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Beinghood and people-making in native Amazonia

A constructional approach with a perspectival coda

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This article examines Yanesha notions of beinghood and people-making practices from a constructional standpoint. By focusing on the composition of persons/bodies as a phenomenological process rather than on the nature of the processes by which persons/bodies are socially fabricated, it seeks to reveal the extent to which Yanesha conceptions of personhood differ from those in the Western tradition. Shaped by the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, this tradition conceives of *persons* as individual, singular, and self-contained beings, both ontologically complete and incommunicable. In contrast, Yanesha regard persons as composites, resulting from the creational, generative, and socializing contributions of a variety of human and nonhuman entities and, therefore, as possessing compound anatomies and subjectivities. The article discusses the contrasts between constructional and perspectival understandings of beinghood, body, and subjectivity in native Amazonia. It proposes that, rather than conflicting theoretical models, these approaches are an artifact of focusing on different levels of social interaction. In other words, they are the result of diverging points of view. This, however, suggests that the richness of Amazonianist theory lies precisely in it being *une théorie fait de regards.*

Keywords: constructivism, perspectivism, personhood, body, subjectivity, Yanesha, Amazonia, Peru

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The modern Western notion linking personhood to the individual—that which cannot be further divided—is relatively new, going back to the reflections of the early Christian thinkers (Dumont 1999). Key among them was St. Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century theologian who defined *person* as a rational individual whose substance is complete, in that it is not part of anything else; it subsists in itself insofar as it exists on its own and not in another, and it is separate from all else for it exists apart from others (Aquinas 1920: III, q. 16, art. 12). In this view, what characterizes personhood is its incommunicability, by which Aquinas means that the qualities that characterize a person—what we would now call his or her subjectivity—are nontransferable. Although Aquinas conceived of

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persons as made up of bodies and souls, he did not view these two entities as separate, but as composing a single, unique substance. In other words, in his view personhood is intrinsically associated with indivisibility, singularity, and self-containment.

Unquestionably, Western notions of the individual person have evolved throughout time, and Aquinas' definition is only one among many in the long history of Western philosophy. One could fast forward in time to the seventeenth century and Descartes' notion of the solitary self and the doubting mind, or even to contemporary discussions in behavioral genetics on issues of free will and the determinism of individual genomic configurations. All these views, however, are predicated on the idea that lies at the center of Aquinas' conception, to wit, that the individual is incommunicable. This would be true even of monozygotic twins who, according to recent studies, do not have identical genomes (Bruder et al. 2008).

Recently, the Thomist notion of the indivisible, singular, and self-contained subject has been contested by postmodernist theorists such as Lyotard (1984), who asserts that the self only exists in a "fabric of relations," and Derrida (1995), who, following Lévinas (1979), claims that the subject can only be forged in relation to "the call of the other." It has also been contested by Amazonianist anthropologists, who, since Seeger, da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro's 1979 seminal article, "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indigenas brasileiras," have been extremely successful in revealing the social constructedness of persons in native Amazonian societies (Viveiros de Castro 1979; Seeger 1979, 1980; Turner 1995; Pollock 1996; Conklin and Morgan 1996; McCallum 2001). The resulting body of work shows an important divide between what could be called *constructional* and *perspectival* understandings of indigenous notions of beinghood, people-making, the body, and subjectivity. Much of the debate on this subject has centered on the mechanisms through which persons—and bodies—are fabricated. A detailed analysis of this debate is beyond the scope of this paper. Although all parties seem to agree that native Amazonians conceive of persons/bodies as being relationally constituted, permeable, metamorphic, and in permanent flux, some assert that the fabrication of persons/bodies is achieved through the intimacy, sharing, and commensality ensured by conviviality, which is conducive to "relations of substance" (Seeger 1980; Gow 1991; Overing 1999; Overing and Passes 2000; McCallum 2001; Belaunde 2001), while others contend that such fabrication depends on the antagonism, cannibalism, and familiarization typical of generalized predation, which lead to "relations of capture" (Viveiros de Castro 1993; Århem 1996; Vilaça 1998, 2005; Fausto 2002, 2007).

As fertile as this debate has been, here I will analyze how a particular group of native Amazonians, the Yanesha of the forested mountains of eastern Peru, conceives of the end product of a process of construction of persons/bodies. By moving away from the question of the mechanisms through which persons/bodies are fabricated to focus instead, as A. Strathern and Lambek (1998: 13) have suggested, on "embodiment" as a phenomenological process, I seek to reveal how much Yanesha conceptions of personhood are predicated on constructional notions (Santos-Granero 2009b), and thus differ radically with respect to those derived from the Thomist tradition.

By analyzing what goes into the making of Yanesha persons I seek to answer five basic questions: What entities are involved in the fabrication of human persons? What is their input in the making of their bodies and subjectivities?

What substances are involved? Through what rituals or everyday life operations are these substances transmitted and transmuted? And, how are a person's anatomy and subjectivity affected by these processes? In brief, I will explore the *constructional*—rather than the constructed—dimension of native Amazonian notions of personhood, or, the *material*—rather than the relational—aspects of the fabrication of human persons (see Santos-Granero 2009a, 2009b).

