

IDENTITY BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND COGNITION: STYLE ELABORATIONS AND CULTURAL INTERACTION IN AMAZONIA

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The following discussion addresses the complex and sometimes ambiguous relation between ethnic style and identity. It is commonly assumed that because of its formal properties, style can be particularly effective in marking ethnic identity and in communicating it cross-culturally. Though, this statement carries along problems of different order. The "marking" of identity, in fact, becomes problematic when we see identity as intrinsically dynamic and relational in character, rather than static and essential. It is not an obvious question to ask how style accomplishes this effect, and data presented below suggest not to limit the interpretation of style to processes of codification and decodification. This discussion of Amazonian ethnography suggests to look at the relationship between style and the construction and performance of identity as the complex combination of multiple fields of different order.

In Amazonia identification can be a thorny task. This is well expressed by Gow (1991) when he observes that in the Bajo Urubamba the same person would be identified by someone as Piro, by someone else as Campa, and by a third one as a *mestizo*; and the same person would identify him- or herself differently from time to time depending on the context at hand. This indicates the inadequacy of a notion of identity as a fixed attribute, and exposes the problems we have to expect if we crystallize identity in a univocal correspondence with a given "ethnic style".

The fragmentation of indigenous territories and ethnic relations as a consequence of the colonial occupation of Amazonia, as well as the myth of a homogenous natural environment, are at the origin of the distorted image of indigenous societies as uniform and isolated. This must be seen not only as the result of colonial policies and institutions that relegated indigenous groups to ecological and social marginality, but also, as Appadurai (1988: 37) points out, of the «assumption of anthropological thought regarding the boundedness of cultural units», and the annihilation of internal diversification within those boundaries. The "physical immobility" of the natives is seen not simply as a function of an almost mystical attachment to a place of origin and to a mythical past «without distortion or residue» (*idem*), but as dependence on the preexisting conditions of the environment in which they live; «of course, when observers arrive, natives are capable of moving to another place. But this is not really motion; it is usually flight, escape, to another equally confining place» (*idem*).

In lowland South America this view has found ground not only in the unfortunate distinction between "hot" and "cold" societies (Lévi-Strauss 1963) that characterizes a traditional thought as unmediated by social and historical factors, but also in an excessive focus on indigenous resistance to the realities imposed by Euro-American colonialism and neo-colonialism. By relying unreflectively on the catch-all notion of resistance, we may be led to overlook the active participation of the Amerindians in the subtle and contradictory process of intercultural exchange, and neglect the dialectics of power internal to indigenous realities.

At the same time, criticism must also address those models of ethnicity in which grouping is based on style or linguistic distributions, although they may reveal the diversity and extent of contact and exchange. Such models in fact «rely on the questionable assumption that migrations and conquests are the basic processes of social development. This ignores the potential for simple, local elaboration of existing social practices to produce these observed distributions itself» (Whitehead 1989: 4). We will see, for example, how data on the strategic adoption of foreign physical appearance

through body-tattoo, skull deformation, or style emulation (DeBoer 1990; Erikson 1986; Henley & Mattéi-Muller 1978), invalidate the reduction of style to a univocal correspondence with ethnic identity, and suggest the need for a cautious approach to the interpretation of the face value of style. In addition to this, data on multilingualism in the Amazon complicate the use of linguistic distributions in the definition of ethnic affiliation (Sorensen 1967).

Once we acknowledged these complex factors, we can still look at style as a privileged sphere to understand the complex interrelation of the phenomena that underlie the ways in which people define and represent themselves. We will see, for example, how style, as a patterned order of elements, is unconsciously embodied and inscribed in the physical person in addition to the mind, or how kinesthetic processes involved in its production offer a support to cultural memory. We will also look at the role of narratives and situated learning in the acquisition of style, how they contribute to the creation of scenarios for action, and how tacit cultural knowledge is conveyed through these processes.

Style and knowledge: between ideology and cognition

Tentatively, we can define style as a recognizable form produced by a "more or less deliberate" selection of elements and their composition, i.e. by a creative performance specified by some idealized aesthetic rules (1). Style is not reducible to art forms, but it can be recognized, at least intuitively, in all those aspects of human life, such as language, gestures, body postures, and manufactures, in which groups or individuals mark and communicate their "distinctive character" in relation to others. Lévi-Strauss (in Tax 1953: 61) noticed that style is also «widely applicable to nature, that trees [...] and animals have style, that human profiles often have different style», and that even crystals and molecules have style. For Lévi-Strauss this suggests that «the human mind is working

unconsciously along lines similar to nature's» (in Tax 1953: 62), moreover, it defines style as an outstanding operational tool to try to understand the correlation between nature and culture. In a somehow similar direction, Bateson (1972) sees style as expressive of psychic integration, which makes successful artistic expression recognizable cross-culturally.

These suggestions must be confronted with the fact that style is symptomatic of the time and place of its production; it gives clues of the relationship between groups, and of the cultural transformations linked to historical processes. This line has been pursued by the Marxist approach to the changing relations of art and economic life as part of conflictual processes of ideology construction, by archaeological studies in artifact dating, and by iconographic analysis. For example, the analysis of the formal code may highlight the relationship between different social groups. A similar integrated analysis was conducted by Washburn (1990), who studied the designs of the Bakuba raffia cloth and found specific patterns of symmetry for each level of the interethnic hierarchy. Moreover, because of the centrality of style in cultural life, it can become ground for dispute in situations of conflict between groups or individuals. Style would be used to impose or strongly suggest a standard of what is a proper and correct expression. By contrast with the official style, alternative styles are chosen to express dissent and foster resistance or cultural independence. If we look at situations of contact in particular (2), style shows the signs not only of the history and circumstances of the interaction between groups, but also of their interpretation.

