tobacco smoke in shamanic rituals is underscored by the facts that chant-owners (málikai limínali) are referred to as "blowers" (sopladores) in local Spanish and describe their singing and chanting as "blowing tobacco smoke" (ínyapakáati dzéema).

Although this indigenous theory of ritual power as a process of materialization is specific to the Wakuénai of the Upper Rio Negro region in Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil, it is but one of many variant forms of shamanic practices in Amazonia that make use of audible breathing, or exhaling, as a primordial sound of life that both animates and materializes the world of objects, species, and people and that can be amplified, collectivized, and otherwise harnessed by making and playing musical wind instruments (or aerophones) from hollowed out bones, ceramics, and plants. In *Burst of Breath: Indigenous Ritual Wind Instruments in Lowland South America*, Jonathan Hill and Jean-Pierre Chaumeil (2011) have organized case studies by a group of Amazonianist scholars in order to explore the variety of ways in which ritual flutes, trumpets, and clarinets are linked to the ritual power of shamanic breath and how these wind instruments act as 'energy transformers' (Riviere 1969) that embody the power to convert affines into kin, spirits of the dead into living persons, animal sounds into human speech, and so on. Musical wind instruments are examples of the category of tube-shaped objects in Lowland South America, which are in turn linked to the prevalence of male and female genitalia – penes, breasts, wombs, birth canals, and umbilical cords – as symbols that ensure the flow of life through allowing passage of food, water, air, sound, semen, blood, children and other vital substances. "Like rivers, anacondas, palm trunks, and flutes, the human body and its various parts – vocal apparatus, gut, bones, and genitals – are all tubes" (Hugh-Jones 2001: 252). Ritual wind instruments belong to this family of tubular structures that transform energy, sustain life, and convert potentially dangerous 'others' (e.g., affines) into fully socialized members of local kin-based communities. Ritual wind instruments are thus symbols of the ability to build connections, or enduring social ties, between

the living and the dead, mythic ancestors and human descendants, humans and animals, men and women, kin and affine, indigenous peoples and nation-states, and so on. These sacred flutes, trumpets, and clarinets are the skeletal inner structure of the social body that binds together men, women, animals, spirits, and others into coherent universes of meaning and discourse.

2. The Arawak-Speaking Wakuénai of Venezuela

Before entering into a more detailed exploration of the three main species of plants used for making artefacts and the social and mythic transformations associated with each of the three species, it is important to establish the contexts in which I carried out long-term fieldwork with the Wakuénai of Venezuela in the 1980s and '90s as well as the broad outlines of their cosmology. The Wakuénai of Venezuela are also known by the ethnonym 'Curripaco' in both Venezuela and Colombia, and in Brazil they refer to themselves as the 'Baniwa' or 'Baniwa-Coripaco.' The official name of their language is 'Kurripaco' (KPC) in the Ethnologue Languages of the World (www.ethnologue.org), which lists a total population of 12,540 in all three countries (7,830 in Colombia, 1,250 in Brazil, and 3,460 in Venezuela as of 2001). I carried out dissertation fieldwork on the musical performance system of the Wakuénai-Curripaco of Venezuela in 1980 and 1981, a regional study of 'Northern Arawakan Adaptations to Extralocal Factors' in 1984 and 1985, and an intensive study of indigenous mythic narratives in 1998.[3] In addition to my published works on the Wakuénai of Venezuela (see Hill 1988, 1993, 2002, 2009), the Baniwa-Coripaco of Brazil are described in several works (Wright 1981; 1998; 2009), and the Curripaco of Colombia have also been documented in a recent ethnography (Journet 1995).

[3] I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned Societies International Doctoral Research Fellowship, Program for Latin America and the Caribbean, and to Fulbright-Hays Training Grant, Doctoral Dissertation Abroad Program for providing financial support for my dissertation research in Venezuela in 1980 and 1981. I am also grateful to the Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Program for supporting my post-doctoral field research in Venezuela in 1984 and 1985. Finally, I am grateful to the Office of Research and Development Administration at Southern Illinois University for a Faculty Summer Research Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Summer Research Stipend, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research for a Small Grant for their financial support of my research in Venezuela in 1998.