The above distinctions are particularly pertinent because of the widespread influence that M. Strathern's (1990) work on Melanesian societies has had with studies of personhood in other regions of the world, including Amazonia (e.g. Niehaus 2002; Snyder 2002; McCallum 2001; Vilaça 2005). According to this perspective, persons—but also animals, gardens, and artifacts—are the objectification of the multiple social relations that have gone into their making or, as Strathern (1990: 13) puts it, they constitute "the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them." While acknowledging the compound and *dividual* character of persons in Melanesian thought, Strathern (ibid.) understands this notion mainly as a native metaphor by which "The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm." By transforming what is basically a native understanding into an analytical abstraction that draws inspiration from the Marxian notion of objectification, this approach converges with other poststructural critiques of the "givenness of the subject" (A. Strathern and Lambek 1998: 11). Whereas this perspective has been extremely fruitful in stressing the constructed and relational character of personhood in many non-Western societies, scholars who have adopted it have overlooked the material dimension of people-making processes by focusing mainly on the social relations that go into the making of a person. Here, I argue that for the Yanesha—as well as for many other native Amazonian peoples—the composite character of personhood is not a root metaphor but a physical actuality. This is what McKim Marriott—from whom M. Strathern borrowed the notion of "dividual"—implied when claiming, in relation to Hindu thought, that "To exist, dividual persons *absorb heterogeneous material influences*" (Marriott 1976: 111; emphasis mine).

For Yanesha people, dividuals are so, not only because they are socially constituted, but because they are thought to be made from a broad range of material and immaterial substances provided by a variety of human and nonhuman, male and female entities: gods, spirits, plants, animals, artifacts, parents, relatives, and friends. Through contributions of bodily substances, objects, knowledge, foods, songs, and names, these entities participate in different ways and to different degrees in the formation of a person's body and subjectivity. From a Yanesha perspective, human persons are the product of a conscious and deliberate process of bricolage involving numerous agents and a broad array of materials. There is, however, a crucial distinction between Yanesha and South Asian understandings of the dividual: As a result of widespread *animic* cosmological ideas, in native Amazonia the incorporation of foreign substances always involves the assimilation of the bodies and subjectivities of the entities whose substances are being incorporated.

Yanesha processes of bodily construction are not, however, aimed at simply producing "specific human bodies" irrespective of gender differences, as Vilaça (2005: 242) has suggested for the Wari' and other native Amazonian peoples. Rather, the objective of such processes is the shaping of gendered bodies, which—although sharing male and female subjectivities—are endowed with the necessary

skills to operate effectively in the highly gendered Yanesha laborscape. Yanesha people are not alone when they consider gendering to be a key component in the fabrication of human persons. The Airo pai (Belaunde 2001), Cashinahua (McCallum 2001), Kayapo (Fisher 2001), Urarina (Walker 2009), Yuracare (Djup 2007), and even the Wari', (according to Conklin [2001]), place similar emphasis on the production of gendered persons/bodies. This puts into question Vilaça's (2002), and also Descola's (2001), arguments that in native Amazonia gender differences are not relevant, being subsumed by other more symbolically prominent oppositions, such as those between humans and animals, predators and prey, or *consanguines* and *affines*. Such assumptions have been countered recently by Rival (2005: 288, 302), who contends, "sex and gender are as significant in Amazonian theories of personhood and embodiment as they are elsewhere."

It is this constructional, cumulative, compound, gendered, and relational quality that allows us to assert that, from a Yanesha point of view, people have composite anatomies and subjectivities. As a result, rather than being incommunicable, as St. Thomas Aquinas would have it, I argue that Yanesha view persons in general, and human persons in particular, as highly communicable. This poses important dilemmas with regard to the questions of personal unity, integrity, and continuity.

In the first section of this article I examine the differences between constructional and perspectival analytical approaches to native Amazonian notions of beinghood, with particular emphasis on their understandings of bodies and subjectivities. In the three sections that follow, I discuss Yanesha people-making practices, focusing on the creational input of gods, plants, and animals, the generative input of parents, and the socializing input of relatives and friends. In the fifth section, I address the important issue of whether the assimilation of bodily and subjectival substances from human and nonhuman Others is realized through incorporation or, as an older paradigm would have it, by means of *contagious magic*. In the conclusion, I discuss how Yanesha ideas of the communicability of personhood contrast with Thomist understandings, and I examine some of the theoretical consequences of Yanesha constructional understandings of the human person. Finally, I take a new look at constructional and perspectival views of beinghood, suggesting that rather than contrasting theoretical models, they constitute opposite but coexisting dimensions of a widespread native Amazonian way of viewing the world.

Constructional and perspectival approaches to beinghood

A quick review of the literature suggests that there are two main approaches to the issue of beinghood in native Amazonia. I use the term *beinghood* rather than *personhood* because it is more encompassing, and it allows for the consideration of subjective, or subjectivized beings that are not necessarily persons. The first, or perspectival approach, derives from the writings of Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004a, 2004b) and his students, and has been subjected to considerable theoretical elaboration. The second approach, which I will call the constructional approach (and is still in the making), is based on the contributions of a variety of authors working on indigenous notions of subjectivity and body-making (Basso 1985; Seeger 1981; Descola 1996a; Pollock 1996; Overing 1999; Overing and Passes 2000; McCallum 2001; Conklin 1996, 2001; Belaunde 2001, 2006; and others). This approach has received much support from the analysis of native Amazonian

theories of materiality and personhood, and of the role of objects in people-making processes (see Santos-Granero 2009a).