In addition to this, style is the «common ground against which innovation and the individuality of particular works may be measured» (Schapiro 1962: 278). It is produced by individual elaborations mediated by, and interacting with, cultural forms. As the product of specific techniques and procedures, style incorporates kinesthetic and sensory-motor elements; «we sense that these are operations of the human hand; that there is somebody speaking, doing, acting» (Schapiro, in Tax 1953: 65). To fully understand the transformation of style produced by the interplay of individual

attitudes and cultural meaning, as well as of marginal and official instances, it is useful «[to study] learning rather than merely analysing the style in itself» (Mead, in Tax 1953: 62, 63).

This complex interrelation of factors and levels of analysis in the study of style necessarily implies a view of knowledge as the combination of different processes of different nature. This perspective stresses the tension that exists between ideology and cognition, i.e., between a system that legitimizes the social order by constructing schemes about the nature of the world, and one that organizes the information acquired through the perceptive system following a problem-solving path. The distinction between those categories and ethical notions that are the product of non-individual historical processes, and the knowledge systems that grow out of experience was pointed out by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, although they had in mind the social experience of labor and interpersonal relations (3). The fundamental insight of this distinction is that it implies a rejection of the approach to culture as a coherent, all-encompassing system, seen as collective representations or cosmology, and leads us to acknowledge the contraddictory relation between alternative knowledge systems within groups or societies. This is further explained by psychological theories of knowledge acquisition pointing out the fact that individuals do not receive categories or modes of reasoning ready-made from previous generations, but construct them from experience in a creative and dialectical interaction with their environment.

For Bloch (1985) ideology, as a legitimizing system that mystifies, inverts and hides the real condition of existence, pretends to be cognition by making up a representation of the world that we must hold to be true to remain sane. This is the recoverability of ideology and its permanence in times of drastic change, although this system is constantly confronted with the cognitive system that grows out of experience. The distinction between these two processes, and the attention to the ways in which they interrelate, is needed to address the following issues: the criteria underlying style transformation; the ways in which knowledge and style circulate

within one society; and the terms of the conflict between different knowledge systems and their reciprocal rearrangement in a contact situation (Whitehead 1992, 1995).

The creation of meaningful worlds and the performance of identity

The complication of the face value of style is made necessary by recognizing that «people shape social structures and meaning in their contact with one another» (Hannerz 1992: 15), and that ethnicity is not a «pristine form of authenticity but a tension resulting from the institutional forms imposed by the dominant culture and the need to convey a sense of the self or a meaning of history that is alien to the colonial order» (Rabasa 1993: 69). Ethnic identity is not a bounded and immutable entity, something that can be thought of as a trait inventory or that is associated with a unique, almost mystical, historical experience. Rather, it can be seen as sets of performances based on a «disjoint plurality of knowledge structures» suggested by particular contexts (Sands & Lehman 1991). We may also look at ethnicity as based on "communities of practice". In the definition given by Lave and Wenger (1991: 98) this notion does not implies necessarily «co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable groups, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understanding concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities». From a different perspective, Whitehead (1989: 7) presents us with a similar suggestion; for him «ethnicity did not necessarily coincide with particular economic, political or linguistic systems but could also be founded on an economic technique or specialization that was part of [...] a wider system of exchange». For example, among Tupi speaking groups, the Bakani were known for the production of *urucù*, cotton, hammocks, rectangular and shell beads; the Nahuqua

for calabash containers and nut shell beads; the Trumaì and Suya had the monopoly in the production of weapons and tools made of stone, and were renown for tobacco cultivation; Trumaì and Mehinaku were specialized in the production of salt from the ashes of particular plants (Lévi-Strauss 1943:125). Such specialization is sometime reflected in naming: thus 'Arawak' for trading to the Spanish of flour *aru*, and 'Warao', 'canoe-makers' or 'canoe-owners' (Whitehead 1989). It is therefore a «monopoly of double rarity» (Godelier 1977), the product and the required technical and magical knowledge to produce it, that distinguish between groups. In this regard, it is particularly interesting the relation drawn by Leroi-Gourhan (1965) between technology, kinesthetics (that he calls «the bodily basis of value and rhythms») and social memory.

But as the combination of procedural and declarative knowledge, style bridges daily practices with attempts to trace particular relations with the past. What distinguishes between different ethnic groups isn't merely a specialized production and the knowledge and expertise required, but the production of historical schemes in memory as well. These schemes offer a referent for the performance of identity, in the sense that «making history is a way of producing identity insofar as it produces a relation between what supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affair» (Friedman 1992: 837).

The emotional element expressed as creativity in style production, and its place in the definition of identity, has been addressed by Sapir (1924) in the distinction between "genuine" and "spurious" culture. This distinction, which has been wrongly interpreted as an argument for the existence of an authentic essence of cultural identity, refers instead to the problem of how different facets of identity are integrated by interest and desire. Individuals instinctively look for mastery and spiritual satisfaction in their daily lives; therefore, what distinguishes a genuine expression is not an authentic essence, but an authentic experience, which finds its most complete example in human creativity and in style, as the internal and external representation of what is good, proper, and meaningful. This seems to be in line with those works in cognitive science that

bring into relation emotions with the acquisition and ordering of knowledge (see for example Lehman 1994) (4). Emotions and knowledge are both responsible for monitoring and directing behaviour and the on-going activity of memory; they create affectively salient worlds in which inferences, projections, and solutions are individually generated *vis-à-vis* cultural values and expectations.

