Bernd Brabec de Mori[*]

About magical singing, sonic perspectives, ambient multinatures, and the conscious experience

Abstract: The significance of the sonic, especially of vocal music, in the context of animism and perspectivism was hitherto underestimated in anthropological theory. Working on examples of Shipibo-Konibo magical songs from the author's own ethnomusicological fieldwork recordings, in this paper it is proposed that the first-person experience of *médicos* (healers or sorcerers) has to be considered most valuable for interpreting structures of relationships between humans and non-humans. This experience surfaces most obviously in singing styles and lyrics of songs performed by *médicos* in the current state of interaction with non-humans during ritual curing, worshipping, or fighting. Results obtained from this analysis include: 1) The ascription of consciousness and human or humanoid physicality to non-humans is the result of the *médico's* perceptions during musically induced or controlled altered states of perception and cognition (ASPC); 2) The transformation into and identification with non-humans involve full conscious experience by the *médico* and therefore pertain to the highest level of evidentiality in Shipibo discourse which is ontologically determining; 3) Human physicality and competence of perception and action is not universal among all beings but is a matter of grading dependent on magical and practical powers of the respective species; 4) A "sonic perspectivism" allowing for agency in the construction of perspectives, and an "ambient multinaturalism" extending the notion of transformation from body to environment, are introduced by analysing sonic phenomena. Finally, the author proposes to focus more on indigenous praxis than on analysis and comparison of narratives in order to understand indigenous ontologies.
Keywords: Shipibo-Konibo, vocal music, animism, perspectivism, Peru, 21st century.

[*]   Bernd Brabec de Mori is an ethnomusicologist specialised in indigenous music from the Ucayali valley in Eastern Peru. He spent five years in the field with the Shipibo-Konibo. He received his PhD from the University of Vienna, has been repeatedly working for the Audiovisual Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and is currently employed as a Senior Scientist at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz. His publications address Western Amazonian indigenous music, arts, and history, as well as the complex of music, ritual, and altered states.

Resumen: Hasta ahora la importancia de lo sónico, especialmente la música vocal, en el contexto del animismo y el perspectivismo ha sido subestimada en la teoría antropológica. Basándose en ejemplos de canciones mágicas de los shipibo-konibo extraídas de grabaciones etnomusicológicas propias del trabajo del campo del autor, se propone en este artículo que la experiencia en primera persona de médicos (curanderos o brujos) debe ser considerada de altísimo valor para la interpretación de las estructuras de relaciones entre humanos y no humanos. Esta experiencia surge de manera más evidente en los estilos de canto y las letras de las canciones interpretadas por los médicos en el estado de interacción con los no humanos durante la curación, la adoración o la lucha rituales. Los resultados obtenidos de este análisis incluyen: 1) La adscripción de la conciencia y la materialidad humana o humanoide a los no humanos es resultado de las percepciones del médico durante estados alterados de percepción y cognición controlados o inducidos musicalmente; 2) La transformación en los no humanos y la identificación con los mismos suponen una experiencia de plena conciencia por parte del médico y así pertenecen al más alto nivel de la evidencialidad en el discurso shipibo que es ontológicamente determinante; 3) La materialidad y la competencia de percepción y acción humanas no son universales entre todos los seres sino son el resultado de una clasificación en función de los poderes mágicos y prácticos de las respectivas especies; y 4) A través del análisis de fenómenos sónicos se introducen un "perspectivismo sónico" que permite agencia en la construcción de perspectivas y un "multinaturalismo ambiental" que extiende la noción de transformación del cuerpo al ambiente. Por último, el autor propone centrarse más en la práctica indígena que en el análisis y la comparación de narrativas para entender las ontologías indígenas.
Palabras clave: Shipibo-konibo, música vocal, animismo, perspectivismo, Perú, siglo XXI.

In a city, a young Asháninka man has to wait for about a week for his ferry and therefore rents a cheap room. After a few days he appears at the local police department: "I would like to report my mestizo neighbour for repeatedly beating his wife. Every night I hear him shouting and her screaming –" The policeman interrupts: "Did you see that?" "No, but I can hear –" The policeman interrupts again and declares: "If you haven't seen it, you can't report it. Goodbye." The young man rises from his chair and makes for the door. Before leaving the office, he farts incredibly loud. The policeman starts up and shouts, "Can't you behave? How comes that you fart in here like this?" – The Asháninka responds: "Did you see that?"

A Shipibo joke

1. Introduction[1]

The sonic, specifically vocal music by the western Amazonian indigenous group Shipibo-Konibo, and its function within the indigenous cosmos will be discussed in this paper. The interactions of music performance with the social and individual human condition including human consciousness may reveal some aspects and qualities of an animistic ontology which hitherto received little attention by anthropologists. In order to discuss animism, or perspectivism, as understood in contemporary anthropological studies among indigenous societies in the South American lowlands, one will not be able to skip the ontological approach as coined by Philippe Descola (2005) who established four categories of ontologies (animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism). It appears that the main divide can be drawn between naturalism and the others, because of the strict distinction between culture as the domain

of human action and nature as an independent variable of non-human environment established in naturalism, which is absent in the other three categories. The concepts of perspectivism and multinaturalism formulated by Viveiros de Castro (1997) and others (e.g. Stoltze Lima 1999, Vilaçá 2005), on the other hand, rely on a radical reversion of naturalism in Amerindian perspectivistic cosmologies. Therefore, these concepts still cannot (and do not intend to) completely overcome the culture-nature-divide, as was shown in a brilliant intellectual exercise by Turner (2009). Although there is a long debate at work among the protagonists of these theories,

> What is clear is that this debate destroys the notion of nature as an overarching concept covering the globe, to which anthropologists have the rather sad and limited duty of adding whatever is left of differences under the tired old notion of 'culture' [...] (Latour 2009: 2)

– say, a radical relativisation of naturalism as the dominant concept.

Against this backdrop of contemporary theoretical debate – which has still to gain sharpness, or, as Viveiros de Castro puts it, "anthropology today is largely decolonized, but its theory is not yet decolonizing enough" (Latour 2009: 2) – I will explore the relevance of animism and perspectivism in music performances of trained specialists (commonly called "shamans"; in this paper I will refer to them as *médicos*, a common term in local discourse). This exploration relies on musical ethnography I collected with the pano-speaking Shipibo-Konibo people (henceforth Shipibo) among whom I conducted fieldwork during five years of the past decade. With around 45,000 people, the Shipibo are a rather large indigenous group. They dwell mainly on the shores of the Ucayali River and tributaries in the eastern Peruvian rainforests. In their vernacular language they autodenominate themselves *noa jonikon*, "We Real People" or *non kaibo*, "Our Relatives".

The definition of who may be considered a "Real Person" and who may be "only a person" (but not a "Real" one) is not only intrinsically connected to the question who may be considered to "have culture" (where both Descola and Viveiros de Castro agree that human culture is attributed to all persons in an animic as well as an perspectivistic society). It proves even more important who may "have human consciousness" – which beings would perceive themselves "*sub specie humanitatis*" (Viveiros de Castro 1997: 106), that is, which beings would believe that they were human beings themselves; and, finally, if this perception is (as Viveiros de Castro argues) consistent among both "people" and "Real People". It has not yet been explored to great extent that the notion of who may be regarded a conscious person depends on (human) perception, and vice versa. Challenging "orthodox" perspectivism, Rosengren (2006) describes that Matsigenka cosmic positioning seems to depend on the positionality of the conscious self rather than on the physical form.

Likewise, Santos-Granero proposes that obtaining knowledge among the Yanesha combines the "five common senses" of the body with senses of what he translates as "vitalities":

> [...] whereas the bodily senses only perceive the tunic of things, that is, their material appearance, the noncorporeal senses of our vitalities are capable of perceiving things as 'they really are' (Santos-Granero 2006: 61).

Consciousness seems not to be located in the physical body but rather in an instance (vitality) capable of obtaining at least two existential modes: staying localised within a human body in everyday situations, and perceiving and acting on its own during specific occasions. Descola's types of ontologies – at least in theory – can live without different perception modalities, but Viveiros de Castro's approach necessarily includes radically different perceptions of what he calls "multi-natures" by different persons from different species. I do acknowledge Viveiros de Castro's interpretation that perception of the environment was similar among different species, but rather the "natures" of their bodies were different. Within "multinaturalism", Viveiros de Castro understands both humans' and non-humans' bodies as flexible "bundles of affects", resulting in a "somatic perspectivism" (1997: 107-108). However, in this paper I do neither intend to speculate about e.g. a jaguar's perceptions of its body and its surroundings, nor whether these perceptions were different from human perceptions. I rather wish to show how perceptions by *Real People who experience what it is like to being e.g. a jaguar* differ from perceptions obtained during their everyday states. Such specific perceptions are subsequently attributed to the corresponding non-humans by the *médicos* who experienced such states. Shipibo ethnographic and linguistic examples affirm these different modes of perceptions from different perspectives, although not in the absolute, egalitarian sense of "orthodox" perspectivism.