Both approaches owe much to the work of Seeger et al. (1979), insofar as they both view human persons as being socially constructed, and reject the notion of body as "a material substrate on which meaning can be encoded" (Conklin 1996: 373). Despite sharing this common frame—and other elements that I will discuss below—the two approaches have diverged significantly, and present diametrically opposed views of native Amazonian understandings of beinghood.

The constructional approach draws its strength from the Boasian tradition, with its emphasis on empirical research, its skeptical stance with regard to the possibility of establishing scientific laws of culture, its eagerness to identify general cultural patterns and configurations, and its willingness to introduce a historical perspective in anthropological analysis. Scholars in this field privilege human beings and human interaction as their focus of analysis, paying much less attention to the bodies and subjectivities of nonhuman existents. They view the body as a social product constituted by relations with a diversity of human and nonhuman Others. Central to this approach is the notion that the body is socially transformed and constantly in the making through the incorporation of material substances—bodily fluids, food, beverages, medicines, etcetera—provided by the broad gamut of beings that participate, either actively or passively, in its making. More recently, several authors have added artifacts to this list of substances, arguing that ritual objects, personal ornaments, and gendered tools become, through incorporation, important components of human and nonhuman bodies (Miller 2009; Walker 2009; Erikson 2009).

The constructional approach also places emphasis on the role of immaterial substances—thoughts, knowledge, memory, feelings, capacities, names, songs, images, and gender dispositions, among others—in people-making processes. Children are viewed as the embodied thoughts of their parents (Overing 1986); gender is conceived of as embodied gendered knowledge and agency (McCallum 2001); while real kinship is thought to be produced by the sharing of substances and the "memory of past acts of caring" (Gow 2001: 168). Body organs and bodily substances, however, are attributed with an important mediatory role in processes of learning and knowing (McCallum 2001); blood is particularly important by "embodying and gendering personal spirits, thought and strength, and transporting knowledge to all body parts" (Belaunde 2006: 130). Bodily senses are also regarded as being socially constructed and thus amenable to change. Hearing—and with it the capacity for understanding and knowing—can be enhanced through the ritual piercing of the ear lobes (Seeger 1981: 90), whereas a hunter's sight can be improved by placing the parasite found in the sharp eyes of toucans on his eyes (Descola 1996b: 262). In this view, souls, vitalities, or subjectivities are thought to be endowed with the same sensorial capacities as the body, and they are often considered to be the means through which real knowledge is acquired, either in dreams, or while under the effects of hallucinogens (Santos-Granero 2006; Hill 1993: 214; Kensinger 1995: 240; Taylor 1996: 208–9).

The constructional approach views bodies as the material expression of the sociality that produces them. Social collectivities are therefore regarded as "communities of substance," as corporeal rather than corporate groups (Conklin 1996: 374; Seeger 1981: 121, 145). In general terms, although scholars in this field do not seem to be overly concerned about the differences between the beinghood

of humans and nonhumans, they do tend to attribute these differences to the fact that whereas proper human beings are made through the repeated input of eminently cultural and moral substances, such as tobacco, coca, manioc, and chili peppers, these substances are absent in the making of nonhuman beings, or are replaced by similar but counterfeit versions (Londoño Sulkin 2005; Karadimas 2005: 65). The difference between humans and nonhumans resides, therefore, in that they constitute different communities of substance. In short, although these scholars reject the notion of bodies as asocial biological matter, favoring instead the view that they are an embodiment of social relations, knowledge, and thought, their approach is firmly grounded on the notion of consubstantiality and the physicality of the body.

Equally important in this approach is the interconnection between body and soul in the definition of human personhood. In this view, subjectivity is a property of the soul associated with agency, animacy, or a combination of both. Some scholars in this field define persons as "agents of meaningful action" (Pollock 1996: 320), suggesting that subjectivity is fundamentally a matter of agency and agentivity. The only entities that can be considered to be proper subjects are those who can "intentionally... use their own force, or energy, to bring about an event or to initiate a process" (Lyons 1977: 483). This would entail possession of consciousness, will, and goal-oriented thought. Other scholars associate subjectivity to animacy, the quality that makes an entity sentient and alive. Such animacy may be manifested in an entity's capacity for communication and for affecting other similar or lesser subjects, as suggested by Basso (1985: 65–66) for the Kalapalo, or by an entity's possession of a soul, and its degree of strength, which determines differential perceptual capacities and semiotic agency, as proposed by Descola (1996a: 375–6) for the Achuar.