For example, the Shipibo-Conibo Indians of Peruvian Amazonia, see the whole cosmos as patterned with designs, the invisible world of the spirit made visible by human creative activity. The capacity of seeing and creating designs is *shina*, also translatable as thinking, imagination, awareness, and a successful expression is *kikin*, «harmony, symmetry, accurate performance, or cultural refinement», term that also includes «ideational values like subtlety, relevance, appropriateness, and cultural correctness. A harmoniously formed and well painted vessel is *kikin* just like a village kept free from plant growth» (Gebhart-Sayer 1985: 161-162). Thus, *kikin* denotes identity as an ongoing practice of cultural values opposed to the unchanging identity deriving from an original order, which is instead expressed by the suffix *kon* (Keifenheim 1990). In the dilemma between "to be", and "to be able to be..." style provides a framework of reference for the daily performance of identity.

Travel, trade, and interethnic relations in Amazonia

Recent interdisciplinary research in Amazonia reflects an important shift of paradigm regarding how to look at indigenous social formations, and a much more complex picture is emerging. The correlation between trade and the political organization of interethnic relations has been pursued by these studies, that bear on the discussion about the ways in which trade, warfare, and interethnic hierarchy and symbiosis influence the formation of ethnic identity and its strategic expression through style. Archaeological

and ethnohistorical works have shown the stratified organization of preconquest Amazonian chiefdoms, their complex and large-scale economies and organized warfare, and the regional patterns of indigenous settlements. On the basis of a study that integrates projections of depopulation ratios with subsistence patterns in different ecological zones, Denevan (1992: 207) suggested «the former existence in Amazonia of at least locally dense populations with sufficient economic surpluses to support social classes and specialists». In the Llanos de Mojos of Northeastern Bolivia, for example, a complex of thousands of ridges, drainage ditches, raised platforms, associated with causeways and habitation mounds is «indicative of large, well-organized populations» (1992: 210). Roosevelt (1993: 274) brought archaeological evidence to indicate «the presence for more than a thousand years of populous complex societies of indigenous origins, with urban-scale settlements, intensive subsistence and craft-production systems, and rituals and ideologies linked to systems of social hierarchy and political centralization».

In response to the presumed "physical immobility" of the Amazonian natives, the importance of regional and long-distance trade networks has been pointed out. Goods such as curare, salt, pottery, green stone, metal tools, coca, shamanic knowledge and ritual objects were exchanged along these routes, that are still partially used. The rationale for trading has been located by some scholars in the distinction between the *várzea*, the periodically flooded areas along the major rivers, and the *terra firme*, the interfluvial areas characterized by soils of lesser quality. The ecology of the tropical forest environment would have also underpinned the competition between riverine and backwood populations. Problems of different order make this kind of explanation highly questionable. First of all, as demonstrated by ethnobotanical and archaeological studies, the poverty of the soil shouldn't be seen as an obstacle itself, since indigenous people know and use sophisticated techniques of soil management that are part of a complex system of resource use not limited to agricultural practices. Moreover, are rarely raw products to be traded, while the

most sought after items are manufactures, usually belonging to the category of nonutilitarian exotic "scarce" goods. It has been noticed that the place of trade goods in the groups' economies is negligible; they rather belong to the sphere of prestige, and must be treated as object of social exchange rather than as commodities (Scazzocchio 1978). With regard to the trade networks established by ancient Panama chiefdoms, Helms (1987) has shown that despite Panamanian knew and practiced gold craftship, the items that were designative of chiefly power were imported from outside the isthmus through long-distance trade, or were local copies of foreign artifacts. She also demonstrated that the items exchanged, such as polished black wood and other manufactures, as well as esoteric knowledge, were associated with political-ideological elites. In a similar direction, Whitehead (1989: 9) pointed out the regional integration of Amerindian populations «as much in the inter-fluvial as in the floodplain areas with political power being exercised at a geographical distance via lines of economic interaction». He also suggested (1989: 10) that «the modes of leadership which were erected upon these networks of exchange linking the domestic producing units might be classed tentatively as trading-military or theocratic-genealogical» (5). In response to the fundamental changes brought by the European intrusion, this political systems were dialectically readjusted on the basis of Amerindian ideologies, to undergird «the formation of new military elites, the emergence of new tribal divisions and a fundamental reorganization of native trading networks» (Whitehead 1993: 210). For example, «the lithic technologies and their productive bases were marginalized by access to metal tools; and so a range of specialists and their skill in this sphere died out, and the associated regional networks of trade collapsed or were reoriented to capture the European market» (1993: 214). Consequently, new political formations were build on the privileged access to European manufacture, while pre-conquest trade networks were used by the colonizers to gain control over peoples and goods. On the basis of these studies, we see how the reason to trade and the intense longstanding hostilities between riverine and backwood groups seems hardly to be determined by ecological

reasons, and must be analyzed in conjunction with the ideology underlying the complex system of intra- and inter-ethnic hierarchies and alliances, as well as with the attribution of power to the exotic. The control of the flow of exchange goods and of information conveyed along the rivers used as communication avenues, and the participation in a system of prestige not limited to geopolitical matters but also involving cosmological conceptions which underpin the organization of society, provide a more convincing picture.