The question here is not whether human perception, cognition and consciousness can be regarded universal (as naturalistic science claims), but how different modes or states of perception are used in order to achieve knowledge of perspectives, or "multi-natures" as is thought to be experienced by non-human persons. Human perception may be universal (or not) in so-called "healthy wake states". In Amerindian and many other ontologies, perceptions obtained during altered states of consciousness (ASC, or more precisely, altered states of perception and cognition, ASPC) have to be regarded much more interesting for inter-specific explorations. These explorations are usually undertaken by specialists. In the Western Amazon, these specialist *médicos* have to train for a long time in order to master entering, controlling and exiting provoked meaningful dreams, or ASPC induced by fasting, specific

musical practice or dancing, or by the ingestion of psychoactive preparations,[2] say, to master almost everything else than "healthy wake states". The importance of dream experience and of techniques of controlling them is underlined by Santos-Granero by stating that dream

> [...] is closely associated with particular ontological and cosmological conceptions that oppose the 'virtual reality' of the material world and the physical body to the 'real reality' of the multiplicity of intangible worlds and spiritual body essences (2003: 180).

Within an emic context, descriptions provided by *médicos* who claim to perceive this "real reality" or "multi-natures" in the way non-human agents who are "natives" in these realms are supposed to do, finally allow to interpret the perspectives or ontological positioning of these non-humans relative to "us", to human (Shipibo) commoners, the specialist *médico*'s audience. The specialists therefore experience and perform the non-humans' perceptions and actions and may or may not attribute "humanness" – that is human consciousness – to the non-humans in question. In general, non-humans who are addressed with *jonibo* (persons) carry this attribute of human consciousness. We can see that personhood is related to (human) consciousness, which is related to (altered) perception, which is likewise linked to perspective, which is again related to personhood. If approaching these relations assuming the "healthy wake state" as the determining principle of "truth" (intra-ontological validity), the most reasonable conclusion can be given in the way Turner (2009) or Karadimas (this volume) do: relativising, or "softening" perspectivism and animism to anthropomorphism as an "anthropological invariant".[3] This works perfectly as long as one does not consider the reports from outside the realm of "healthy wake states" obtained by Amerindian specialists while exploring any form of ASPC.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of the sonic: Viveiros de Castro (in company of a legion of anthropologists) heavily relies on the visual and the culinary, that is on predator-prey relationships as well as on the visible and the

---

2   Today, among Shipibo and neighbouring groups the ingestion of the hallucinogenic plant brew *ayawaska* is most common. However, historically this was different (cf. Gow 1994; Brabec de Mori 2011d). In this paper I therefore refer to ASPC in a general sense, independent of their etiology (including *ayawaska* as well as dreaming, fasting, repetitive singing, hyperventilation, etc.).

3   Both Turner and Karadimas apply a Lévy-Straussian structuralist approach, relying on analysing, comparing and theorising myths. I think that both authors overlook contemporary praxis (in ritual or everyday life). Whereas myths tell us about the past and about past encounters with and transformations into non-humans most often by accident, the *médicos*' praxis tells us how such states are obtained here, now, and intentionally – a crucial difference.

commonly invisible.[4] Despite pioneering work in ethnomusicology by Seeger (1987), Hill (1993), Olsen (1996), or Menezes Bastos (2007), among others, which is widely acknowledged also among anthropologists, the sonic and the musical are still not integrated in anthropological theory. In line with ethnomusicology, Lewy (this volume) historically and ethnographically observes among the Venezuelan Pemón that between species, "seeing" is "different", while "hearing" is "similar". With that he indicates that the very indigenous people may use visually oriented ter-minology to express difference, but acoustic, and musical communication for estab-lishing similarity or at least mutual recognition.[5] Illius clearly states, that for Shipibo, "Music is the spirit's language, and singing is the adequate mode of communicating with them" (1997: 216, my translation). While Karadimas (2004, and this volume) looks at a Miraña wind instrument made of a deer skull (and other items of visual arts), I would love to listen to its sound when blown. During the last decade, I have listened and re-listened to ca. 2,800 Western Amazonian indigenous songs in record-ings I made myself[6] – which means that I was present at their live performances, either in explorative settings or during current festivities or rituals. It became clear to me that the audible, especially vocal music does indeed play a great role in Shipibo ontology and does so probably in many other societies:

> It is as though music were the centripetal force enabling the convergence of the visu-al, olfactory and other kinds of discourse composing the rites. Following convergence of these elements, this force becomes centrifugal, recomposing the diversity of ritual discourses. In the Kamayurá case, music likewise functions as a pivotal system me-diating the universes of the verbal arts (poetry and myth) with plastic-visual expressions (graphic design, iconography, feather art) and choreological expressions (dance, theatre) (Menezes Bastos 2007: 5).

---

4   Viveiros de Castro writes, that "The raw and the cooked cannot be separated from the visible and the invisible. Amerindian cultures evince a strong visual bias of their own [...] Vision is often the model of perception and knowledge [...]; shamanism is laden with visual concepts" (2010: 8). This visual/culinary bias in perspectivism was critizised e.g. by Classen (2005), Rosengren (2006) and Santos-Granero (2006).

5   Rosengren writes that among Matsigenka, it is required "that verbally interacting parties must be located in the same dimension of reality in order to understand each other, since each mode of verbal communication is exclusive to a particular dimension" (2006: 89). I think that this seemingly radical opposition to Lewy appears because it refers to speaking, while Lewy refers to singing – another crucial difference.

6   Most of the songs are in Shipibo language, but Asháninka, Yine, Kukama, Iskobakebo, Kakataibo, Amahuaca, and others are present as well in this corpus which is completely archived at the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv and described in detail in Brabec de Mori (2011b, volume 2).

Going further, not only the audible, but also the "apparently inaudible" (Menezes Bastos 2011) is not only valuable, but necessarily to be recognized for understanding visual difference and other phenomena. According to Shipibo understanding, the sound *rooo* uttered by a howler monkey, for example, carries meaning equivalent to Shipibo love or ritual songs – if one can only listen to, understand, and translate it. It is therefore my aim to show how musical practice among Shipibo specialist *médicos* can provide elaborate models of personhood, consciousness, perception, and perspective.

2. Consciousness, perception, and evidence

In naturalistic consciousness research, first-person experience cannot be measured, especially experience obtained in dreams or other ASPC proves difficult.[7] In phenomenological or philosophical terms, consciousness can be defined as a subjective first-person experience of *what it is like* being someone (Nagel 1974). Lehrer, for example, argues that the experience of consciousness via the subjective experience of qualia is apt to create knowledge about the conscious state by "exemplarisation" (Lehrer 2006: 412).[8] Therefore, subjective experience creates representation of this state by being a kind of conscious state. With that, I may argue, one who experi-

---

7   Cf. Windt & Noreika (2011): These authors critically review the "integration problem" of dream experience into consciousness theories, also paying some attention to disturbing topics like "lucid dreaming", "pathological wake states", "hallucinogen-induced experience" and even "out-of-body experience". The all-encompassing uncertainties in these topics show that scientific research in this area is still far from providing reliable results. Although in cognitive sciences many models and approaches interpret the vast and rapidly growing data about neural correlates of consciousness and the first-person knowledge about conscious states itself, "at present, however, no single model of consciousness appears sufficient to account fully for the multidimensional properties of conscious experience" (Seth 2007: 10). These co-developing models significantly differ in terms of restricting the possibility of conscious experience to "normally functioning" human beings (in the Western understanding, of course). E.g. the information integration theory of consciousness would allow experience of consciousness for any system with high enough Φ, where Φ is a measure for dynamic complexity of information processing (cf. Seth 2007). However, it seems that "high enough Φ" depends on whether this complexity is externally attributed to a system or not, as complexity cannot be measured from outside the system (again resulting in the problem of "other minds", see below).