In the first case, entities are classed in a continuum that goes from hyperanimate and powerful supernatural beings to inanimate objects and body parts that are incapable of thought and intentionality, with human beings occupying a higher intermediate position than animals and plants because, although all of them are thought to be endowed with the capacity for independent goal-oriented thought and actions, humans have in addition the capacity for lying, inventing and fantasizing. In the second case, entities are classified according to their communication skills in a continuum that goes from the Achuar, on one end, to most insects, fish, grasses, and pebbles, which do not possess a soul and thus cannot communicate properly, on the other. In this latter classification, animals, plants, and spirits occupy the middle ranges despite possessing a soul and the capacity for language, insofar as they present different kinds of restrictions in their capacity to communicate with humans.

Whether defined in terms of agentivity or animacy, capacity for intentional action or possession of soul substance, consciousness, or language, it is clear that the constructional approach regards subjectivity not as an absolute property, but as a matter of degree of possession of several different properties. As Guzmán-Gallegos (2009: 216) rightly notes, "subjectivity does not necessarily presuppose the presence of a soul, whereas not all agency presupposes will and intentionality." In effect, some entities are believed to possess full souls and are thus thought to be capable of consciousness, thought, speech, will, and intentional action, whereas others—such as Runa identity cards—are considered to have lesser amounts, or lower forms of soul substance, and for this reason are thought to lack some of the

capacities attributed to full subjects or, at least, to possess a diminished version of these abilities. It is the possession of different degrees of soul substance that explains, for instance, the existence of "multiple ways of being a thing" (Santos-Granero 2009c).

Proponents of the constructional view regard subjectivity not as a fixed condition, but rather as a quality amenable to enhancement or diminishment in accordance to the sign of the relations that a person establishes with other beings. This notion is well exemplified in Walker's (2009: 45–6) analysis of the taming of *egaando* stone bowls. Through rituals involving tobacco smoke, formal dialogues, and songs, Urarina shamans coerce the wild, impersonal, and amoral predatory agency of the *egaando* into becoming a full subject, or "true person" (*cacha*), endowed with personality, consciousness, capacity for dialogue, and moral sense. Such transformation is not, however, unidirectional. As Walker (2009: 90) points out, despite the asymmetrical character of the taming process—in which shamans must always be in authority—"each [party] productively transforms the other through communication and substantive exchange." As a result of the exchange of words and substances, the *egaando* comes to share the shaman's subjectivity, acquiring in the process the full subjectivity of true persons, while the shaman shares the *egaando*'s subjectivity, obtaining the capacities of a *benane*, or true shaman (Walker 2009: 93–94).

From this point of view, then, subjectivity is a fluid condition, and its particularity derives not from some immanent singularity of their bodies or souls, but from the unique combination of bodily and subjectival substances obtained through interaction with a variety of subjects, whether humans or nonhumans, *affines* or *consanguines*, enemies or friends. In this view, subjectivities are considered to undergo a process of formation—in the Latin sense of the word—involving "shaping, structuralization, and education in which the soul gains its individuality" (Rosengren 2006: 94). Bodies and subjectivities are, therefore, highly personalized, as they are the outcome of unique people-making processes and experiential trajectories.

The perspectival approach, on the other hand, draws its inspiration from Lévi-Straussian structuralism, with its tendency to conceptualize sociocultural phenomena in terms of metalinguistic levels of analysis, its search for sociological laws, its privileging of structure over process, and its fondness for binary oppositions and overarching theoretical inversions. This approach analyzes indigenous notions of beinghood by focusing mainly on humans and animals, and their interrelation. In this view, subjectivity is regarded as a universal, absolute property, whereas the body is regarded as the site of difference and change. According to Vilaça (2002: 352), "Amerindian peoples conceive the world to be inhabited by different types of subjects, all possessing souls, who apprehend the world from distinct points of view related to their bodies." Subjectivity in this approach is equivalent to the possession of a soul, and as such it is regarded as an absolute property—either you have one or not. Souls, however, are considered to be uniform and universal insofar as they all share a human shape and are endowed with similar capacities, namely, "an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471).

What distinguishes different categories of beings is not their degree of subjectivity as the constructional view would have it—expressed in terms of differential capacities for thought, communication, and agentivity—but their

particular perspectives or points of view, which, according to Viveiros de Castro (1998), are situated in their bodies. In this view, bodies have two dimensions. On the one hand, the bodies of different species are conceived of as "a mere envelope (a 'clothing') which conceals an internal human form, usually only visible to the eyes of the particular species or to certain trans-specific beings such as shamans" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471). On the other hand, they are viewed as bundles of affects and capacities existing in an intermediate plane between "the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 478). This would be the origin and locus of perspectives. Different species have similar souls but different bodies, which are characterized by particular types of affects. Affects, in this view, do not refer to emotions, sentiments, or feelings, but to sets of capacities, dispositions, and inclinations. In other words, to a habitus, or a pre-conscious way of being and acting in the world (ibid.: 478). Collectivities, in this approach, are thus not communities of substance, but rather "communities of affects": jaguar affects, peccary affects, human affects, and so on.