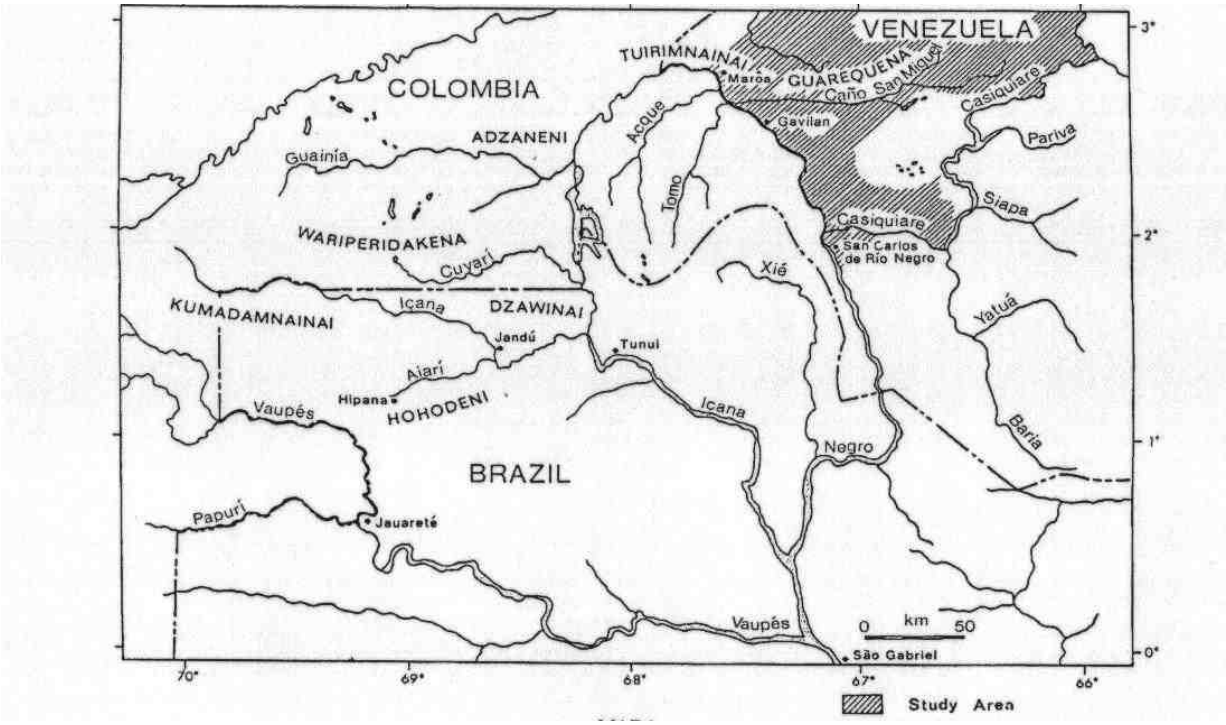

Figure 1. Ancestral territories of Wakuénai phratries in Isana-Guainía drainage area

The Wakuénai of Venezuela are located primarily in villages along the Guainía-Negro River from Victorino in the north to Cocuí in the south (see Figure 1). A smaller number of their villages are found along the lower Casiquiare River; the Río Atabapo and its tributaries, the Temi and Atacavi rivers; and neighborhoods and villages in and around Puerto Ayacucho. Most of the Wakuénai living along the Guainía-Negro River in Venezuela belong to one of four large kinship groups, called the Adzanéni, Dzáwinai, Waríperídakena, and Tuirímnainai. These exogamous phratries consist of several hierarchically ranked patrisibs whose ranking is based on mythic order of emergence from the center of the world at Hípana, a village along the Aiarí River in Brazil. During my dissertation research in 1980 and 1981, I divided my time in the field between two villages, a group of Adzanéni living in the vicinity of San Carlos de Rio Negro and a group of Dzáwinai living near Maroa. In the latter community, I was privileged to work with a generous and talented Dzáwinai elder, Horacio López Pequeira, who was a highly respected master of sacred chanting (*malikái limínali*) and extraordinarily knowledgeable storyteller. Horacio and I spent many hours transcribing and discussing sacred chants and songs (*malikái*), shamanic songs (*malirríkairi*), and collective dance-music played on a variety of flutes and trumpets. Horacio taught me about the connections between ritual chanting and mythic narratives and that some of the spirit-names invoked in *malikái* are especially powerful because they "have stories." Nearly all the musical performances that are stored in the Curripaco (KPC) collections at the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA) at the University of Texas (www.aillautexas.org) are the results of my collaborative research with Horacio, his son Felix López Oliveros, and other people living in their community in the early 1980s. In addition to performances of verbal and instrumental music, I recorded a significant number of mythic narratives with Horacio during those years.

The mythic narratives discussed in following sections of this essay are based on transcriptions and translations which I made in collaboration with Felix López Oliveros during fieldwork in 1998. Wakuénai narratives about the mythic past and its transformations fit clearly within the general pattern of indigenous American genesis stories, or "the scheme of world-ages, of plural creations that end in flood, eclipse, and other catastrophes" and where "The emergence of our human species is posited as a late, though climatic, event in the story of life forms" (Brotherston and Sá 2004: 11). Wakuénai storytellers refer to these narratives by the phrase *yákuti úupi pérri*, or "words from the primordial times," and they are set in an unfinished space-time before there were any clear distinctions between humans and animals, men and women, day and

night, old and young, and powerful and powerless. The central character throughout these primordial times and the ensuing transformations that open up into the world of distinct peoples, species, and places is a trickster-creator who survives a prolonged series of life-threatening attacks and who ultimately defeats all his adversaries.

The Wakuénai refer to this trickster-creator as "Made-From-Bone" (*Iñápirríkuli*) because of the way he was created from the finger bones of his slain father. Unlike the buffoonish, comical tricksters of better-known North American mythologies (Radin 1956), the trickster-creator in Wakuénai society is an omniscient, powerful being who always anticipates the treachery and deceit of other beings and who skillfully manipulates words and other signs as tools for deceiving and defeating these other beings.[4] From the very beginning of mythic times, Made-From-Bone must struggle against powerful adversaries who try to kill him and his brothers by shooting them with arrows and darts, poisoning their food, drowning them in rivers and streams, or burning them alive. However, Made-From-Bone always knows in advance about his enemies' lethal traps and finds ways to escape, often turning the tables on his enemies in the process.