8   With "exemplarisation", Lehrer points at the quality of an "exemplar". While an example represents a category, an exemplar is part of a category but not representative for it – my own experience of what it is like being Bernd Brabec de Mori is an exemplar for a conscious state but cannot be taken as representation (like an example) for other (or others') conscious states because of an inherent lack of comparability in this category. Lehrer's argument shows that representation can nevertheless be achieved, because exemplarisation itself creates representation of the very exemplarisation – a "loop", concept this author is very fond of.

ences consciousness may imagine others to *have* consciousness, too, others who may be one's closest relatives, any human being, and, consequently any non-human or even "inanimate" being. Following phenomenological models of consciousness, it seems easy to link the very experience of conscious states to attributing them to non-humans in animism. This is what anthropomorphism is about in anthropological theories. Both Nagel and Lehrer provide an option for non-human beings (e.g. the bat in Nagel 1974), to experience consciousness for themselves. However, this would rather be a bat's consciousness than human consciousness. The latter could only be attributed to a bat via anthropomorphism (cf. Karadimas' bat in this volume).

The phenomenological basis of consciousness, the self-generated knowledge of *what it is like* being, for example, myself, is not compatible with third-person observation, as long as we stay within the Western scientific paradigm, including as a "fact that the phenomenology of a subject's experiences cannot be viewed from a third-person perspective (the classical philosophical problem of 'other minds')" (Velmans 2009: 146).[9] This conceptual paradox however results from the sharp differentiation between first-person experience and third-person observation in naturalistic understanding, where only the observable (and reproducible) is considered evident. "Other minds" do not pose a problem to indigenous people in the Western Amazon. Among the Shipibo, evidence is considered greatest, when first-person experience is expressed. This is obvious, for example, in the grammar of the Shipibo language, where different levels of evidentiality can be distinguished. These are also linked to the relative remoteness (in time or space) of the event or process referred to by the speaker (Camacho & Elias-Ulloa 2005; Brabec de Mori 2011a).

> The coding of evidentiality in SK [Shipibo-Konibo] takes place at two different levels. First, a major distinction between first-hand information and second-hand information is established; secondly, a further specification may occur to indicate either inference or speculation. As commonly found in languages with a grammaticalized evidentiality category, SK evidentials may also encode epistemic modality and mirativity (Valenzuela 2003: 33).

Along with other grammatical forms, Valenzuela extrapolates these different levels of evidence expressed with the morphemes -*ra*/*ri*- (first-hand information) and -*ronki* ("it is told that...", second-hand information). She confirms that a "shaman" (*médico*) uses -*ra* when telling about his own experience during ASPC despite its remoteness

---

9 Some cineasts may claim these days that they know *what it is like* "Being John Malkovich". This example resembles the fascination of finding a way to actually experience *what it is like* being anybody (or anything) else, transcending the "problem of other minds". History of arts, cinema, literature and music is full of similar examples.

from everyday accessibility. The reportative *-ronki*, on the other hand, may be used when the *médico* tells the patient what non-human allies have told him (Valenzuela 2003: 51). In the example texts presented later, the respective markers are underlined in order to show at which points the singing *médicos* transmit their perceptions as evidence.

Because in Shipibo *médicos'* speech, especially in song, the first-person experience of dream or ASPC contents can be linked to the highest level of evidentiality (with the use of *-ra*), the experience of *what it is like* being a bat, John Malkovich, or a forest-dwelling black jaguar gains significance and may lead to a very different understanding of consciousness within indigenous thought. In order to highlight the intrinsic logic of the indigenous approach, in the following I am going to report some ethnographic accounts on how Shipibo *médicos* use to obtain, control, and translate such experiences into socially significant knowledge – that is, mainly through singing.

3. Knowing what it is like being an animal

Western Amazonian people, including the Shipibo, use a method called "dieting" (*samatai* in Shipibo language) in order to contact non-humans. A person willing to do so applies a substance on him- or herself (e.g. ingests a decoction of tree barks, or bathes in water containing certain leaves) and then retires from ordinary life for a certain period of time (ranging from one day to a few years, depending on context).[10] In seclusion, ordinary human food as well as contact with fellow humans is avoided. During the "diet", the "dieter" is supposed to make contact with non-humans, usually with those associated with the applied substance. During an intense "diet", for example in order to become a healer, ASPC occur. The "dieter" may dream, have wake-state visions, hear voices (one could say, the "dieter" generally adapts to a fairly psychotic perception), and thus communicate with non-humans. The "dieter" therefore is viewed as somebody who transforms into one of the non-humans and shares time and localisation with them in order to learn from them. The complete transformation of the "dieter" into a non-human is a pre-requisite for obtaining power and knowledge – a process that takes place within repeatedly provoked dream or ASPC experiences ideally presenting culturally determined and consciously

---

10 The complex around the "diet" has been described to some extent in almost every publication about western Amazonian people, for instance see Illius (1987), Tournon (2002) or LeClerc (2003) on the Shipibo-Konibo, or Frank (1994) on the Kakataibo, among many others. Although with different peoples, groups, families, and persons, many particularities can be observed, the fact of appliance, the durations, the overall modalities as well as expected results are fairly constant in the Peruvian lowlands (Brabec de Mori 2007).

controlled content. When acquiring knowledge via "dieting", the "dieter" experiences a form of "going native" among non-humans. This is not expressed in terms that e.g. the "dieter's" soul (*kaya*, or any other instance detachable from the "dieter" as a physical person) travelled to the non-human's realm, but rather that the fully conscious "dieter" completely transcends the interspecific border.

Therefore, during their training Western Amazonian *médicos* intentionally undergo a series of experiences where the consciously experiencing self is positioned as a (usually non-human) person among her "natural" peers and within her "natural" environment. The *médico* lives through the first-person experience of *being* a jaguar, for example. However, it is uncommon that during this experience the *médico* would think that he[11] was a quadruped jaguar with spotted fur. Rather, the *médico* would experience that he, a biped human being with arms and hands, would meet with other human beings of similar appearance. Thus, following the reversion in perspectivism, the *médico* perceives himself as a human person among other human persons – although all persons involved in this experience would be seen as jaguars (spotted quadrupedes) by common Shipibo people observing the situation. It is important to note that such transformations are performed in solitude during periods of retreat (the "diet"). The potential of Shipibo commoners observing the transformation or encountering the transformed *médico* is minimal, though possible. Shipibo *médico* Pascual Mahua, for example, explains the dangers of such a transformation for both sides in dramatic terms: The transformed *médico* sees Shipibo people as prey (e.g. as peccary) and has to control himself in order to not eat them, while Shipibo would shoot the jaguar as soon as becoming aware of his presence, totally convinced by his physical form. Observed or not, with this experience, the *médico* knows *what it is like* being a jaguar.

The exclusiveness of such experiences for *médicos* is underlined, for example, by the musical genre of "funny songs", *osanti* (Illius 1999: 227-230; Brabec de Mori 2011c). *Osanti* songs are apparently sung by animals through the mouth of the performing *médico*. *Osanti* means literally "to laugh", and these songs are actually funny for Shipibo. Accordingly, they are used to make fun, and sometimes also during healing sessions in order to cheer up suffering patients. In any case, an animal singing an *osanti* song through the mouth of a *médico* is ridiculous by its mere appearance, or fails to sing "correctly", producing "singing errors". It is fairly surprising that *osanti* songs, although "known" to Shipibo commoners (in the sense of having heard prior performances and remembering lyrics and melody), are only

---

11   When referring to *médicos*, I use male forms because of the predominance of males among practicioners (93% in my survey).

to be performed by practising or retired *médicos*. Shipibo commoners consequently refuse to sing a funny little *osanti* song which does nothing magic or the like. The crucial implication is the "outing" of the singer as somebody who has had the first-person experience of *what it is like* to be an animal. Although animals who sing such "laughing songs" are not considered to be powerful in any sense, the mere act of performing a song from the animals' perspective declares the singer to be powerful as somebody who is potentially able to obtain knowledge of *what it is like* to be this animal – obviously, only trained *médicos* are considered as such.