Cosmology: the recycling of difference

In an article of 1943, Lévi-Strauss pointed out the relationship between warfare and exchange. Trade exchange «represents a potential warfare peacefully resolved, while war is the result of an infortunate transaction» (1943: 136). In this perspective, warfare «doesn't necessarily reveal a crisis or unbalance within the relations of the groups, but rather provides the regulator mean to assure the functioning of institutions; opposing for sure, psychologically and physically, the different tribes; but at the same time establishing between them unconscious links of exchange, perhaps unintentional but in anyway inevitable, of reciprocal services that are fundamental to the maintenance of culture» (1943: 124; my translation).

Among contemporary Amazonian groups, despite their relatively small-scale economy, an ideology of hierarchy and dependence that we would expect being associated with chieftancy, is still at work and is reflected in the organization and conceptualization of interethnic relationships. In the Colombian region of the Vaupés, for example, the relation between the Tukano, Arawak, Caribe and Maku, is still thought in hierarchical terms, suggesting that these groups were once possibly joined into a single social order. So «Cubeo, for example, consider themselves to have been the "junior" of the Desana, and the Tukano tribe is still recognized by some as the highest in rank of all [...] Although

Tukanoan and Arawakan intermarriages are predicated on social equality, they nevertheless bear a taint of assimilation» (Goldman 1993: 139). Moreover, «the Maku, who are regarded by Tukanoans as intrinsically alien [...], are nevertheless enmeshed with them...[They] are still the traditional servitors of Tukanoan masters, in relationships that have persisted for generations» (*idem*).

In reviewing works on social structures from three regions of Amazonia (Central Brazil, Vaupés, Guiana) Overing Kaplan (1981) noticed that, despite differences in the social organization, it seems to exist an underlying philosophy of society, reflected in mythology and in cosmology, common to many indigenous groups of Tropical South America. This philosophy is based of the idea that contact and proper mixing of differences is prerequisite to the existence of life and society, and indicates a model of circulation of energy based on the control and transformation of toxicity in a source of life (for a representation of such concept in crafts see Guss 1989) (6) Identity is not only constructed in reference to the other, but consubstantial with it as well. In the tripartite distinction of human beings: we, the other (similar to us), the foreigners, which has been noticed in many Panoan, Quechua, and Arawak groups (Erikson 1986; Keifenheim 1990; Renard-Casevitz 1988; Scazzocchio 1978) the opposition "we/others" is seen as complementary, and is the dialectical opposition of these elements which produce the individual. Hence, the outsiders are not really so, since they mediate between "we" and the absolute alterity; they are seen as potential affines and designated as wife-givers (Descola 1993). This is confirmed by the diffused practice of intermarriage outside of one's own linguistic affiliation. In the Vaupés region of Colombia «language [...] is often referred to in the specification of marriage rules: a person should normally marry someone who speaks differently from themselves» (Hugh-Jones 1992: 96). In the Ecuadorian Amazonian region, Canelos Quechua commonly intermarry with Zaparoan and Jivaroan speakers (Whitten 1976), and in Peruvian Amazonia until few decades ago Panoan Conibo raided for Amahuaca, Remo, Cashibo, Mayoruna, and Arawakan Campa women. Women newly included in the group had to undergo a process of cultural apprenticeship. More

interestingly for the present discussion of style and identity, they had to learn how to make ceramic and textile in the Shipibo-Conibo tradition, which distinguishes the Shipibo-Conibo people from other groups. The continuation of such tradition, that is deeply rooted in the Shipibo-Conibo conception of identity, was therefore dependent on foreign women.

The proper mixing of difference is also seen as the source of cultural continuity and historical transformation. For the Piro of the Bajo Urubamba (Gow 1991), both intermarriage and the ability to channel productive activity into relationships of exchange with the outside, is what makes people *civilizados* in contrast to the *bravos* (wild) Yaminahua. In a similar way, the Canelos Quichua of Ecuadorian Amazonian region construct ethnic continuity out of the symbolic duality between *alli runa* (caserío people), and *sacha runa* (forest people); and in Matsiguenga myths, history as a transformative process is put into relation with the threatening separation of opposed categories of peoples, which is remodeled from spatial to temporal, and interiorized no longer as a separation between self and foreigner, but between Matsiguenga society and its future (Renard-Cazevitz 1988). We see that the duality self/other is not merely constitutive, but becomes action-oriented, and assists ideological transformations through the acquisition of power from external sources of technical and symbolic knowledge. This has also been documented for the Shuar with regard to the elaboration of new forms of leadership (Hendricks 1988).