One of Made-From-Bone's most potent weapons of self-defense is verbal deception, or ways of speaking that cannot be interpreted literally. The trickster-creator always has superior knowledge of his enemies' intentions and uses words and other signs as ways of misleading and defeating them.[5] Made-From-Bone embodies the principle that nothing people say or do can be taken at face value but must always be interpreted symbolically in relation to secret knowledge that does not form part of the immediate situation.[6]

By the end of the first period of mythic space-time, Made-from-Bone has demonstrated his invincibility and his ability to outsmart and defeat all enemies. A second cycle of narratives, called "The World Begins" takes place in a more recent, partially completed world in which Made-from-Bone travels around getting important things, such as cooking fire, night, and peach-palm fruits, by

[4] Scholars of mythic tricksters in West Africa have noted a similar contrast between African and "New World" (North American) trickster figures, arguing that the African trickster's "amorality is not that of the anomic, presocialized individual, who has not yet matured to a sense of responsibility. Suave, urbane and calculating, the African trickster acts with premeditation, always in control of the situation" (Feldmann 1963:15).

[5] Made-From-Bone's uses of verbal deception are reminiscent of the Kalapalo trickster figures in whom "deception and language go together" (Basso 1987: 9). However, among the Kalapalo the theme of verbal deception, or "language as illusion," is spread across a number of trickster characters rather than concentrated into a single, omnipotent trickster-creator as it is among the Wakuénai.

[6] Made-From-Bone bears striking resemblance to the West African-derived myths about *Esu*, or the "signifying monkey" (Gates 1988). Gates' study demonstrates how trickster's privileging of the tropes forms the cornerstone of an Afro-American theory of language use that informs not only a variety of overtly literary oral and written genres but also many varieties of speech in everyday social life. "Signifyin(g) ... is the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning" (Gates 1988: 82).

asking their mythic owners. The reputation of Made-from-Bone as an omniscient, invincible being is now fully established, and his interactions with other mythic beings are more like puzzles or games in which he must outsmart his interlocutors in order to take away their goods than the life-and-death struggles against his adversaries of earlier times.

A third, final cycle of mythic narratives describes how "The World Opens Up" and outlines the conception, birth, and life cycle of the primordial human being (*Kuwái*), who is the son of an incestuous union between Made-From-Bone and his paternal aunt (*Ámaru*). The cycle of myths about *Kuwái* and *Ámaru* describes the origins of individual male and female humanness, the human life cycle, the passage of generational and historical time, and the ritual practices for controlling all these developmental and temporal processes. In addition, "The World Opens Up" includes several narratives about the origins of witchcraft, shamanic curing, the afterlife, and modernity.

3. *Máwi* (Astrostudium schomburgkii): The Gift

Máwi is the Wakuénai name for a species of small palm trees that are collected from forested areas and made into blowguns (*mawípi*), fishing traps and weirs, and pairs of ceremonial flutes (*máwi*). Bundles of *máwi* palm trunks of varying lengths are gathered in the process of clearing areas of forest for manioc gardens (Figure 2). The trunks are submerged in the river until the soft pithy material at their core has softened and can be removed with long sharpened sticks. Once the soft pith has been removed, the inner surfaces of the hollowed-out palm tube are smoothed by pushing and pulling long sections of a knotty vine (*adápi*) back and forth in a sawing motion. Blowguns are made by fastening a carved mouthpiece to one end of the *máwi* tube. Long slats for making fishing traps and weirs are made by cutting the *máwi* tubes along their vertical axis into strips that are 1.5 cm wide and up to 4 m long. These slats are then lashed together to form large, heart-shaped traps (*kakúri*) placed along river banks to catch fish as the rivers flood their banks in the long, April through July wet season. Strips of *máwi* can also be lashed into larger, fence-like weirs used to block off the mouths of streams to capture large quantities of *Leporinus* fish after they have spawned and migrated into newly flooded areas of forest at the beginning of the long wet season.

Figure 2. Bundles of *máwi* palm tubes for making flutes, blowguns, and fish traps (Photo taken by Jonathan D. Hill, 1981)

Máwi flutes are made by cutting a small, 8 x 1 cm^2 hole from the upper end (i.e., the end into which the player blows air) of a hollow palm tube. The flute's maker cuts off any excess length and throws it away, making only one instrument from each *máwi* pole. The longer, 'male' flutes range from 1.59 to 1.77 meters in length, according to the height of the eyebrows of the man who makes them when he is standing upright. 'Female' flutes are about 15 cm, or eight fingers' width, shorter than male flutes and range from 1.44 to 1.62 meters in length. The rectangular hole is covered with two palm leaves, and a plug made of *peramá* (a natural resin) is molded with a hot knife inside the upper end of the flute so that a condensed air column is channeled up and split against the lower of the two leaves to produce sounds. The upper palm leave serves mainly as a tuning device, since by narrowing the aperture between the two leaves, the pitch is raised slightly. The actual pitches produced can vary among different pairs of flutes due to differences in the heights of men who make them. What is most important is that the two instruments of each pair be tuned one whole step apart, with 'male' flutes tuned one whole step lower than 'female' flutes. The instruments must be played in a hocket, or alternating, style in order to produce a melody, since they have no fingerholes for producing smaller melodic intervals. Each *máwi* flute produces a series of overtones with larger intervals naturally occupying the lower register and smaller intervals of a third or less in the higher register. Each melody consists of a string of notes that are alternately produced on the male and female flutes.

Máwi has strong mythic associations with death. Although Made-from-Bone is invincible, his powers are not unlimited as he is incapable of preventing the death of his younger brother, *Máwirríkuli* (Made-from-*Máwi*), who was poisoned by Made-from-Bone's arch-enemy.[7] As the first being to die in primordial mythic times, *Máwirríkuli* establishes a close symbolic relation between *máwi* and death.