The animals recollected in *osanti* songs are never magically powerful. In my recordings of *osanti* songs there appear: the howler monkey (*roo*), the red monkey (*joshin shino*), the spider monkey (*iso*), the dog (*ochiti*), a vulture (*xete*), a baby parrot (*bawa*), two more birds (*jenenponpo* and *abokoma*), the land tortoise (*mananxawe*), three fish (*ipo*, *amakiri*, and *koyaparo*), one plant (the bush *anta*), and one nameless and powerless demon. There are no *osanti* songs by the anaconda, for example, or by the jaguar, or the pink river dolphin. In *osanti* songs, two important observations can be made: First, there is some distinction between the animal's conscious experience of humanness compared to "Real People's" experience. That is, the animals produce "singing errors" and fail correct pronunciation, for example; or they describe physical features that are "normal" for themselves but reveal their non-humanness. The red monkey sings about its flat nose, the vulture sings about its crown which is turned inside out, and the howler monkey sings about his wifes' wobbling buttocks. These animals perceive themselves as humans, but as humans with obvious bodily differences compared to "Real People".[12] The second observation shows that the animals who sing *osanti* songs lack "competence of perception and action". I have introduced this term in order to show that Shipibo people do not consider any non-human species to be equally powerful. Although a *médico* is in theory able to transform into a *jejenponpo* bird, for example, this will not serve him for curing or sorcery, because the *jenenponpo* shows lower competence in this sense than ordinary Shipibo people. *Osanti* songs can only be sung by animals who would view the Shipibo as superior, more powerful beings, so that Shipibo people can readily make fun of them and laugh about their inability to achieve easy tasks. For example, the *mananxawe* land tortoise sings about its great difficulties in crossing a fallen tree trunk, and Shipibo listeners imagine the poor tortoise trying again and again to climb the trunk and nearly die laughing (see Illius 1999: 230; Brabec de Mori 2011b: 421-422).

---

12 When *médicos* talk about plants' "owners" (*ibo*), for example, similar physical distortions or revealing features may be observed (see Canayo 2004): some plants' "owners" appear like dwarves, others show strangely coloured skin; the *inoaxatan*-tree's "owner" is easily revealed, because it has no head, but a big mouth on its breast.

Conversely, other animals may sing in *médicos*' performances that are not ridiculous. Songs from the point of view of verily powerful beings (anaconda, jaguar, dolphin, etc.) are very rarely sung by any *médico* – this is considered especially dangerous (see Illius 1987: 167; and ex. 3, for an anaconda song). A song not thus dangerous but still to be used well-dosed, is presented in the following example:

Ex. 1: Excerpts from an omen song by the bird *chishka*[13]

1	*ointsikinaankaman*	Poor you who can only perceive close danger,
2	*jaweraokeaxki*	(you cannot see) from where
3	*bewá yoshin beai*	the demon's song draws closer,
4	*beaibokaya*	(but) everything that arrives (from afar)
5	*oinonki akanta*	we have already seen.
6	*jabo oinyontaanan*	After we have seen them,
7	*oinyontaanan*	after we have seen (oncoming danger),
8	*mia kaitian*	wherever you go,
9	*oa kaa nasenen*	where you will arrive,
10	*nete kaa nasenen*	where the day('s journey) ends –
11	*jainoax bewai*	from there we are singing,
12	*bewaira kai*	we sing during travel.
13	*noa xawe niabo*	We are the tall standing tortoises (*xawe*)
14	*jonin yoiyoiti*	people use to talk about,
15	*yoiti xawebo*	they talk about the tortoises,
16	*xawebora boai*	and the tortoises depart.
17	*ointsikinaankaman*	You cannot see dangers far away
18	*itai xawebo*	the tortoises tell you,
19	*noa riki xawebo*	we are the tortoises.

In this song, the birds' superior competence especially of perception is made obvious by the way the birds describe their own purpose of warning the traveller of oncoming danger (lines 4-5). It is important to note here that the birds call themselves "tortoises" (*xawe*, which is not identical with the funny land tortoise *mananxawe*). In "correct" human singing, the term "tortoise" (*xawe*) is used to designate strong men from the local settlement. It is a poetic code for "Real People", true Shipibo males. Here, the birds refer to themselves with that term, usually reserved for male locals,

---

13 Ex. 1 was performed in 2005 by Herminia Sanancino Mozombite, Phonogrammarchiv D 5489 (full text in Brabec de Mori 2011b: 891-892). In this and the following examples, I have underlined evidentiality markers in the original lyrics (-*ra*/*ri*- for first-hand evidence; -*ronki* for the reportative, cf. Valenzuela 2003). Further on, loanwords form Spanish or Kukama (in Ex. 2) are printed non-italizised in the original lyrics.

thus indicating that while singing they perceive themselves as "Real male People". Also note that they address – through the human *médico*'s mouth – a human listener with "you". However, in line 14, they address the listener's fellows (who use to talk about the *chishka* bird as a bringer of ill omen) with the neutral term *joni*, person. We can observe that the birds, although owning superior competence of perception, do neither view the Shipibo as superior (as a more powerful spirit or demon, for example), nor do they view them as inferior beings (e.g. as prey). They are, in this sense, the Shipibos' *pares*.

This song is a good example for a performance "on the edge" to neat magical curing or sorcery songs. Although it was sung to me in an explorative setting during a recorded interview with the singer, it is thought to be sung to somebody who is going to travel far and who will have to rely upon birds' calls in order to determine travel schedule, or decide whether to follow a path or to avoid it. Despite many lingering dangers the traveller is unable to perceive, the summoned *chishka* birds will always warn the traveller in advance so she or he may reconsider.

Compared to *osanti* songs, we see that the *chishka* birds perceive themselves as humans, but neither do they reveal physical defects nor do they produce "singing errors". They perform a "correct" and well pronounced human song. They experience themselves as "Real male People". And, as can be noted in the lyrics, they apply the evidentiality marker *-ra* throughout.

4. Transformation and mimesis

Magical songs are usually not performed from a first-person perspective of singing non-humans. The reason seems to be the danger of being revealed before enemies if the *médico* openly identifies himself. Therefore, in magical songs a technique is applied that does not appear in any other song genre (besides *osanti*) and that is intrinsically connected with the performance of transformation: voice masking. Olsen (1996: 159-162) describes how voice masking is used in Warao curing songs as an indicator for entering and exiting transformed states, or provoked ASPC, by the performing *médicos* (*wisiratu* healers in Warao terminology):

> [...] the wisiratu's voice is changed (masked), because the invoked helping hebu [spirit] has become the owner of the wisiratu's voice. This interpretation suggests possession; however, the wisiratu is not possessed by the invoked helping hebu but transformed into it. [...] Because the spirit sons dwell within his chest, they and the wisiratu are one entity during spiritual affairs such as curing; and the wisiratu's masked voice *is* the hebu's voice (Olsen 1996: 162, original italics).

In Shipibo magical song performance, a masked voice likewise indicates that the *médico* actually inhabits a transformed state (Shipibo term *naikia*). Voice masking is used to transmit the *médico*'s current experience of *what it sounds like* being transformed into a non-human entity. Shipibo *médico* Roberto Mori explained that during performance his voice would change, although he would go on singing like normal – say, the voice would still sound "human" (or "normal") to him, but would sound masked for the audience. Here, the same bifurcation appears as in the "dieting" period described above: while the *médico* transforms in the eyes or ears of observers (here in sound, there in bodily form), his self-perception and cognition are still human, as well as his conscious experience. Further on, it is important to connect the masked voice with the contents of the lyrics. We observed that in magical songs the first-person perspective of the transformed *médico* is usually not made apparent. The singer describes from a third-person perspective what the non-humans are like, what they do and which actions they take in order to cure the patient. Non-humans are described as persons (human-like with head, torso, extremities, and so on, often manufacturing or using tools and advanced apparatus in order to execute their healing tasks). Other non-humans are likewise identified by the singing *médico* as the illness' cause or origin. These non-humans – the singer's enemies – are named, described (also as human persons), vanquished, or tricked and dismissed. However, during all these tasks, a masked voice indicates that during the performance the singer *is* one of these non-human entities (though he does not express it verbally). Here we can find another bifurcation of sensual perception and transmission: the *médico* transforms into a non-human being, indicated to his audience via voice masking but at the same time concealed from potentially dangerous spirits *yoshin* (who can understand the "spirits' language", the sung words).