Boundary-crossing and track-keeping

The ability to transcend ethnic boundaries is not only necessary to the very reproduction of society, where travelling is needed in order to maintain kin relationships, to carry out affinal obligation, or to participate to feast and rituals where both rank and interdependence between groups are reaffirmed. These occasions are

also instrumental in bringing in knowledge from afar. Butt-Colson has shown how knowledge related to the Halleluja cult in the Guyana, moved along indigenous networks of exchange «along the same routes and via the same kind of relationship» (1985: 125) that supported trade and intermarriage. «Tangible and intangible property thus tend to be treated alike, under a general expectation of reciprocity of some kind» (1985: 119). The ability to manage the relation with the foreigner is a source of knowledge and power, and is one of the qualities of the shaman. Because of his/her power to control and manipulate the relation with the outside, the shaman plays a central role in the acquisition of knowledge and goods through exchange relationships. Among the Piaroa, for instance, trade is under the control of these powerful ritual specialists; they have the perfect knowledge of the tracks and of kinship relations, and they are able to memorize all the transactions going on. The reason for this control is maybe the fact that shamanic power itself depends on the establishment of an exchange partnership between the shaman and his/her spiritual master. But it can also be related to the mediation operated between different worlds through spiritual journey and transformation, and consequently to the familiarity the shaman has with the foreigner and with dissimulation. In the spiritual journey, the shaman acquires knowledge and power by actually becoming something else. Because of the control he has upon the metamorphic quality of life, he's able to create «a bridge for understanding the incoming and so [to cushion] the impact of a [...] clash of different structures» (Butt-Colson 1985: 142).

The role of the outsider in the quest for new conceptual categories and political empowerment has been described by Brown (1991) in a comparative study of millenarism in Amazonia, where he also proves the inadequate reduction of utopian renewal to an expression of resistance to colonial or neocolonial state control. In the five cases presented by Brown, the prophets are figures marginal to the community, through birth or upbringing, «both phisically and in terms of prevailing social and political norms» (Brown 1991: 392). By virtue of their stutus as outsiders, prophets are capable of bypassing the political constaints of existing social units, and

establish alternative forms of social integration. These include attempts to reject social ranking, as in Tupi-Guarani movements, or to establish new social hierarchies. For example, in the millenarian movement sparked by Juan Santos Atahualpa, the Asháninka pledged themselves to an imperial political model, while in the Canela millenarian movement, led by the prophetess Kee-Khwëi, and in the Venancio Christo movement among the Tukanoan and the Arawakan Indians of the Rio Negro, the tributary use of food suggests a tendency toward chiefly politics. Following Brown (*idem*), Amazonian messianic movements can be seen as «instantiations of a cyclical process of political struggle internal to Amazonian societies» grounded in the tension between hierarchical and egalitarian tendencies. On the basis of the discussion of interethnic relations presented above, I would suggest that this «intensification of more subtle oscillations in organizing principles observed in contemporary Amazonian societies» should not be seen as referring solely to the dialectic between «an egalitarian mode associated with ordinary subsistence activities and a hierarchical mode activated during ritual enterprises» (Brown 1991: 402), but also to the dialectic between hierarchy and symbiosis in the organization of interethnic relations.

Another feature of millenarianism is the openness to exotic and spiritual knowledge. This can be seen as an example of the dialectical process through which Amazonian societies incorporate and, at the same time, define themselves against the foreigner. As I mentioned above, here is the ability to reshape external categories and social institutions to meet indigenous conceptual and social structures. These processes not only reverse the hierarchy of the colonial system, but also challenge the traditional authority. They «exemplify the capacity of Amazonian millenarian movements to steer native societies through the rough waters of their own internal contradictions: tendencies toward hierarchy versus a fierce commitment to equality; the continuity of myth versus the need for change in response to new circumstances; ethnic boundary maintenance versus regional integration; resistance to new symbol systems versus their active assimilation» (Brown 1991: 406).

Representation, emulation, dissimulation

The discussion of the definition of identity in interaction that has been pursued in the previous section must be brought into relation with the observation that in situation of contact people often dissimulate their own identity, produce performance contrary to their usual mode, and present a different, very simplified or overemphasized image of themselves. In conflictual situations, the imitation of the outsider accomplishes the goal of avoiding conflict. This strategy has been documented with regard to the Awa-Kwaiker living in the Colombian and Ecuadorian tropical forest of the Pacific lowlands, who experienced intense colonization and exploitation, especially through the institution of the *compadrazgo* which ties them to a mestizo patron. When dealing with the outsider, the Awa-Kwaiker adjust their behavior to that of the outsider «projecting on purpose a "fake appearance" of non-Kwaiker» (Ehrenreich 1991: 58; my translation). Furthermore, «to the non-Kwaiker, the Kwaiker pretend that they speak nothing but Spanish, and they keep up this pretense as long as a mestizo is within hearing distance, even when their Spanish is totally inadequate to the occasion, among themselves they speak their own language» (Osborne 1968: 595). The result is to make people believe that they are assimilated to the dominant culture; they become invisible and in such a way protect themselves from the outsider. This strategy is played on appearance but it also implies an interrogation of foreign features to reveal their "hidden categories" which aren't necessarily accepted. It reveals a political adaptation to external pressure as well as a form of empowerment rooted in indigenous categories.

A somehow similar example comes from the Ucayali Region of Peruvian Amazonia, where style acquisition is embedded in a hierarchy of prestige between different ethnic groups. The ethnohistorical record indicates that the higher ranked groups were those located downstream, and it also documented the upstream movement of what is now the characteristic Shipibo-Conibo (Pano) style. These Pano groups would have emulated the style of the Cocama (Tupi) located downriver, to participate of their prestige in

the geopolitical landscape. Nowadays this phenomenon is still at work among mainstream groups. The Cashibo have recently adopted the Shipibo-Conibo practice of head flattening, and Piro (Arawak) started emulating the decorative style of their downstream Pano neighbors. This voluntary assimilation only regards those stylistic elements that are indexes of prestige, and doesn't imply the acceptance of Shipibo-Conibo status and the assimilation of the dominant culture. At the same time, the interfluvial Cashibo groups are famed for their elaborately decorated weapons used as "display of power". These groups, who were subject to pillaging from their Shipibo-Conibo neighbors, foster an image of ferocity and savagery, almost as if to confirm Shipibo-Conibo expectations. Another visual signaling in which interriverine competing groups in the Ucayali distinguished themselves in an indeleble manner is body-tattooing. Among the Pano, tattoo motifs vary from group to group, allowing the immediate identification of the person carrying them (DeBoer 1990; Erickson 1986) (7). Through the use of body tattoo, Pano groups radically distinguished each other stylistically, marking resistance to abduction; at the same time, tattoo is imposed to the enemies in order to assimilate them.