Máwi palms are also strongly associated with the second cycle of narratives, or 'The World Begins," when Made-from-Bone obtained of night and sleep, cooking fire, manioc gardens, peach-palm fruits, and the musical dancing of *pudáli* ceremonial exchanges. Most importantly, Made-from-Bone and another of his younger brothers, named *Káali*, teach their children how to make and play *máwi* flutes and other instruments in collective ceremonies so that they will know how to

[7] Elsewhere Hill (2002) has written about this mythic trickster-creator as the central figure in an indigenous theory of meaning construction. A complete English translation of the narratives is available in *Made-from-Bone: Trickster Myths, Music, and History from the Amazon* (Hill 2009b). Digital versions of the original field recordings of the narratives are available at the Archives of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA) (www.ailla.utexas.org) in the Kurripaco collection (KPC003R101-109, KPC003R201-206, KPC003R301-306).

properly ask their hosts for food and drink. The invention of ceremonial dance-music (*mádzerukái*) as a way of teaching people how to ask their hosts for drinks marks a key transition in mythic history. Coming against the background of Made-from-Bone's earlier battles with dangerous adversaries, the invention of ceremonial dance-music can be understood as a process of socializing the distance between groups of people, transforming fear and hostility into relations based on respect and reciprocity.

Máwi flutes (also called *yapurutú* in lengua Geral) and other wind instruments made from *máwi* palms are key symbols of the ideals of complementarity between men and women as well as of balanced, reciprocal relations of giving and taking between affinally related communities. Historically, *máwi* flute duets were played in large ensembles as groups of men and women entered another village to offer their hosts a large quantity of smoked fish and game meat in ceremonial exchanges, called *pudáli*. Each *máwi* flute player was joined by a female dance partner, and the opening duets consisted of large, standardized duets accompanied by the low, rumbling sounds of *kulirrína* (catfish) trumpets. After these initial performances around the food-offering, the guest and host headmen made formal speeches of offering and accepting the gift of food, which was put away during the night while host men and women drank together and performed drinking song-dialogues (*pákamarántakan*). Early in the morning, the food offering was redistributed to guest and host families alike, and men and women from the two groups were free to dance and play improvisatory duets together during the day of feasting. At the end of the opening ceremony, the male owner (*púdalímnali*) presented his group's *kulirrína* trumpets to their hosts as tokens of the expectation that a closing *pudáli* ceremony would be held several weeks later. In closing ceremonies, a female owner (*púdalímnarru*) organized women in the production of a large quantity of processed manioc pulp that formed the food-offering. Instead of *kulirrína* trumpets, the guest men played stamping tubes (*wáana*) and sang special songs (*waanápani*) as they arrived in the hosts' village.[8]

Máwi flutes and the broader context of *pudáli* ceremonial exchanges signify the connectedness of men and women, kin and affines, and living and dead. The playing of *máwi* flutes

[8] Copies of Hill's original field recordings of Kurripaco music made in the 1980s were recently transferred from cassette (analog) to digital sound and placed on the website of AILLA (www.ailla.utexas.org) as part of the NEH project on "Archiving Significant Collections" at the University of Texas. In addition to numerous examples of *máwi* flute duets (e.g., KPC001R002I001, KPC001R004I001, KPC001R008I001, KPC001R009I001, KPC001R0011I001, KPC001R0013I001), the collection includes a *máwi* flute duet with *kulirrína* trumpets (KPC001R0068), several drinking song dialogues (*pákamarántakan*) (KPC001R0061, KPC001R0064), songs of the *wáana* dance stamping tubes (KPC001R0053, KPC001R0054, KPC001R0057, KPC001R0058, KPC001R0067), and various other musical and verbal performances associated with *pudáli* ceremonial exchanges.

also speaks to the linkages between communities of people and the annual spawning and migration of *Leporinus* fish at the beginning of the long wet season. The ideal time for initiating a *pudáli* ceremonial cycle is when large quantities of *Leporinus* fish are captured in weirs as they return from spawning grounds in newly flooded forests to the river's main channel and are captured in large weirs. The low, rumbling bass ostinato of the *kulirrína* trumpets is said to imitate the sound of rivers and streams filled to the brim with migrating, spawning *Leporinus* fish. The playing of *máwi* flutes and *kulirrína* trumpets over an offering of smoked fish and game meat thus connects the annual renewal of forest and riverine tropical ecosystems with the regeneration of human social relations based on balanced reciprocity between affinally related communities and complementarity between men and women.

4. *Pwáapwa* (Ischnosiphon spp.): The Meal

The Wakuénai living in villages along the Guainía-Negro River in Venezuela practice slash-and-burn cultivation of bitter manioc and other cultigens, such as pineapple, hot peppers, and squash. Bitter manioc is one of the few cultivated species able to thrive in the region's acidic and nutrient-poor soils (Hill and Moran 1983). Manioc bread is the main staple of the indigenous diet, and the breads are eaten together with all other kinds of fruits, vegetables, and meats. When no other foods are available in periods of scarcity, manioc breads keep people alive, and the breads are considered to be ritually safe for individuals recovering from illness or injury, no matter how severe.

Although cultivating bitter manioc is highly efficient and relatively productive even in these poor conditions, processing the starchy tubers into edible flour, breads, and other products requires considerable time and effort. The harvested roots must be soaked, carried, peeled, grated, sifted, pressed, and re-sifted before the mass can be toasted or baked on large clay ovens and sun-dried on wooden racks. While the labor of processing and cooking bitter manioc is done by adult women, it is men's responsibility to make the tools that women use on a daily basis.