The process of transformation (*naikiai*) can be distinguished from the process of mimesis (*paranai*).[14] A hunter may whistle in the forest, imitating a male bird's call, for example. Here, the hunter imitates the bird, but still consciously experiences his unchanged humanness. For the listening female bird, on the other hand, the hunter is actually transformed into an attractive male bird-person and she follows the call – ending up unluckily as the hunter's dish. This technique of mimesis (*paranai*) can

---

14 *Naikiai* denotes the general idea of transformation, it can be glossed as *na-iki-ai* (inside-being-continuative). Specific transformations into specific beings are allowed in Shipibo language by a simple process of creating intransitive verbs from names (e.g. *inoti* from *ino*, "jaguar", "to transform into a jaguar", or *yoshinti*, from yoshin, "demon", "to transform into a demon"). *Paranai*, on the other hand, is generally used for "defending", or, depending on its complement, "tricking" and "betraying". See also Lewy (this volume) who deals extensively with acoustically and musically tricking "others", as well as Taussig (1993: 104-111).

also be applied by a *médico* in order to trick enemy entities who therefore believe that he was one of them, until they come round caged and overthrown. From a third-person perspective (of e.g. an observing anthropologist) the two processes cannot be distinguished. The crucial difference is marked exclusively in the *médico*'s first-person experience. He is the only one who knows if he transforms into a non-human (*naikiai*) or if he mimics non-humans without transforming (*paranai*). Mimesis is generally preferred when dealing with beings that own lower competence of perception and action than the *médico*, say mainly when dealing with adverse entities (or in funny *osanti* songs). Transformation is preferred in cases when the *médico* deals with entities who dispose of higher competence than himself, ideally the allied forces he learned to work with during his "fieldwork", his accomplished "dieting" periods. During my fieldwork, various rather renowned *médicos* explained to me in our discussions that when facing enemies too powerful and too perceptive in direct confrontation they used *naikiai* to transform into a powerful ally (indicated with a masked singing style), and then, from that perspective, applied the mimetic *paranai* powers of that allied entity in order to trick the enemies by presenting concealing and seductive wording in song lyrics. In the following excerpt, the singer tells us of the multiplied positionalities he uses to confront a powerful enemy sorcerer:

Ex. 2: Excerpts from a battle song (*chipotitian iká*)[15]

1	bobinzana bobinzana	The *bobinzana* (bush, species)
2	*meráyakan jonironki* ikara*i*	*meráya*-person, so it is told, is singing *ikaro* songs:
3	*nanainanai nananainai*	"nanainanai nananainai
4	*tinkontinkonti tinkontinkonti*	tinkontinkonti tinkontinkonti"
5	*earonki* ikara*i*	I, so it is told, am singing *ikaro* songs
6	*yami ewan parankaya*	on the very river of great metal.
7	*bewaboki beai*	The *bewá* songs are approaching,
8	*beaitianra*	and when they arrive;
9	*ramakaya akinra*	we begin right now.
10	bobinzana *meraya*	The *bobinzana-meráya* (says):
11	*ea riki yoashinko*	"I am the *yashingo* (plant)",
12	*itai merayan*	this is what the *meráya* says.
13	*shanka ewan tarani*	In order to roll the great rocks,
14	*taranai jonira*	the person rolls forward,

---

15 Ex. 2 was performed in 2006 by an anonymised *médico*, access to the recording restricted. In the recorded version, no voice masking was used because of the simulative setting. When I heard the same singer performing a similar song during a curing ritual in 2011, he sung in a masked voice.

17	*yoshinboki charotai*	Demons (*yoshin*) rise (in my way),
18	*shanka kerakeraya*	(but with) the sharp-edged rocks
19	*nokon tari saweya*	(that) I have put on as a shirt,
20	*tarame kakinra*	rolling, we advance,
21	*yoshinboki keyoi*	finishing off the demons,
22	*keyokeyobainban*	advancing, finishing them off.
23	*niwe rakakaina*	The (attacker's) "aura" (*niwe*) is extending,
24	kawayo *charotai*	with (enemy) horses rising within,
25	*charotai jonira*	inside (the *niwe*), the person arises. [...]

This is a fairly complicated song. In the beginning, the singer states (in third-person observation, suffix *-ronki*), that the powerful plant-*médico*[16] *bobinzana* is singing *ikaro* songs – a deliberate quotation of downriver Kukama practices: *ikaro* is a Kukama term, as well as *bobinzana*; and the uttering of filler syllables in lines 3-4 mimics (!) Kukama *ikaro* singing style. In line 5-9, the perspective is switched, and transformation occurs (the suffix *-ra* is then used for the remainder of the song): Now the first-person singer performs *ikaro* songs (but here the recorded melody switches from Kukama *ikaro* style to Shipibo *mashá* style!). The singer is now localised on a river of metal, resembling the battlefield (*bobinzana* bushes grow on rocks on the shores of Ucayali tributaries). Songs are approaching, appearing like a gathering thunderstorm.[17] Here, we encounter a use of the term *bewá* (a song genre) synonymous with *niwe* ("aura", "individual essence", "wind", cf. Illius 1992, see also lines 23-25). When the enemy's songs arrive, the confrontation starts.

This means that the first task of the battle is an identity change (lines 10-12, observed from a third-person perspective) of the plant *bobinzana*, who mimics (!) another plant, the *yashingo*. Then the battle starts, and the singing person rolls forward his rocks (*taranai* indicates a movement comparable to a rotating chainsaw). The singer has dressed these rocks as a shirt (Viveiros de Castro 1997: 110) in purpose of destroying approaching demons. In the last presented sequence, the singer describes the enemy's song, now as *niwe*, again synonymously with *bewá*: the "song-aura" is extending, and within, demon horses rise around the enemy person.

The song is much longer, and more instances of power are mentioned later on. In the depicted sequence we can observe, that the *bobinzana* bush, as well as the mimicked *yashingo* bush are considered powerful *médico*-persons. Further on, the rocks are a person, because they contain the *bobinzana-yashingo*-singer who has put them

---

16 *Meráya* is a Shipibo term for most powerful *médicos* (Illius 1987: 120-127, Tournon 2002: 346-350).

17 According to Mori Silvano de Brabec (pers. comm. 2009), in Shipibo everyday discourse an arising thunderstorm can metaphorically be called a demon's song (*bewá*), e.g. *jikikanwe moa bakebo, yoshiman bewára beai*, "enter the house, children, a demon's song is arriving!".

on as a shirt. Finally, the enemy is regarded a person (we do not know if the enemy sorcerer is a fellow human or a non-human entity. This does not matter in the given context of battle).

In case of mimesis, the *médico* (as well as the hunter, or the *bobinzana* plant-*médico*) is aware of his humanness and the localisation of his consciousness does not change. During transformation, the *médico* still experiences himself as a human person, but localised within the sphere (*niwe*) of the class of beings he transformed into, and he perceives himself surrounded by human persons, who, to other Shipibo (and anthropologists) would appear as animals, plants, or plinical beings. Here, the *médico*'s conscious perception is re-localised in another place (the "river of metal" in Ex. 2) – although this place still pertains to what we call the world. The lyrics plus comments by the singer suggest that during the state of being transformed into a non-human person the transformed *médico* perceives the world that appears "normal" for other Shipibo (the tributary river's shores) as a surrounding for agency (the "river of metal") from the non-humans' point of view. If the singer's body, during that state, is constituted by different "affects", as Viveiros de Castro argues, we can note here that also his environment shows very different qualities. If the *bobinzana*'s body inherits the potential of rolling rocks (*bobinzana* plants actually move rocks, although rather slowly by growing their roots), this is well documented in the lyrics. However, the world (the interiour of the *bobinzana*'s *niwe*) does *not* correlate with or appear similar to the Shipibo world. Shipibo people never roll rocks on rivers of metal. The *niwe* of a certain species appears similar to a thunderstorm, or as a certain smell or colour (see Illius 1992) from its outside, but from the inside it constitutes a world with qualitites different from the common Shipibo world.

Ex. 2 also shows that this "multi-nature" can be synonymous with "song" (*bewá*). The enemy's song extends around him as his world – the song strengthens and extends the singer's environment. From the enemy's point of view, the first singer's song appears in the same way, though reversed, as threat.[18]

With that, I suppose, when performing funny *osanti* songs, the performing *médico* does not actually transform into, for example, a *jenenponpo* bird, but imitates its song through mimesis. However, "correct" mimesis of a bird in Shipibo understanding is only possible if one knows *what it is like* being a bird, say if one owns the "transformative faculty" (Brabec de Mori 2011c), the potential ability to transform into one. Contrarily, when performing more delicate songs like Ex. 2, the perspective

---

18   A more detailed analysis of how Shipibo *médicos* construct and work with the technical tool (*kano* in vernacular language, see below) and the ontological aspect (*niwe*) of transformation I undertook elsewhere (Brabec de Mori 2007); a model of the corresponding "musical multiverse" including these concepts is treated in Brabec de Mori (2011b: 444-447).

is not made clear. It can be extrapolated by analysis that the singer transforms into a *bobinzana* plant, who then mimics a *yashingo* plant. Thereafter, it is not exactly clear who, from which perspective, is battling the demons, horses, and finally the enemy sorcerer. This is part of the singer's strategy of concealment, so that he may not be identified, named, and overthrown by the enemy.