The economic importance that the commercialization of ethnic art has acquired in recent years, is another reason underlying the imitation of the other's art style. The sale of crafts is in fact becoming one of the main sources of income for indigenous societies, that develop or invent artistic traditions in response to the market. The Yekuana basketry tradition (called *guapa* in Spanish) was introduced in 1964 to some Panare communities by an Evangelical missionary, because the Yekuana type had greater commercial value than the traditional Panare. After a few years spent in mastering the techniques of the Yekuana type, Panare artisans began to break with the technical conventions of the Yekuana style, in order to achieve more naturalistic graphic forms encouraged by the demand. The *criollo* dealers «urge the Panare to make the graphic figures of their *guapa* works as naturalistic and anecdotal as possible and to include as many animal figures as they can. In order to comply with this request the Panare are obliged to circumvent

technical conventions» (Henley & Mattéi-Muller 1978: 101). Since the ability to interpret the taste of the buyer is, of course, not limited to market relations, we can make the hypothesis that similar mechanisms of style innovation and transformation have always occurred.

The power of fiction

The parodic representation of the other is another common strategy adopted in situations of conflict. This phenomenon has been brilliantly examined by Bakhtin (1984) with regard to popular culture in the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. For Bakhtin laughter is simultaneously subversive and creative. By enacting a symbolic destruction of authority and the regeneration of the world, laughter works at both levels of cosmology and politics. In this section I link the role of fiction in style with the dissimulation of identity discussed in the previous part. This should clarify how the practice of dissimulation, and especially of irony, helps to create or maintain communities in spite of the hegemonic exercise of domination. It should also show how the analysis of style should take into consideration, on the one hand, the relations of power in historical perspective, and on the other, the daily practices and interactions aimed at making sense of these relations, at resisting and subverting them, or simply at relieving the burden of their oppression.

In classical rhetoric, irony is defined as the trope in which the figurative meaning is the opposite of the literary meaning. The more general problem is that according to the traditional definition, «an ironical utterance communicates a single determinate proposition which could, if necessary, have been conveyed by mean of another, purely literal utterance» (Wilson & Sperber 1992: 56). To support their argument against the traditional definition of irony, Wilson & Sperber quote ironical understatement, ironical quotation, and

ironical interjection as examples of utterance which do not communicate the opposite of what literally said. The authors suggest that in irony «there is no norm or maxim of literal truthfulness» (1992: 62), and «there is no such a thing as a fail-safe diagnostic of irony [...] the communicator's intentions cannot be decoded or deduced» (1992: 67). To understand an utterance as ironical one has to realize that it is echoic first, and then to recognize the type of attitude expressed that is not explicit in the propositional form. Irony is a good example that «what is implicitly conveyed in verbal communication is generally weakly communicated» (1992: 73). It involves a *dissimulation* of the knowledge that one wants to communicate, opening up instead a questioning in which the very possibility to find literal definitions is unlikely.

The use of irony in communication has at least two effects. On the one hand, as an experimental practice based on contextual assumptions, it triggers a process of self-education, in the sense that the interrogation provoked by irony extends to a free interrogation of the world. On the other side, irony elicits spontaneous connections between individuals working toward common understanding, creating «a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse» (Bakhtin 1984:188).

A renowned example of this role of ironic representations comes from the Apache studied by K. Basso (1979). They portray the Whitemen by means of linguistic play, enacted through a subtle code shifting that make the jokes incomprehensible to the outsider. These jokes portray the Whitemen as "grossly incompetent" people whose behavior is inappropriate by Apache standard. At the same time they portray a history of domination by representing the usual ways in which the Whitemen behave toward the Apache. Following Basso, these portraits are multipurpose instruments for rendering the whitemen meaningful; they convey a model of the Whiteman, and a model for dealing with the Whiteman, where the Whiteman is both a social category and a cultural symbol. The fact that these jokes are not only considered funny but also dangerous, leads us to think that these parodic representations are endowed with illocutory force, and that, through a process similar to that of contagious magic, satiric

performances cannot only accomplish what they say they do, but potentially recreate a dangerous situation.

Thus, the ironic representation of the other is not only meant to show his incompetence but also to get hold of his power, by bringing it within indigenous categories. It provides meaning and cultural continuity to everyday experience. Among the Canelos Quichua living in Ecuadorian Amazonia this is pursued through ceramic production, where the mythological and cosmological framework offers a model to control the disruptive effects of contact in the face of deep social, economic, and ecological changes (Whitten 1976, 1985; Whitten & Whitten 1988). Artistic production is for the Canelos Quichua a way of commenting upon the contemporary life and a mean of empowerment as well, both on the economical and cosmological level. This is clearly evident in the clay figurines created by Canelos Quichua potters. The Whiteman is represented as a North American oil boss shaped like an edible gourd, riding a canoe and shutting orders to his indigenous workers while holding onto his baseball cap. He is also represented as the monkey-looking *machin runa*, the spirit master of the foreign persons who, in Canelos mythology, is seen as a symbol of entrapment. At the same time, this intrusive outsider is represented as resting on the turtle seat of power of *Sungui*, «the first shaman and the ultimate source of shamanic power» who often appears as a «naked, bearded white man standing on a river bank» (Whitten & Whitten 1988: 49). This complex portrayal accomplishes a two-folded effect: it informs about the dangerous character of the intruder, and controls his power by bringing him into indigenous categories. The use of irony is effective in provoking a debasement of that character, and in recreating with laughter and shared knowledge the familiar links between the people able to recognize and enjoy such irony.