With the exception of grater boards, which are made by inserting tiny stone teeth into curved palmwood boards, the tools women use for processing bitter manioc are made out of a single species of palm, known locally as *pwáapwa* (Ischnosiphon spp.; *tirite*, Spanish). The most important artefacts are circular sieves used for removing fibers and other impurities from the starchy pulp of grated tubers. The mass of grated, sifted pulp is then put into a woven vertical press in order to squeeze out juices, which are highly poisonous. After pressing, the dried pulp is rinsed

and sifted again through circular sieves before being baked into large circular breads or toasted into cereal-like granules on large clay ovens. The cooked breads are stacked on circular woven trays and carried to drying racks. Manioc flour is transported and stored in baskets lined with *plantanilla* or Cecropia leaves. Sieves and presses used for processing raw manioc pulp as well as trays and baskets for carrying and storing manioc products are all made from thin strips of the outer bark of *pwáapwa*.

Young men learn how to weave baskets, sieves, trays, and presses during male initiation rituals, and adult men are expected to make these artefacts for their wives. Harvesting *pwáapwa* to make artefacts used for domestic purposes is done in the course of felling new gardens, hunting game animals, or collecting wild palm fruits. Bundles of the long slender stalks are cut to uniform lengths, and small vertical cuts are made at regular intervals (approximately 5 mm) around one end of the stalks. A knife is then used to separate the outer, dark green bark of the stalks away from their hard inner core. These strips of bark are then peeled carefully down the entire length of the stalk until there are enough thin strips of equal length and width to make a basket, manioc press, or other woven artefact. The green strips are then soaked in water to keep them flexible for weaving into various shapes. The more skillful weavers will dye some of the strips black in order to weave intricate designs into a basket or tray (see Figures 3 and 4). Once the woven artefact has dried for several days, the strips of *pwáapwa* turn light brown in color and stiffen into their final form.

Figure 3. Basket with the name "JONATHAN HILL" woven into it (Photo by Jonathan D. Hill, June, 2006).

Figure 4. Young man weaving basket with black designs; tubes in right background are hollow bamboo pieces to be made into dance stamping tubes (*wáana*); circular woven tray (*guapa*) in left background is for carrying manioc breads (Photo taken by Jonathan D. Hill, 1981)

Given the ubiquity of bitter manioc and artefacts made from *pwáapwa*, it is not surprising that this plant species receives explicit attention in mythic narratives and ritual events. *Pwáapwa* is mentioned in one of the early episodes of the third cycle of mythic creation narratives when the primordial human being (*Kuwái*) takes a group of boys to gather *pwáapwa* so that he can teach them how to make baskets, trays, and other artefacts as part of their initiation into adulthood. Sacred chanting performed after childbirth must include the spirit-names for *pwáapwa* so that the newborn infant's father can resume everyday activities of hunting, fishing, gardening, and making artefacts. Interestingly, the first spirit-name for *pwáapwa* is based on auditory imagery, or the ripping, tearing sound produced then the outer bark is peeled off to make thin strips of weaving material. *Límutukéku éenu* translates as "the ripping sound of the sky." *Éenu* means "sky" in everyday speech, but in sacred chants (*malikái*) the term *éenu* refers to a category of spirit-names that includes various species of wild palms that are sources of useful material and/or edible fruits. Palm trees have a broader mythic significance as the reincarnation of *Kuwái* after his fiery "death." As the vertical pathway between the celestial world of mythic ancestors and the social world of human descendants on the ground, palm trees form a cosmic umbilical cord that nourishes humanity with life-giving ancestral powers. This connotation of the term *éenu* is expressed in another spirit-name for *pwáapwa*, *hliépulepukúke éenu* (lit., "the navel of the sky"), which also refers to "the manioc sieve." A third name for *pwáapwa* is "the cutting smooth sky-spirit" (*litiékuka éenu*), which associates the smooth, thin strips of weaving material with cutting and loss of blood. Thus, in the space of one short stanza, the chanting of spirit-names synaesthetically interweaves auditory, tactile, bodily, and visual images of mythic power to verbally construct the *pwáapwa* palm as a ripping-sound, cutting-smooth, cosmic navel of the cosmos.

Like the *máwi* palms used for making blowguns, fish traps, and flutes, *pwáapwa* plays a vital role in the technology of subsistence economics by providing the Wakuénai with raw materials for making the tools needed for processing bitter manioc and for storing and transporting manioc products. Both *máwi* and *pwáapwa* signify the cultural value placed on gender complementarity between adult men and women, but they do so in contrasting ways. *Máwi* palms must be hollowed out so that men can move things – poisoned darts, fish, or breaths of air/musical notes – *through* them, and these tubular artefacts serve as connectors or portals between predator and prey, life and death, fisherman and fish, and male flute player and female dance partner. Rather than being hollowed out, the hard inner cores of *pwáapwa* palms are laid bare by peeling away the

outer shell of bark into long thin strips. The woven artefacts fashioned from *pwáapwa* are containment structures *into* or *onto* which raw and cooked vegetable foods – grated manioc pulp or processed manioc products – are placed, processed, stored, or moved.