Recent elaborations on the idea of the body as a habitus, or as a bundle of affects and capacities, have led to more abstract and disembodied notions of the body. Vilaça (2005: 450), for instance, seems to drop the notion that the real body resides in an "intermediate plane," and suggests that the physical body is "a way of being actualized in bodily form." Taylor and Viveiros de Castro (2006) go even further, and maintain that the body does not have a proper form—it assumes the shape imposed on it by its relation with other subjects as a result of an exchange of glances (*regards*) between the perceiver and the perceived. In other words, it is *un corps fait de regards*, "a body made out of glances." It is this insubstantial body that is viewed as the site of species-specific perspectives, whereas the more corporeal souls are regarded as being largely uniform and unproblematic. This poses a certain conundrum, for if souls are homogeneous and universal, and affects, predispositions, and capacities are species specific, how does the model account for the existence, or development, of personal differences, gender distinctions, and differential degrees of subjectivity?

In the perspectival view, subjectivity is not only an absolute property, but also a fixed condition. Since subjectivity is equated with the possession of a soul, and since all souls are considered to be similar in terms of shape and capacities, subjectivity can only change as the result of death and the detachment of the soul from the body. According to the perspectival approach, what are prone to change are not souls or spirits, but bodies, which are extremely fluid and mutable. In Vilaça's words, "What enables this permutability of the body is precisely the equivalence of spirits: all are equally human, equally subject. By modifying the body through alimentation, change in habits, and the establishment of social relations with other subjects, another point of view is acquired: the world is now seen in the same way as the new companions, that is, the members of other species" (2002: 351). In brief, coresidence, commensality, and intimate contact with beings belonging to different species, or social groups, produce a change of perspectives, or points of view, which is tantamount to say a specific type of affect, habitus, or way of being.

Table 1. Constructional and perspectival understandings of beinghood

	Constructivism	Perspectivism
Anthropological tradition	Boasian	Lévi-Straussian
Main focus	Human persons	Relation humans/animals
Body (mode of construction)	Shaped by input of substances from Others	Shaped by exchange of glances with Others
Body (composition of)	Composite of substances	Bundle of affects
Body (capacities of)	Locus of gendered knowledge and skills	Locus of gender-neutral perspectives
Body (nature of)	Site of identity	Site of difference
Subjectivity (defining element)	Agency and animacy	Consciousness
Subjectivity (nature of)	Varied and unequally distributed	Uniform and universal condition
Subjectivity (as property)	Relative property of self	Absolute property of self
Subjectivity (as condition)	Fluid condition	Fixed condition
Species (definition of)	Community of substance	Community of affects
Difference between species	Differing moralities	Differing points of view

Despite their radically different views of beinghood (see table 1), these two approaches share a set of common elements. Both agree that the self is not a given, but that it must be socially constructed through the common effort of a variety of people in order to become a proper human being. They agree that human beings are not self-contained, are constantly in the making, and are thus mutable and in permanent flux. They also agree in that the self can only become a proper human being through the incorporation of alterity, that is, through the incorporation of different Others. In addition, they coincide in that such incorporation is effectuated through the sharing of substances resulting from living, eating, and sleeping together. It should be noted, however, that those who view subjectivity as a fluid condition and as a matter of degree understand that consubstantiality between different kinds of beings entails the sharing of both bodily substances and subjectival qualities, while those who view subjectivity as a fixed and either-you-have-it-or-not condition regard consubstantiality as leading to a radical—though not necessarily irreversible—change in point of view and, thus, in bodily affects.

Here, I adopt a constructional viewpoint because it fits better with the Yanesha ethnography on people-making practices than the perspectival approach. The purpose of this article, however, is to take the constructional approach a step further, and to examine the logical consequences of its main tenets in order, first, to suggest that in native Amazonian ontologies and social praxis all beings are viewed as possessing composite anatomies and subjectivities, and second, to explore the implications of such an understanding.

The creational input of gods, plants, and animals

Yanesha myth-tellers assert that humans, plants, animals, and all good things on Earth were created at the beginning of times by the creator god, Yato' Yos, whereas Yosoper, his classificatory brother, is said to have created all that is bad and evil in a failed attempt to emulate his older brother. There are several versions of this myth. In all of them, however, Yato' Yos is said to have molded the earth and the primordial human beings from a mixture of excrements and breast milk (or dirt and breast milk) obtained from his mother or sister and insufflated with his

divine breath (Duff-Tripp n/d; Bautista 2008a; Wise 1958). This latter action is said to have been crucial to the creative process, for by doing so Yato' Yos endowed primordial humans—including the ancestors of plants, animals, and some objects—with a fraction of his divine soul, or *camuequeñets*. As a result, all existents considered to be good share in the soul of the creator god, and their individual souls or "vitalities"—*yecamquëm*—are thought to have a human shape.

The creator gods are not, however, the only supernatural beings to have an important role in the making of human persons. Whereas all humans share equally in the bodily substances and soul stuff of the creator gods, they manifest important differences associated with the input they have incorporated from other supernatural beings throughout their lives, particularly during the prenatal, postnatal, infant, and adolescent stages. In each of these stages, parents apply different bodily treatments to their children in an effort to endow them with desired physical or characterological traits. These treatments involve the ritual manipulation of different animals, plants, and artifacts, either to obtain from them desired features, or to inoculate their children against unwanted traits. Some of these plants, animals, and objects have female subjectivities; others have male subjectivities. In general terms, those with female subjectivities are used to treat girls, whereas those with male subjectivities are used to treat boys. Some, however, are applied indistinctly to boys and girls. As a result, boys and girls are thought to share male and female subjectivities.