With Hymes, we see that «the naturalization of the cultural of which Bordieu writes seems always to require an analysis of the nature of the improper, within and without" (foreword to Basso, 1979: xii). To fully appreciate the commentary function of the representation of an encounter in style, rather than focusing on "doxa" «[the] unquestioning acceptance of the social order as an

order of nature», we should shed light on the alternatives responses to such order, as «a state of awareness in which "heteodoxy" and "orthodoxy" define each other and conflict» (*idem*).

Creating scenarios: style, learning, and storytelling

When he went among the Yekuana of Venezuela to translate their creation epic known as the *Watunna*, Guss (1989: 1-2) realized that «there were not neatly framed "storytelling events" into which the foreign observer could easily slip [...] Rather, *Watunna* was everywhere, like an invisible sleeve holding the entire culture in place [...] "That's *Watunna*," a Yekuana would say, and yet there would be no semblance of a narrative [...] The open-ended quality of storytelling, the "stitching together" (*rhapsodein*) of narrative into the fabric of daily life» led Guss «to seek another entrance into the mythic universe». Noticing that «conversation simply did not occur without someone making a basket», and that this activity «orchestrated each dialogue, with pauses and transitions paralleling the critical moments of basket's construction» he decided engaging in the long apprenticeship of becoming a basket maker, and through the learning process realized the role of basketry (*atta*) in translating and communicating the symbolic system of the *Watunna*.

Basketry is a visual and kinesthetic metaphor of Yekuana mythology, as we could say that the *Watunna* embodies the rhythms and images of basketry. We cannot reproduce the metaphoric operation to conceptual analogy, at least if we don't take into account the formation of concepts, underlying the creation of metaphors, through embodiment and imagination. A metaphoric representation «gives occasion to the imagination to spread itself over a number of kindred representations that arouse more thought that can be expressed in a concept determined by words» (E. Kant, *CJ*, § 49; quoted by Johnson 1987: 163). Metaphors express complex and broadly connotative ideas that cannot be interpreted separately from

the context in which they are embedded. This is why Guss was able to grasp their meaning structure only through a long process of apprenticeship, in which not only he learned the skill of basket making, but also participated to the conversations that came along the productive activity, and became familiar with the ecology and social environment where those activities, conversations, and conceptual elaborations, took place. This is a further evidence that there are some aspects of cultural knowledge that cannot be explicitly stated; they are rather tacitly conveyed and dissimulated through fiction in the sense of «an assumption of a possibility as a fact irrespective of the question of its truth» (Webster). Implicit knowledge is not directly transmitted; rather, it is at the same time circumscribed and evoked.

Because of the entanglement of narrative and practice in learning, the notion of communities of practice mentioned above should therefore be developed to better engage the role of storytelling. The apprentice who is involved in a learning process through a «legitimate peripheral participation» (Lave & Wenger 1991), doesn't acquire knowledge and skill only by participating in practice, but also by being exposed to conversations and "war stories", whose interpretation provides the ground for inference, and contributes to the construction of scenarios for action. Narratives present concrete and situated dilemmas, where different experiential worlds exist side by side, and where one's capacity as an agent is measured against the ability to conceive or to fashion more than a simple solution. With E. Basso's words (1987: 3), they have «less to do with truth or falsehood than with the enactment of an illusionary relationship».

Moreover, narratives are endowed with a cognitive structure that makes them particularly salient and easy to recall. The scenario they create is not limited to what is suggested by the content, but also consists in a patterned order of elements that is particularly relevant for the discussion of style. A suggestive example comes again from the Shipibo-Conibo of the Rio Ucayali, where "creativity", *shina*, also translated as "thought" or "imagination", is enhanced through the participation to a shamanic session, that

includes singing and storytelling. The purpose of the session seems to be the creation of a synaesthetic scenario, where rhythms, images, spatial arrangements, voice qualities, as well as orchestrated participation, play a fundamental role for the creation of the typical Shipibo-Conibo decorative style. Gebhart-Sayer (1985) pointed out how women artists "translated" in design the singing of the shaman, aimed in its turn to reproduce the visions obtained with the use of the hallucinogenic brew *Ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis* Sp.). Though, rather than the mere one-to-one translation of elements, this seems to imply an evocative transposition of the aesthetic experience from one domain to another through the harmonious combination of diverse elements. Culture, as conveyed in Shipibo-Conibo style, comes to be inscribed in a sensory representation endowed with aesthetic value. Such embodiment brings into relations individual attitudes and experiences, as well as cultural formulations. Yekuana and Shipibo-Conibo examples suggest that the connection developed between style and other aspects of social and cultural life are "stitched together" through concrete, situated practices, such as those involved in making baskets, telling stories, or participating in a healing ritual.