5. *Púpa* (Socretea eschorrhiza Spp.): The Secret

Púpa (Socretea eschorrhiza Spp.; *macanilla,* Spanish) is a palm species used for making sacred flutes and trumpets played in ceremonies called *kwépani* ("Kuwái-dance") and male initiation rituals (*wakapéetaka iénpitipé*). The Wakuénai regard these flutes and trumpets as sacred instruments that must never be photographed, filmed, or visually represented, and for this reason I will not explicitly describe the instruments' appearance or construction here or in other publications. In terms of organology, the sacred flutes of Kuwái belong to the category of duct flutes with stops with partly covered sound orifices. The sacred flutes are similar to ceremonial flutes called *máwi* inasmuch as both have palm leaves lashed to the outside of the barrel and these leaves partly cover the sound orifice, or hole cut into the side of the barrel's upper end. However, unlike *máwi* flutes, the flutes of Kuwái have finger holes, or stops, allowing each instrument to produce a greater range of larger and smaller melodic intervals. The sacred trumpets of Kuwái are classified as bark trumpets, or single tubes of hollowed *púpa* made by wrapping bark spirally into a cone-shaped resonator held together by a framework of sticks attached to their outside.

In sharp contrast with *máwi* and *pwáapwa*, *púpa* is not a source of practical artefacts used for everyday economic activities and is used only for making sacred flutes and trumpets of Kuwái. The birth of Kuwái, the primordial human being and son of an incestuous union between Made-from-Bone and one of his paternal aunts (*Ámaru*), radically changed the older primordial world of Made-from-Bone and his adversaries. The body of Kuwái was a monstrous conglomeration of different animals, plants, and material substances, and when Kuwái 'spoke' the musical sounds of his voice traveled far away, opening up the world and filling it with all the different kinds of animals, plants, and objects.

> *kamena kákukani Iñapirríkuli isriú. dapa, máaliawa, p^{h}iume hna Kuwái, p^{h}iume kákuka lidaki.*
>
> (And he began to 'speak,' or make sounds, for Iñapirríkuli: paca, white heron flutes, everything of Kuwái, all the sounds of his body.)

> *kamena kákukani hnéemakaru liaku p^{h}iume hekuápiriko. tsúukatua hekuapi.*
> (He began to 'speak' the word-sounds that could be heard in the entire world. The world was still very small.)
> *kamena kákukani. "heeee," pidaliaku. limáliatsa pida hiekuita lihméetawa hekuapi.*
> (He began to speak, "Heee." The sound of his voice ran away and opened up the world.)

Through a series of episodes, Made-from-Bone (*Iñapirríkuli*) succeeds in luring Kuwái down to the ground at *Hípana*, the place of ancestral emergence, and learning the sacred singing and chanting (*malikái*) necessary for male initiation rituals. *Dzúli*, a younger brother of Made-from-Bone and first chant-owner, memorizes all these sacred songs and chants before helping his brothers to push Kuwái into a bonfire, causing the world to shrink back to its original miniature size. From the ashes of Kuwái grows a *pupa* tree, a *yebaro* tree,[9] and *dzámakuáapi* ("two snakes") vines. Made-from-Bone felled these trees and vines and fashioned them into the sacred flutes and trumpets of Kuwái. Ámaru and the women stole these instruments from Made-from-Bone and played them in various downstream and upstream locations. The world opened up for the second time when the women played the sacred flutes and trumpets of Kuwái. Eventually, through a variety of trickery and deceit, Made-from-Bone and the men regained control over the sacred instruments, and they remain under men's control until today.

The men's fashioning of sacred flutes and trumpets out of *pupa*, *yebaro* bark, and *dzámakuáapi* vines is an episodic enactment of the process of materialization, or the transformation of human subjectivities into 'things.' In ritual contexts, materialization is rooted in the shamanic practice of exhaling primordial breath-sounds which are made visible as clouds of tobacco smoke. The cycle of mythic narratives about Kuwái's creations of the world call attention to two distinct manifestations of materialization as well as their transformation into one another. In its first manifestation, materialization takes the form of word-sounds that are 'spoken' by the different body parts and animal species making up the mythic being of Kuwái and that directly transform into natural species and objects as the world opens up for the first time. This musical naming power, or 'The Powerful Sound that Opened Up the World' (*kémakáni ^{h}liméetaka hekuápi*), becomes the prototype for sacred singing and chanting in which powerful spirit-names are used to speak-, sing-, and chant-into-being the animal and plants species and objects making up the human

[9] *Yebaro* is a hardwood species often found in patches of forest cleared for use as manioc gardens. The bark stripped from *yebaro* trunks is used to make various bark trumpets of Kuwái.

mesocosm. In its second manifestation, or the materialization of Kuwái as a set of ritual flutes and trumpets made from *pupa* and other plant species, the ambiguity of human body parts and animal species is collectively expressed in the belief that each flute or trumpet represents not only a different part of the mythic body of Kuwái but also a different animal species. The pairs of shorter and longer *máariawa* flutes, for example, are said to represent the thumb and index finger of Kuwái and, at the same time, the shape of a white heron (*máari*) in flight.[10] If we take a wider perspective of the two mythic creations of the world, it is clear that the transformation of Kuwái as a creative life-force, or musical naming power, in the first creation into Kuwái as a set of musical wind instruments in the second creation is itself a macrocosmic demonstration of the process of materialization.