Plants have a central role in Yanesha people-making processes. In previous works, I have mentioned the importance of magical plants (*epe'*) in the fabrication of successful male hunters and female gardeners (Santos-Granero 2004: 251–53). Thanks to the ethnobotanical works by Bourdy et al. (2008) and, especially, by Valadeau (2010), we now have a much deeper knowledge of these plants and how the Yanesha use them. In this and the following sections, I will refer to these works in order to present a more detailed portrayal of the use of plants in Yanesha people-making processes. It should be noted, however, that because these works focus mainly on medicinal plants and their use to combat disease, they do not take into consideration the input of other beings, such as animals and artifacts, in the making of Yanesha people, and thus do not explore the question of the composite nature of Yanesha bodies and subjectivities.

The importance of plants in the shaping of male and female bodies begins as soon as a woman realizes she is pregnant. Mothers can determine the sex of their babies by consuming the larger leaves of the plants *tsana'narropan* (*Pilea diversifolia*) and *chellochellpan* (*Cyclanthus bipartitus*) if they want a boy, or their smaller leaves if they want a girl (Valadeau 2010: 58). Once a woman realizes that she is pregnant, she and her husband begin to observe a number of prescriptions and proscriptions. Among the prescribed behaviors is drinking infusions of a variety of magical and medicinal plants that may benefit the unborn child. The idea here is that by drinking a given infusion, the beneficiary acquires a portion of the subjectivity of that plant and with it the ontological positive traits attributed to it (see also Valadeau 2010: 60). For example, women often drink infusions of the liana *eñsesrech* (*Clusia amazonica*) during pregnancy; the plant has a tough upright stem, so their children's bones will be hard and straight (Bourdy et al. 2008: 101).

After birth, mothers collect the feathers of wild pigeons (*arot*) and the bones of a variety of animals whose calls resemble the weeping of a baby. They keep these

in a small cotton bag, together with scrapings taken by their husbands from their *peque-peque* outboard motors, whose rhythmic sound recalls that of a crying baby. If their baby cries too much, they boil the contents of the bag and bathe the child with the infusion every day for an entire week. Alternatively, they burn the saved objects and make the baby inhale the resulting smoke. In either case, the idea is to immunize the baby from the possibility of crying too much by making the baby incorporate the subjectivity of animals and objects that weep a lot—a principle very similar to that underlying Western vaccines. Parents also use a variety of strengthening plants to fix the newborn's soul, or vitality (*anclleto*), which is believed to be particularly fragile and prone to detach from the body at this time (Valadeau 2010: 60).

During early infancy, parents treat their babies' bodies with a variety of plants in the hope of instilling in them other desired physical or psychological qualities. Which plants they use, and how they use them, will depend on what plants are available to them. Not all Yanesha possess the same magical plants, or know all medicinal plants. This process will also depend on the amount of knowledge they have on the ways of using these plants. Men and women have different degrees of knowledge, and know different kinds of plants, depending on how much they learned from their parents and close relatives, and how receptive they were to learning plant lore. Some of these plant treatments are gender-neutral; others, however, are gender-specific, and may vary according to the parents' expectations. Thus, babies receive different bodily treatments and, as a result, end up having different bodily compositions. Parents may bathe their babies with leaves of *shollapan* (*Commelina diffusa*) soaked in water to ensure that they will have a long life, because this plant is very hardy and does not die easily (Bourdy et al. 2008: 228). Or they may bathe them with an infusion of *camantar* (*Calliandra angustifolia*), a bush that grows close to river shores and is said to make children as strong as the bush itself, which never loses its leaves and is not uprooted even by the strongest floods. They may also boil the stem of *atatcapar* (*Gurania lobata*) and bathe their babies with the mix so that they will be as strong as the tapir (*ato'*) whose name this liana bears (ibid.: 46).

Sometimes, mothers breastfeed their babies after eating a few bulbs of the magical plant *morreñtsop̃ar* (*Cyperus* sp.) so that the baby will absorb this plant's subjectivity through the mother's milk, develop an excellent memory, and become wise (ibid.: 107). Mothers may also steam bathe their newborn children with boiled *corarnopan* (*Piper* sp.) leaves so that they will not be shy, like the little white frog after which the plant is named (ibid.: 86). Or they may bathe their babies with the boiled roots of the white-flowered variety of *mueñtsopar* (*Mimosa pudica*), a plant normally used to induce sleep (*mueñets*), so that they will be always obedient (ibid.: 140).

At puberty, adolescent girls and boys undergo more structured initiation rituals in which baths with a variety of beneficial plants have a central place. The duration of these rituals has become shortened as a result of schooling and conversion to Christianity, but they continue to be held because they are considered to be crucial for the development of healthy and productive adult men and women. Pubescent girls (*ponap'nora'*) are confined in a hut made of palm fronds as soon as they have their first menstruation. During their confinement—which in the past could last up to one year but now lasts only a few months or even weeks—girls must avoid

consuming salt, fat, certain animals and fishes, sugar, and sweet foods. Such proscriptions are meant to avoid incorporating the negative traits attributed to the subjectivities of these plants and animals.