Stories and the value of material culture

The scenarios created by stories also regard the attribution of value to the items exchanged, especially in a system based on a preferential notion of value. These stories inscribe on the subject the memory of the circumstances of its acquisition, its origin, the vicissitudes of its circulation; it's close to a process of mythologization that has to be able to respond to the other's conception of value, and through which value is negotiated (Parise 1992). However, these stories tell us less about the object than about the people involved in the interaction, and represent the subtle and concrete art of putting oneself in the shoes of the other, of

accomplishing consent by expressing the other's desires and expectations. As Friedman well says, «it is in the strategies of selfhood and identity that "things" take on their social life. Things do not have social lives. Rather, social lives have things» (Friedman 1991:161).

Conclusions

The issue of this paper grew out of the observation of the multifaceted character of style, its pervasive presence in human life, and of the problems found in dealing with the notion of "ethnic style." The dynamics of social interaction in Amazonia complicate any formal analysis of style, requiring instead the simultaneous consideration of a range of different levels. In turn, style becomes an outstanding instrument to understand the "relational character of culture", a relation maintained at the same time with the other and with the past. With Kroeber (in Tax 1953: 66) I am convinced that «the problem of style is one that is fundamental in practically every aspect of anthropology». Yet, I diverge from him when he states that «the moment one begins to consider culture wholes, one is immediately confronted with the problem of how far such a culture whole is an assemblage of related styles or, possibly, represents a style in itself». In my personal opinion, this is still an essentialist view of culture and ethnicity. In contrast, I suggested paying more attention to how multiple identities coexist in the same individual and push their way through concrete situations of interactions, but also to how people rely on fiction, as both a strategy of interaction and as an instrument for learning. Evidence of how this comes to be reflected in style has been supplied. As we have seen in particular in the use of irony and metaphor in style as identity representation, there is a serious problem in always interpreting "stylistic utterances" as literal; identity is not only an assignment but also the ability to pretend and still communicate. As counterpoint to style,

the role of storytelling in depicting scenarios for cultural learning and activity has been pointed out, as well as its role in creating collectivities based on participation and recognizement between individuals.

Notes

1. "More or less deliberate" «in order to avoid the false idea that consciousness is an all-or-none distinction; it is rather a matter of degree» (F. K. Lehman, personal comm.).

2. Without minimizing the disruptive effect of "contact", it is fundamental to take into consideration the «symbiotic character of conceptual production» (Whitehead 1995: 54) developed in the interaction between different cultural systems. Some anthropologists recently have preferred substituting the term 'contact' with 'encounter', getting round the problem without getting rid of it. If 'contact' tends to disregard the active participation of indigenous people to the socio-political and cultural transformations before and after colonization, on the other side 'encounter' seems to be a little too euphemistic, given the genocidal and ethnocidal effects of conquest and colonization.

3. This issue was similarly put forward by A. Gramsci in his distinction between "common sense" and "good sense".

4. This is argued on the basis that «knowledge is learnt and registered as a network of neural connections or pathways», and that «the differential facilitation and inhibition of connection is effected by electrochemical agents of the general family called neurotransmitters. These are related in turn to the agents associated with the production of emotional-affective states, which also have the effect of facilitating certain neuronal-cognitive pathways, in the sense that different affective, or mood states clearly predispose one to think and interpret events and select plans of action in certain ways, and likewise inhibit contrary possibility of thought and action» (Lehman 1994: 5-6).

As pointed out by Lehman, this theory is especially relevant for bringing into relation emotions with meaningfulness. This has important implications not only for the study of learning, memory, and knowledge representation, but also for domains that are at the core of anthropological theory, such as symbolism, value, and belief.

5. «The political organizations that these genealogical elites created and operated are highly reminiscent of "feudal" formations. The control of people rather than the redistribution or expropriation of specific economic resources was [...] the ultimate expression of political dominance» (Whitehead 1989: 11).

6. An extreme example is expressed by anthropophagy, a topic too vast and complex to be discussed here, but that need at least to be mentioned, being in fact the ultimate, literal example of the maintenance of society through the incorporation of the outsider (see Viveiros de Castro 1992).

7. Is the maternal uncle the one responsible for transmitting the group identity through tattooing. He is also the most different relative, as well as wife-giver, being of the other moities of the other generation.

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Summary

The discussion addresses the complex and sometimes ambiguous relation between ethnic style and identity. It is commonly assumed that because of its formal properties, style can be particularly effective in marking ethnic identity and in communicating it cross-culturally. Though, this statement carries along problems of different order. The "marking" of identity, in fact, becomes problematic when we see identity as intrinsically dynamic and relational in character, rather than static and essential.

This discussion of Amazonian ethnography suggests to look at the relationship between style and the construction and performance of identity as the complex combination of multiple fields of different order.

Sommario

L'articolo tratta la complessa e a volte ambigua relazione tra stile etnico e identità. E' comunemente accettato l'assunto che, a causa delle sue proprietà formali, lo stile possa essere particolarmente efficace nel marcare l'identità etnica e rispetto la sua comunicazione cross culturale. Tutto ciò pone però problemi di vario ordine. Il "marcamento" dell'identità, infatti, diviene problematico quando vediamo l'identità come fenomeno intrinsecamente dinamico e relazionale, piuttosto che statico ed essenzialista.

La discussione dell'etnografia amazzoniana suggerisce uno sguardo alla relazione tra stile e costruzione dell'identità come complessa combinazione di molteplici campi di ordine differente.