Ex. 3: Excerpts from a curing song against anaconda influence (*roniman kopiaki iká*)[19]

1	*ronin nete kanonbira*	Within the *kano* of the anaconda's light
2	*yakaakekainax*	I sat down, and from there,
3	*earonki bewai*	so it is told, I am singing.
4	*bewai kai*	singing, I advance,
5	*earonki bewai*	it is told that I am singing.
6	*oinoinbokinra*	We will see carefully,
7	*jawekeskatimain*	how it could be done,
8	*nato bake ikai*	how this child could (be healed),
9	*iikai*	how it could be.
10	*en roniman kopiaronki*	I, the anaconda, have influenced (the child), it is told,
11	*enronkia*	I, so it is told,
12	*aabainai*	I am doing it while advancing [...]

In Ex. 3, the singer first mentions *kano*. *Kano* denotes the tools or frameworks that are manipulated through song and that allow for the construction of a "way" or "path" transcending interspecific borders, or the construction of specific places in the singer's altered perception (*kano* is most often applied when singing during ASPC induced by hallucinogens). The term involves an implicit sense of directed power.[20] Whereas the term *niwe*, explained with Ex. 2, stands for the specific environment or "atmosphere" around any being, consistent with others of the same species, *kano* is tied to the singing individual. It extends – primarily audible but also synaesthetically visualisable in ASPC – from the singer into the world. Thus, it constitutes the "audio-perspective" of the singer, preliminarily correlating with perspectivism's "video-perspective". We shall see to which extent this correlation can be maintained and at which point problems emerge.

---

19 Ex. 3 was performed in 2005 by José Alvarado Marrona, Phonogrammarchiv D 5498 (see also Brabec de Mori 2011b: 440-441 and 895-896).

20 In everyday life, e.g. *kanóti* ("which makes kano") denotes a hunting bow; *kano* may also stand for the part of the river where the current is strongest, besides other meanings, e.g. "framework" (the pillars of a house or the thickest lines in an art pattern, for example).

In lines 1-5, the singer explains that he sat down in this *kano*-perspective of the anaconda. He uses this perspective (in lines 6-9) to obtain knowledge (by seeing!) of what happened to his patient, a child who was influenced by an anaconda.[21] Note that in lines 1 and 6 the singer applies the marker *-ra* for highest evidentiality. This is where he directly transmits his perception: he "sees" from the anaconda's perspective. Both the *kano*-perspective in line 1 and the perception in his anaconda-like seeing from that perspective in line 6 are regarded evident. In the passages with *-ronki*, on the other hand, the singer quotes a (fictional) observer who is commenting on what the singer is doing (this is part of the lyrics' trickery, or mimesis). This is another instance expressing the singer's transition into another subject's position while he partly maintains concealment in the lyrics. Here as well as in Ex. 2 the singers masterfully play with these ambiguities.

Line 10 represents the crucial point when the singing *médico* identifies himself with the illness' cause: "I, the anaconda". The singer has infiltrated the anaconda's perspective and finally identifies with her. Thereupon he obtains control over the situation. The song goes on, and the singer subsequently describes how he advances further, singing, and detaching the anaconda's *niwe* from the child, and finally relocating the child's *kaya* ("soul") in her physical body, so that the child will be healthy again. All these curing actions are not mentioned directly by the singer, but by the (fictional) observer he quotes. His double positionality can now be understood perfectly: In the song lyrics he expresses that in his own perspective, from the "inside", he is the enemy anaconda, while from the "outside", "so it is told", he is the curing *médico*. This double positionality is further multiplied (and reversed) in the observers' eyes: as a curing *médico* wearing a voice mask he appears transformed into an anaconda-person for his audience, while he still experiences himself (being the anaconda) as a human person with human consciousness.

5. Collective transformation

There are accounts, hitherto unexplored in literature, about collective, apparently religious rituals Shipibo people performed until a time still remembered by some elders (maybe until around 1965), when – due to their accounts – a "correct" lifestyle and with that, more potent magical power was still in place. These rituals are called

---

21 In the case of *irabana*, or *kopia*, the anaconda attaches its *niwe* to the child, which then would become ill (Illius 1992). First, its "soul" *kaya* would be taken away by the anaconda, and then the child would be transformed slowly as it would be dragged into the multi-nature (*niwe*) of the anaconda.

mochai.[22] During my fieldwork, I recorded eleven *mochai* songs and a few interviews about contents of the corresponding rituals. It seems that a singular ('the' *mochai* ritual) cannot be applied, but a pluralistic view on past *mochai* rituals is necessary. I could isolate three main tendencies for *mochai* songs' functions, that is (i) the purpose of "curing" sun or moon during eclipses, (ii) the purpose of summoning and meeting certain non-human entities, and, (iii) still in use by some *médicos*, the purpose of curing patients in severe conditions in the context of healing sessions. These tendencies are not mutually exclusive but may overlap. For all *mochai* rituals in (i) and (ii), collective participation is a prerequisite, and, clearly indicated in the given accounts, without ingesting any drug. All accounts coincide in descriptions of a circle formed by the participants and of a statue or cross that is erected in the centre, as well as in necessary guidance by a powerful *meráya médico*. When worshipping and *mochai* singing had started, something seems to have happened:

Ex. 4: *Mochai* song for summoning *Inka*[23]

1	rai *santon keweni*	From the patterned king of statues
2	*keweni paro<u>ra</u>*	the patterned river emanates,
3	*non kewé paro<u>ra</u>*	our river of patterns.
4	rai *santon keweni*	From the patterned king of statues
5	*keweni paro<u>ra</u>*	upon the patterned river
6	*ron tsaanai*	resounding with a boom (they are arriving).
7	*noa beaitian*	When we bring them (back) here,
8	*mai nayatai*	the earth is trembling,
9	*shinan wekanyamawe*	so do not allow your concentration to falter!
10	rai *kaibobo*	(our) royal kin,
11	*ja bonitoninbi*	the same way that once took them away
12	*inkabo<u>ra</u> beai*	is now bringing the *Inka* people back,
13	*ja beaitian*	and when they arrive,
14	*mai nayatai*	the earth is trembling,
15	*shinan wekanyamawe*	so do not allow your concentration to falter!
16	rai *kaibobo*	(our) royal kin,
17	*noa* rai *jonibo*	we are the royal persons
18	koros *manichimea*	with a cross erected in the centre.

---

22 The *mochai* rituals, or at least the word, are mentioned in some ethnographies, but I have still not encountered a passage longer than one or two sentences about forms or content (see Brabec de Mori 2011b: 447-464).

23 Ex. 4 performed by Claudio Sánchez Serafín, Phonogrammarchiv D 5346.

In lines 1-5, a somehow esoteric picture is drawn which suggests an ASPC, but as indicated above, no drugs were ingested: The statue, decorated with design patterns (*kewé*)[24] emanates a river of patterns. This suggests a strong collective focusing which "turns off" the ordinary perception of the external world. Subsequently, a great booming sound heralds oncoming entities, who make the earth tremble with their arrival. Participants could flee in terror, indicated by the repeated warning not to give way in lines 9 and 15. Further on, we have to pay attention to the distribution of the loan word *rai* (Spanish *rey*, king), obviously indicating some kind of superiority. The term is twice applied for the statue-cross which resembles a person.[25] On the river emerging from this cross-person-statue, persons arrive who are called *Inka*. In line 10 and 16, *rai* is applied to *kaibobo*, kin people. While in line 10, *rai* probably refer to the arriving *Inka* (and if so, also in line 16), in line 17, "we" are these royal people who have erected the cross (which does not resemble a person here). A process of identification appears here, (i) the statue becomes a royal person, (ii) from this person more royal persons, the *Inka*, emerge and (iii) upon arrival, the participants and the *Inka* share the royal identity, while they do not see the cross as royal anymore.

Among Shipibo, the *Inka* are considered "legendary" but definitely real people. These *Inka* retired from the invading Spaniards into remote regions of the world in order to not mingle with people who lived in such an "incorrect" way as the Spaniards, mestizos and contemporary Shipibo. The *Inka* are considered technologically advanced, having x-rays and any imaginable "health machines" at their disposal, as well as great battleships apt to beat back the disliked invaders when time is ripe.[26]

The *Inka* occupy a different *niwe*, a different section of the world. It seems that the *mochai* performance was a collective magical-religious experience which enabled the ardently singing Shipibo to summon and collectively identify with the *Inka*. These *Inka* appear sometimes synonymous to God or the Sun, but sometimes synonymous to the *simpibo jonibo*, who are considered terribly threatening demons, a source of maximal destructive power. With *mochai* rituals, Shipibo people did not

---

24 For the intracultural significance of *kené* and *kewé* desings or patterns, see Illius (1987: 156-172), LeClerc (2003: 227-251), or Brabec de Mori & Mori Silvano de Brabec (2009).