The cycle of myths about Kuwái and the two creations of the world outlines the construction of a social world that is more hierarchical than the egalitarian one of balanced reciprocity between kin and affines and complementarity between men and women created in the earlier periods by Made-from-Bone. By the time of the fiery 'death' and transformation of Kuwái, the social world has become differentiated into a hierarchy of older and younger generations, adult (initiated) and uninitiated children, chant-owners and non-specialists. The passage through generational and life-cycle, or developmental, time is mediated by *Dzúli*, the first chant-owner, who alone possesses the secret knowledge of ritual chanting and singing (*malikái*), or the human means for accessing and harnessing the musical naming power of Kuwái. In the second creation of the world, social hierarchy based on differential control of secret knowledge is collectively embodied in the distinction between groups of men who take the knowledge of how to make and play sacred flutes and trumpets away from groups of women. Women are able to take control of this ritual power for brief periods of time, and their playing of the flutes and trumpets of Kuwái in various places opens up the world for a second time. Nevertheless, their power is limited to playing the instruments that they have stolen from Made-from-Bone and the men, and they do not retain knowledge of how to *make* the sacred musical instruments after the men have regained control of them. Moreover, Ámaru and the women can take possession of the instruments only by *going away* from the mythic center of the world, and they are always running away from Made-from-

[10] Also, the term "*máariye*", or "white heron feather," is one of the many ritual names for Kuwái and is the most prevalent word in the refrain for sacred songs, called *kápetiápani* ("whip-dance songs"), performed in *kwépani* ceremonies and male initiation rituals. In myth, *kápetiápani* originated when Made-from-Bone and his brothers took Kuwái outside and danced in circles around a giant bonfire before the men pushed Kuwái into the fire, causing the fiery end of the first creation of the world.

Bone and the men.

In both mythic narratives and sacred rituals, the secret of Kuwái is not an absolute one of knowledge versus ignorance. In myth, the women know that Made-from-Bone and the men have tricked them.

> "Aaa," he said, "Those things [flutes and trumpets] have all transformed themselves into animals; fish, jaguars, all dangerous animals. Now we men are going to watch over them. You women cannot see them any longer because they are very dangerous," Made-From-Bone said to First-Woman.
>
> "Okay," she said, "It doesn't matter; another of Made-From-Bone's tricks."

In rituals, the secrecy that surrounds the sacred flutes and trumpets of *Kuwái* applies primarily to the sense of vision. Women know about these instruments, can *hear* their music, and 'converse' with men playing the flutes and trumpets; but they must never *see* either the instruments or the men who play them. Clearly the secrecy of the sacred flutes is an avowed one in which both men and women are required to participate in a ritual co-construction of the secret.[11]

6. *Kulirrína* trumpets: A Synthesis of the Gift, the Meal, and the Secret

Kulirrína trumpets are named after a species of large catfish (*kulírri*; *surubí*, Yeral; *raiao*, Spanish) that has a thick black stripe running along each of its sides. In 1927, Kurt Nimuendajú traveled through the Northwest Amazon and concluded that these 'catfish' (*surubí*) trumpets were the most distinctive material artefacts produced by Arawak-speaking 'Baniwa' of the Isana River (Nimuendajú 1950). By the time of my first fieldwork with the Wakuénai in 1980, these unique instruments were no longer in use in villages along the Guainía River. However, in the course of studying the music of ceremonial *máwi* flutes and related kinds of vocal and instrumental music, my indigenous hosts decided to construct several of the *kulirrína* trumpets as a way of teaching me about them and as a demonstration for people in the village. News of the catfish trumpets spread across the region, and soon there were not only Wakuénai visitors but Yeral-speakers from the

[11] See Nicolas Journet's essay (n.d.), "Hearing Without Seeing: Sacred Flutes As the Medium For an Avowed Secret in Curripaco Masculine Ritual," for a detailed exploration of the meaning of 'avowed secrets' in Wakuénai, or Curripaco, ritual music.

Casiquiare, Guarequena from Guzman Blanco, and Baniwa[12] from Maroa who were all interested in seeing and hearing the catfish trumpets.[13]

In technical terms, the *kulirrína* are complex trumpets, or ones in which a separate mouthpiece or embouchure is attached to a tubular resonator (Izikowitz 1970 [1934]: 232). The use of basketry covered with resins, waxes, and paints to make bell-shaped resonators is found only in the Upper Rio Negro region among the Wakuénai and Curripaco of Venezuela and Colombia and the Baniwa of Brazil. Making catfish trumpets begins with weaving tubular resonators (the body of the fish) out of *pwáapwa* strips around a balsawood mold. The lower ends of the woven resonators are later sewn and flared out to make the fishes' tails. After several identically sized and shaped resonators have been woven and sewn, short tubes of hollowed-out *máwi* palm are fastened to wheels made from *dzamakuáapi* vines just large enough to fit snugly into the 'heads', or upper ends of the woven resonators. The mouthpieces are then inserted into the resonators and cemented into place with several layers of palm leaves covered with hot, melted resin from a tree species called *peramá*. As this combination of resins and palm leaves cools, it hardens and holds the mouthpieces into place. The long ends of *pwáapwa* strips are then tied securely around the *máwi* mouthpieces, and excess lengths of *pwáapwa* are cut off with a knife. The instruments are not considered to be dangerous or sacred except for the moment in which men close up the resonators by tying them to the mouthpieces. It is said that women of childbearing age must not see or be present at this moment because their future unborn children could become stuck inside their wombs, causing death to both the mothers and their unborn children.