Secluded girls spend most of their waking time spinning cotton, or doing other traditional female chores, under the instruction and supervision of their biological and classificatory mothers and grandmothers. During this time, widows and sterile women are forbidden to approach the girls so as to avoid sharing substances that would cause them to become sterile or widowed (Valadeau 2010: 64). Secluded girls bathe frequently with a variety of herbs to acquire their virtues. The most important of these plants is *marrashe'mapar* (*Lycianthes amatitlanensis*), which makes girls *light* (*marrashe'm*) like the plant's name, a term that from a Yanesha perspective encompasses the meanings of agile, strong, and hardworking (Bourdy et al. 2008: 135). Confined girls are also bathed or steam-bathed with *aporëc_h* (*Clematis guadeloupae*), a plant that prevents teeth from decaying (ibid.: 38); with *echtallets* (*Sobralia* sp.), so the girl's hair, cut short at the time of her confinement, will grow fast and abundantly (ibid.: 96); and with *otañtsoch corarnoch* (probably *Piper* sp.) to stimulate her appetite and make her fat and beautiful (Duff-Tripp 1998: 267; Bourdy et al. 2008: 89).

Although the initiation of pubescent boys (*huepuesha'*) is less structured than that of girls, it also involves important bodily rituals. Such rituals take place when boys are around fifteen years old, and before they have had their first sexual relation. Central to these rituals are the ingestion of an infusion made of *pesherr* (*Ambrosia arborescens*) leaves, as well as steam baths made with the same mix. This plant produces abundant vomiting and is said to make boys' bodies bitter (*pesherr*), as the name of the plant indicates. As such, it is thought to purify the body from evil substances and make it resistant against diseases (Bourdy et al. 2008: 169; Bautista 2008b). Some of the plants used in these body-shaping rituals are highly gendered, such as *marrashe'mapar* or *pesherr*. Others, however, are gender-neutral and may be applied to both girls and boys.

The generative input of parents

Like many native Amazonian peoples, Yanesha claim that children are created in a woman's womb through the combination of female blood (*errasats*) and male semen (*collets*). The gestation of a baby is not regarded, however, as a one-time event. Rather, it is considered to require the repeated input of paternal and maternal substances through frequent intercourse. Such generative input is not only necessary to conceive a baby but also goes on during pregnancy, when the baby's still weak vitality is thought to become impregnated, and thus protected, with that of his or her mother (Valadeau 2010: 58–59). It also continues after birth, during the period in which babies are not named and are referred to simply as *baby* (*ema'*). During this phase, which may last up to one year, there is a constant transference of maternal vitality to the baby, either through close contact or through feeding. Mothers carry their babies on a sling wherever they go, seldom separating from them. Whenever a baby shows signs of restlessness, they nurse them until they calm down and fall asleep. When babies are six months old, mothers start feeding them solid foods, namely boiled manioc and plantains. They often chew the boiled manioc or plantains themselves and feed their babies with the resulting pap. The ingestion of solid foods does not put an end to

breastfeeding though. In the past, mothers continued to nurse their children until they were a year and a half, or even two years old. At present, weaning takes place somewhat earlier. Breast milk, saliva, and the transfer of the mother's perspiration through close physical contact are thought to transmit part of her subjectivity to the child's body, contributing to the formation of the child's subjectivity until the time when they are named and achieve social personhood.

During this period, fathers also contribute their bodily substances—mostly saliva and sweat—to ensure the healthy development of their babies. Fathers chew the bulbs of a variety of magical sedges (*epe'*), in order to spray the mix over a baby's body and rub its body with it. These sedges—that is, their subjectivities—are thought to have important qualities that contribute to different aspects of a child's physical and spiritual development. One of the most important *epe'* is *huomencpar* (*Cyperus* sp.), which ensures that babies grow strong (*huomenc*), and have greater resistance against illness (Bourdy et al. 2008: 106). Another plant that fathers may chew and rub on a baby's body is *puesen* (*Piper* sp.). As its name indicates, this plant induces oblivion (ibid.: 186). It is used mostly when a baby has lost its soul due to the evil agency of certain animals (e.g., ants, termites, wasps) or natural objects (e.g., stones, bodies of water). By rubbing babies with *puesen*, fathers seek to make the sorcerous agent forget its victim, thus prompting the release of the trapped soul, and its reunion with the baby's body. Occasionally, fathers also rub their perspiration onto a baby boy's body in order to transmit to them part of their subjectivity and with it, their strength, courage, or hunting abilities.

As providers of nourishment, parents continue to assist in the fabrication of their children's bodies as they become older. In the highly gendered laborscape of Yanesha society the production of food and beverages is only possible through the combination of male and female productive activities. To be considered appropriate, a meal must contain both manioc and meat—whether fish or game. Manioc is produced and cultivated by women in gardens cleared by men. Meat is mainly procured by men, but is always processed and cooked by women. As products of their gendered endeavors, skills, and knowledge, manioc, meat, as well as other foods and beverages are thought to be endowed with the affects, thoughts, and intentionality of their producers; that is, with their gendered subjectivities. It is in this sense that they are perceived as "extensions of self," a term used by McCallum (2001: 93) in reference to similar conceptions among the Cashinahua. By regularly consuming the product of their parents' labor, children come to share in their subjectivities, thus becoming consubstantial with them (see Mentore 2005: 86, for similar ideas among the Waiwai).