25 The "cross" is explicitly mentioned in line 18. That the statue resembled a person is included in the term *santo*, twice used with *rai*. The Shipibo term *santo* denotes miniature figurines of male or female Shipibo people carved from wood and usually dressed up in striking detail (e.g. the mini-garments they wear are embroidered or painted with *kewé* designs). It may be derived from Spanish *santo*, "saint".

26 This millennarian interpretation of an Incaic *reconquista* may as well result from Christian and syncretistic messianic ideas, like Juan Santos Atahuallpa's revolution in 1767 and newer movements (Ochoa Abaurre 2002).

only "cure" sun, moon, or patients, but also collectively transcended the borders of their own *niwe* – the world "we" (the Shipibo) live in – and united and identified themselves with the people they could have been if they had followed them into exile, into departing parts of the world.[27]

6. Sonic perspectivism

With the analysis of four Shipibo magical song texts, their performance contexts, and comments by the singers I have contributed to theorising indigenous concepts of the person, of consciousness, and of both human and non-human persons' positionalities in the cosmos.

The results from analysing musically accompanied or induced ASCP which are deliberately provoked and experienced by trained *médicos* contradict the interpretation that the ascription of human consciousness and physical appearance to non-humans occurs due to anthropomorphism as proposed for example by Turner (2009) or Karadimas (2004, and in this volume). The ascription is not the result of projecting one's own "exemplarised" (Lehrer 2006) experience of self-consciousness to others, but the result of a "full blown" experience of transforming into and communicating with these others in their human(oid) physical forms and consciousness. Shipibo *médicos* who obtained such experiences communicate these to their audience by playing with intermedial tools, like voice masking for indicating transformed states, enigmatic song lyrics for concealing their own positionalities, and bodily transformations during their training periods which may potentially be eyewitnessed by not-transformed Shipibo observers.

This phenomenology, exclusively enacted by *médicos*, confirms the principal programmatic concepts of perspectivism and multinaturalism. But there are important details to be noted. In Shipibo understanding, humanoid physicality is universal to conscious beings – in contrast to human physicality as proposed by "orthodox" perspectivism. Certain animals (e.g. land tortoises or howler monkeys), certain spirits and "owners" (*ibo*) of plants do perceive themselves as humanoid, as *jonibo*, persons, but with distinguishing features in both their physicality as well as their competence of perception and action. For example, howler monkeys have wobbly buttocks, and cannot sing correctly. Such entities are often protagonists in Shipibo *osanti* songs. Shipibo people are more powerful in perception and action and can

---

27 The phenomenon of populations who once dwelled together with the ancestors of today's ordinary people and then retired on their own decision (though in most cases not exactly voluntarily) into aspects of the world that depart from "our's" – and which can only be visited by trained or lucky people – was called "the fairy syndrome" by Evelyne Puchegger-Ebner (pers. comm., 2006). It appears in many societies and ontologies around the world.

readily make fun of them. Additionally, there are also species, most of them plants or fish, who are not regarded to even believe that they were human, and no consciousness is ascribed to them, they are not *jonibo*. On the other hand, there are beings equally or more powerful than Shipibo people, like the *chishka* bird (Ex. 1: Excerpts from an omen song by the bird *chishka*), jaguars, anacondas (Ex. 3), or pink river dolphins. These persons understand themselves exactly like Shipibo understand themselves, as "Real People", *jonikon*, but in most cases dispose of even higher competence of perception and action than Shipibo. Of such beings, no fun can be made lest one would reveal suicidal tendencies. On the contrary, they have to be pacified in order to avert the dangers they would pose to a Shipibo community if unchallenged. Dealing with all these beings, including the least competent ones, is exclusively the duty of specialists.

In order to conclude about the ontological qualities of perception and action in the given context, I have to stress the importance of the sonic compared to the visual: Shipibo *médicos* excessively use visual metaphors and descriptions not only when reporting from their experiences but also in their song lyrics. However, the visual stays within the framework of metaphorical language and retains a merely descriptive function. The audible, on the other hand, may function for descriptive purposes, too, but in depth it is the tool for achieving mimesis, transformation, and the construction of worlds. Without singing, or at least formalised uttering of words (*boman*, see Brabec de Mori 2009), such tasks cannot be performed, not even by ingesting psychoactive drugs. By "dressing up" in voice masks, Shipibo singers do not only indicate their state of current transformation (or mimesis), but actually enact this state: It is said among Shipibo that the former powerful *médicos*, the *meráya*, could transform into spirits and even physically disappear, by mere proper (masked) singing of magical songs. This is also indicated by *mochai* song lyrics (Ex. 4), a genre that was collectively performed in former times without drug ingestion but still resulting in severe collective ASCP, or transformed states.[28] Therefore, going with Lewy (this volume), hearing and sound production, specifically music performance, constitute key elements in transcending interspecific borders.

With that, the most important inconsistency of the above mentioned "audio-perspective" (*kano*) with perspectivism's "video-perspective" is addressed: the sonic connects perception with agency in its phenomenology as well as in the human body (or bundle of affects). Although the visual also allows for agency (by dressing up in any "clothes", including masks), an act of seeing cannot be connected

---

28 The *mochai* lyrics analysed here (and similar texts) can still be interpreted as descriptive metaphors, but comments and explanations by elders who had participated in *mochai* rituals indicate that perceptions e.g. of arriving spirits were perfectly real to them.

with effect in the way utterance effects agency. Focusing on the visual, it is impossible to understand the agency of *médicos* (or "shamans") affecting the *environment*. Therefore it is logical that wearing or not wearing masks affects the body, an observation reflected in Viveiros de Castro's "somatic perspectivism" (1997: 108), resulting in a multinaturalism centered on the nature of the (human or non-human) body. The "audio-perspective" contituted by the term *kano* in *médicos*' songs, on the other hand, suggests a "sonic perspectivism", or a multinaturalism encompassing the whole "nature" of an environment, constituted by the term *niwe*, as perceived by a person in her surroundings. As was shown with the brief description of *mochai* rituals, this "sonic perspectivism" therefore results in an "ambient multinaturalism" and also allows for collective transformations much more consistently than e.g. the collective wearing of masks, because of the intrinsic environmental quality ("ambience") of sound perception and production.

Shipibo ethnography therefore suggests that indeed, as proposed by Viveiros de Castro, each society of animals, plants, spirits, and non-Shipibo people share their respective perspective on the world and perceive their environment with intraspecific commensurability. However, the concepts of *niwe* and *kano* are dynamically loaded with multiple meanings. Such meanings underline the intrinsic quality of agency in "sonic perspectivism": e.g. the launching of an arrow from a bow (*kanóti*, "which makes *kano*") does not connect to Viveiros de Castro's perspectives, but is clearly related to what Shipibo people understand as directing magical power – this is what *médicos* do when positioning themselves within the anaconda's perspective (*ronin kano*), for example. Similarly, *niwe* (which also means "air", "wind", "aura", or "smell") is as dynamic as a thunderstorm, may arise and dissipate, can be constructed, held and extended by song performance (and vanishes with the song's end), but is at the same time the ever distinctive "nature" of an "ambient multinaturalism", wherein humans and non-humans dwell respectively. The qualities of perception, localisation, and action within a *niwe* are as dynamic and loaded with differences as the term *niwe* is. The ambience can be constructed by sonic utterance, perceived synaesthetically and communicated in visual metaphors which finally indicate that e.g. the *bobinzana*-plant-persons' environment *does not look like* the Shipibo-persons' environment. The *médicos*' communications about their explorations in visual metaphors may confirm animism's constant claim that non-humans share human culture in the sense that non-humans (as humanoid persons) in their environment behave like humans (drinking maniok beer, dressing in cushmas, etc), but they do so localised in an environment which is radically different from the environment of "Real People" (Shipibo) in ordinary circumstances.

Concluding my argument I propose that the evidence of experience has to be regarded more influential to the construction of human and non-human sociability than the descriptive and explanatory quality of narratives. In Shipibo language, evidentiality is clearly expressed by certain grammatical features. In the limited scope of this paper, the marker *-ra/ri-* was seen in the lyrics examples to indicate first-person experience representing the highest degree of evidence in contrast to the reportative marker *-ronki*, indicating third-person observation, hearsay, or narration (like myths). Unlike in naturalistic science, where evidence can be achieved only by the means of observation and reproduction by third persons, in Shipibo ontology the experience of the first person is considered more valid (especially if the first person is a renowned *médico*). Therefore it is possible that dreams or provoked ASPC provide perception and experience of "the 'real reality' of the multiplicity of intangible worlds and spiritual body essences" (Santos-Granero 2003: 180). The grading of evidentiality explains why this "real reality" is considered more important and even more valid than everyday experience. The humanness or humanoidness of non-humans within indigenous ontology is not an ascription due to anthropomorphism but a fact due to epistemic evidence provided by *médicos*.