Once the instruments have been closed up, the entire exterior of the resonators, from the 'heads' where they are joined to the mouthpieces down to the 'tails', must be covered in thick layers of *peramá* resin so that they will be airtight and capable of functioning as resonating sound cavities. Heated knives are used to smooth the coating of resin until the trumpets have a smooth, shiny, jet-black appearance. Long strips of palm leaves are tied to the outsides of the resonators to serve as masking while the other surfaces are painted white and decorated with designs representing the mythic ancestors of the trumpets' makers (Figure 5). After drying the trumpets on the same racks used for sun-drying manioc breads, the palm leaf masking is removed, revealing the

[12] The Baniwa of Maroa share many of the mythological and ritual traditions with the Wakuénai, Curripaco, and 'Baniwa' of Brazil. However, the Baniwa language spoken in Maroa is radically different from that of the 'Baniwa' of Brazil.

[13] See "Ethnomusicological Interlude: The Catfish-Trumpet Festival of 1981, or How To Ask for a Drink in Curripaco" (Hill 2009b) for a detailed description of this event.

long black stripes that complete the instruments' resemblance to *kulírri* catfish (see Figure 6). The upper ends, or 'heads,' and lower ends, or 'tails,' of the trumpets may also be decorated with white heron feathers mounted on thin sticks (Figure 7).

Figure 5. Masking and painting trumpets to make black stripes (photo taken by Jonathan D. Hill, 1981)

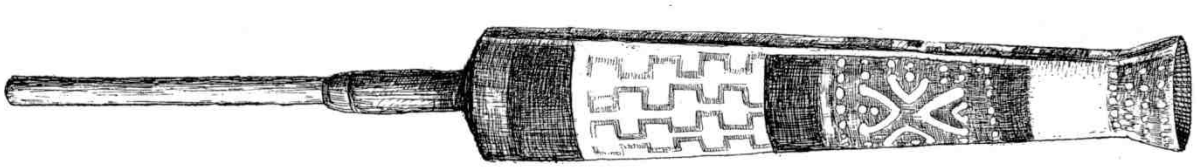

Figure 6. Drawing of "Surubi-trumpet with bell of waxed and painted basketry, Baniwa GM: 28.1.159. Length 130 cm." (Izikowitz 1970 [1934]: 232).

Figure 7. Testing trumpet after painting and decorating (photo taken by Jonathan D. Hill, 1981)

The use of woven basketry, palmwood mouthpieces, vines, and resins to make complex trumpets is unique to the Wakuénai, Curripaco, and 'Baniwa' of the Upper Rio Negro region and is not found anywhere else in South America or the rest of the world. My research with the Wakuénai of Venezuela thus confirms Nimuendajú's assertion (1950) that these catfish trumpets are the most distinctive cultural artefacts produced by the 'Baniwa' of Brazil. The making of such unique and highly visible, sound-producing artefacts is a statement of collective identity, a way in which the Wakuénai, Curripaco, and Baniwa express who they are and distinguish themselves from all the other Arawak-, Tukano-, Maku-, Yeral-speaking and non-indigenous peoples living in the region.[14]

Yet if these quintessential indigenous artefacts, or the local cultural 'logo,' are unique and culturally specific, the materials out of which the catfish trumpets are made – *máwi*, *pwáapwa*, and *dzamakuáapi* – are signifiers of socioeconomic and religious themes that are found throughout indigenous Amazonia: the reciprocal giving and taking of foods and other gifts, the processing and transporting of vegetable foods, and the power of secret or restricted knowledge. *Kulirrína* trumpets unite all three themes into single objects, a fashioning of plants that connects the annual spawning runs of fish to the episodic regeneration of human social relations; men's hunting and fishing to women's gardening and manioc processing; kin to affine; and invisible secret to the experiential world of sounds, shapes, colors, objects, and species.

7. Concluding Thoughts

This essay has demonstrated the multiple ways in which an indigenous Amazonian people fashions wild plant species into a variety of artifacts that are centrally important to daily activities of procuring, producing, and processing foods; building social relations between men and women and between kin and affines; constructing ritual hierarchy and secrecy; and defining a unique social identity within one of the most ethnolinguistically diverse regions in the world. Plant materials and the artifacts people make from them – tools, weapons, traps, weirs, baskets, presses, sieves, flutes, and trumpets – are not a presymbolic order onto which cultural meanings are grafted but semiotic resources, or cognitive tools, that enter directly into peoples' practical

[14] Conversely, of course, the fact that the *kulirrína* trumpets are no longer made and played in the region except in response to a visiting anthropologist's curiosity is a statement about loss of cultural identities and the emergence of new ones.

and communicative interactions with the natural world and with one another. Fashioning plants is thus a form of social poetics in which material artifacts serve as extensions of agency and the body.

Although all the artifacts discussed in this essay participate in this social poetics, it is important to acknowledge that some objects "differ from others not only in the way they have become subjectivized but also in terms of the degrees of animacy and agentivity they are thought to possess" (Santos-Granero 2009: 9). Within the multitude of (inter)objectivities that make up the general category of things that are amenable to subjectivization, there is an important distinction between subjective objects, or those seen as having independent souls and that can act as agents of meaningful action, and subjectivized objects that require the intervention of human beings to activate their agency (Santos-Granero 2009: 8-11). Among indigenous Amazonian peoples, this distinction is most clearly expressed through the degree to which communicative power inheres in certain kinds of objects. Musical wind instruments are often seen as the most agentive or subjective objects because they allow people to gain controlled access to powers of mythic creation and destruction, to introduce natural sounds into human social contexts, to cross the boundary between verbal and non-verbal communication, to communicate between men and women in sacred rituals, and to bridge the gap between kin and affines in ceremonial exchanges.

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