With that I suggest to ever again pay attention to indigenous praxis in order to understand their lived worlds and ontological positions. I think that neither it is sufficient to analyse and compare myths and other narratives (although it may help), nor just to look and see (which may help, too). Going with Classen (2005) and Santos-Granero (2006), I argue that all senses and modes of expression (including those not present in naturalism, like Santos-Granero's "noncorporeal modes of sensing and knowing") must be considered when intending to understand indigenous ontology. As was shown in this paper, sound, hearing and utterance prove essential for transcending interspecific boundaries and interacting with non-human persons.

Bibliographical references

Brabec de Mori, Bernd
   2007   *The Inka´s song emanates from my tongue: Composition vs. oral tradition in Western Amazonian curing songs*. Paper presented at the 39th World Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), July 5-11, Vienna. Unpublished manuscript.
   2009   Words can doom. Songs may heal: Ethnomusicological and indigenous explanations of song-induced transformative processes in Western Amazonia. *Curare. Journal for Medical Anthropology* 32(1+2): 123-144.
   2011a   The magic of song, the invention of tradition and the structuring of time among the Shipibo (Peruvian Amazon). *Jahrbuch des Phonogrammarchivs der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2: 169-192.

2011b   *Die Lieder der Richtigen Menschen. Musikalische Kulturanthropologie der indigenen Bevölkerung im Ucayali-Tal, Westamazonien.* 2 vols. PhD thesis, Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Universität Wien.

2011c: Shipibo *osanti* animal songs and 'shamanic' practice: Transforming into and performing the 'other'. Paper presented at the *41st* World Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), July 13-19, St. John's. Unpublished manuscript.

2011d   Tracing hallucinations. Contributing to a critical ethnohistory of ayahuasca usage in the Peruvian Amazon. In: Labate, Beatriz Caiuby & Henrik Jungaberle (eds.): *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca*. Zürich: LIT, 23-47.

Brabec de Mori, Bernd & Laida Mori Silvano de Brabec
2009   La corona de la inspiración. Los diseños geométricos de los Shipibo-Konibo y sus relaciones con cosmovisión y música. *Indiana* 26: 105-134.

Camacho, José & José A. Elías-Ulloa
2005   The syntactic structure of evidentiality in Shipibo (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jcamacho/publications/evidShipibo.pdf>; 26.11.2010).

Canayo, Lastenia
2004   *Los dueños del mundo shipibo*. Lima: Centro de Producción Editorial e Imprenta, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos.

Classen, Constance
2005   McLuhan in the rainforest: The sensory worlds of oral cultures. In: Howes, David (ed.): *Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader*. New York: Berg, 147-163.

Descola, Philippe
2005   *Par- delà nature et culture*. Paris: Gallimard.

Frank, Erwin H.
1994   Los uni. In: Santos-Granero, Fernando & Federica Barclay (eds.): *Guia Etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía*. Vol. II. Quito: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), 129-238.

Gow, Peter
1994   River people: Shamanism and history in Western Amazonia. In: Thomas, Nicholas & Caroline Humphrey (eds.): *Shamanism, history and the state*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 90-113.

Hill, Jonathan D.
1993   *Keepers of the Sacred Chants. The Poetics of Ritual Power in an Amazonian Society*. Tucson/London: The University of Arizona Press.

Illius, Bruno
1987   *Ani Shinan. Schamanismus bei den Shipibo-Conibo (Ost-Peru)*. Ethnologische Studien, 3. Tübingen: S&F.
1992   The concept of Nihue among the Shipibo-Conibo of Eastern Peru. In: Langdon, E. Jean M. & Gerhard Baer (eds.): *Portals of power. Shamanism in South America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 63-78.
1997   Ein Lied zur Haarschneidezeremonie der Shipibo-Conibo. In Dürr, Eveline & Stefan Seitz (eds.): *Religionsethnologische Beiträge zur Amerikanistik.* Ethnologische Studien, 31. Münster: LIT, 211-231.

1999   *Das Shipibo. Texte, Kontexte, Kommentare. Ein Beitrag zur diskursorientierten Untersuchung einer Montaña-Kultur*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.

Karadimas, Dimitri
2004²   The Miraña deer skull: Mythological and cognitive implications of a Miraña communication instrument (Colombian Amazon). In: Myers, Thomas P. & María Susana Cipolletti (eds.): *Artifacts and society in Amazonia/Artefactos y sociedad en la Amazonía*. Bonner Amerikanistische Studien, 36. Bonn: Bonner Amerikanistische Studien (BAS), 63-94.

Latour, Bruno
2009   Perspectivism: 'Type' or 'bomb'? *Anthropology Today*, 25(2): 1-2.

LeClerc, Frédérique Rama
2003   *Des modes de socialisation par les plantes chez les Shipibo-Conibo d'amazonie peruvienne. Une étude des relations entre humains et non-humains dans la construction sociale*. PhD thesis, Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, Université Paris X – Nanterre.

Lehrer, Keith
2006   Consciousness, representation and knowledge. In Kriegel, Uriah & Kenneth Williford (eds.): *Self-representational approaches to consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT, 409-420.

Menezes Bastos, Rafael José de
2007   Music in the indigenous societies of lowland South America: The state of the art. *Mana N.S.* 3 (<http://socialsciences.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-93132007000100001&lng=en&nrm=iso>; 10.10.2012).
2011   *Apyap world hearing II – Conversing with 'animals' and 'spirits' and listening the apparently inaudible*. Abstract presented at the 41st World Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), July 13-19, St. John's. Unpublished manuscript.

Nagel, Thomas
1974   What is it like to be a bat? *Philosophical Review* 83(4): 435-450.

Ochoa Abaurre, Juan Carlos
2002   *Mito y chamanismo: el mito de la tierra sin mal en los tupí-cocama de la Amazonía peruana.* PhD thesis, Facultad de Filosofía, Universidad de Barcelona.

Olsen, Dale A.
1996   *Music of the Warao of Venezuela. Song people of the rain forest*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Rosengren, Dan
2006   Matsigenka corporeality, a nonbiological reality: On notions of consciousness and the constitution of identity. *Tipití. Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4(1+2): 81-102.

Santos-Granero, Fernando
2003   Pedro Casanto's Nightmares: Lucid dreaming in Amazonia and the New Age movement. *Tipití. Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 1(2): 179-210.

2006   Sensual vitalities: Noncorporeal modes of sensing and knowing in native Amazonia. *Tipití. Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4(1+2): 57-80.

Seeger, Anthony
1987   *Why Suyá sing. A musical anthropology of an Amazonian people*. Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seth, Anil
2007   Models of consciousness. *Scholarpedia* 2(1): 1328 (<http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Models_of_consciousness>; 10.10.2012).

Stoltze Lima, Tania
1999   The two and its many: Reflection on perspectivism in a Tupi cosmology. *Ethnos* 64(1): 107-131.

Taussig, Michael
1993   *Mimesis and alterity. A particular history of the senses*. New York/London: Routledge.

Tournon, Jacques
2002   *La merma mágica. Vida e historia de los Shipibo-Conibo del Ucayali*. Lima: Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica (CAAAP).

Turner, Terence S.
2009   The crisis of late structuralism. Perspectivism and animism: Rethinking culture, nature, spirit, and bodiliness. *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 7(1): 3-40.

Valenzuela, Pilar M.
2003   Evidentiality in Shipibo-Konibo, with a comparative overview of the category in Panoan. In: Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. & Robert M. W. Dixon (eds.): S*tudies in evidentiality*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 33-61.

Velmans, Max
2009   How to define consciousness – and how not to define consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16(5): 139-156.

Vilaça, Aparecida
2005   Chronically unstable bodies: Reflections on Amazonian corporalities. *Journal of the Royal anthropological Institute N.S.* 11: 445-464.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
1997   Die kosmologischen Pronomina und der indianische Perspektivismus. *Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Américanistes* 61: 99-114.
2010   The forest of mirrors. A few notes on the ontology of Amazonian spirits (<http://amazone.wikia.com/wiki/The_Forest_of_Mirrors>; 23.9.2010).

Windt, Jennifer & Valdas Noreika
2011   How to integrate dreaming into a general theory of consciousness – a critical review of existing positions and suggestions for future research. *Consciousness and Cognition* 20(4): 1091-1107.