Parents also contribute to the formation of their children's bodies through gifts of highly gendered personal ornaments. These ornaments are thought to be endowed with the subjectivities of their parents, as they are made with their own hands. Through prolonged intimate contact, these gifts undergo a double process. On the one hand, the subjectivity of the makers of the gift is incorporated into the subjectivity of the gift receiver. On the other hand, gifts undergo a process of ensoulment—or subjectivation of the gift by the gift-receiver—and as a consequence they become, literally, part of their owner's body (Santos-Granero 2009c: 119–22). Yanesha, as well as other native peoples (cf. Hugh-Jones 2009; Miller 2009; Walker 2009; Erikson 2009), consider personal ornaments worn on a daily basis to become not only constitutive parts of their bodies, but also of their souls or

vitalities since the latter are conceived as mirror images, or doubles, of the body. It could be said that, following LiPuma (1998: 59), from a Yanesha point of view, personal ornaments have "person-making powers."

The most important among these ornaments are the beautifully designed cotton wristbands and ankle bands (*ormets*) that mothers weave for their babies. These bands are meant to protect the babies from the illness-inducing activities of a variety of evil beings. Valadeau (2010: 65) asserts that they are also used to prevent children's vitalities from leaving their bodies. These cotton bands are not removed until they fall off due to prolonged wear and tear, at which time new ones replace them. Parents give their children other ornaments as they grow older: cotton tunics (with a V-neck for boys and a crew neck for girls), necklaces made of different materials according to gender, tunic shoulder ornaments for girls, and small bows and arrows for boys. These ornaments are highly gendered and are generally passed on from mothers to daughters and from fathers to sons. Some are made with the body parts of certain animals whose qualities parents wish to transmit to their children (see Walker 2009 for similar ideas among the Urarina). Boys are given the tails of female armadillos (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) and kinkajous (*Potos flavus*)—animals that feed on ants and termites—so they will acquire their strength in order to resist these insects' attacks, which Yanesha consider sorcerous agents. For similar reasons, girls are given the tails of male armadillos and kinkajous. Additionally, boys are given jaguar (*Panthera onca*) claws in the hope that they will become good hunters, since jaguars catch their prey with their claws; meanwhile, girls are given the hooves and bones of pacas (*Cuniculus paca*) to use in necklaces or as tunic shoulder ornaments so that, like pacas, which are good at finding large manioc tubers, they will become outstanding manioc cultivators.

When children reach puberty and have undergone initiation rites, they receive from their parents two important gifts denoting their new, adult status as men and women. Mothers give their daughters beautifully crafted chestbands made from palm fibers woven with intricate geometric designs. Known as *tse'llamets*, these chestbands are used both as ornaments and as baby slings. They can only be worn by girls who have undergone the *ponap'nora'* ritual, and they constitute a material expression of the initiated girl's generative and childbearing capacities, skills which she has learned from her mother and grandmothers during her ritual confinement. Through a process of ensoulment, these ornaments become extensions of their owner's body. It is said that if a woman loses her chestbands, or they are somewhat damaged, the woman will inevitably fall ill (Santos-Granero 2009c: 119–20). Boys, in turn, receive from their fathers a new set of bow and arrows, which advertises their reproductive capacities, as well as their abilities as hunters and providers. These are abilities that they have gradually acquired from their fathers and grandfathers through learning and imitation. It is in this sense that gender may be understood, as McCallum has suggested, "as an epistemological condition for social action, one that accumulates in the flesh and bones of proper human beings as either male or female agency" (2001: 5).

The socializing input of relatives and friends

The input of relatives and friends is no less important for the fabrication of a person's body than the input provided by the gods, plants, and animals, or by a person's parents. It is they who in the end provide the material and immaterial

elements that make a person unique. This process of socialization starts when relatives and friends give special presents to the newly born. Most of the gifts are ornaments that, as argued above, will become constitutive parts of the baby's body. They are generally passed on along gender lines. The relatives who contribute most of these presents are bilateral grandparents and classificatory parents (MZs and FBs). The presents they give are not mandatory. They depend very much on personal preferences and, later, on the rapport established between the child and relatives in these categories.

As children grow up, gifts may also include charms, magical plants, and magical songs, as well as the ritual knowledge of how to use them. These presents are also transferred along gender lines. Children are taught about the origin of these items, their properties, how they came into the hands of the giver, the correct way to handle them, and the procedures to follow in case they lose their effectiveness. This ritual knowledge also becomes a constitutive part of a person's body. Yanesha people use two terms to refer to the act of learning: *yec_heñets* (to learn) and *yoc_hre'teñets* (to learn by means of the heart, from *yoc_hrets* [heart]). The latter is not a metaphor. Yanesha people claim that the origin of thoughts is not the brain, but the heart. The process of *learning by means of the heart* entails acquiring thoughts through the heart and storing them in it (Santos-Granero 2006: 69). As is the case among the Cashinahua, Muinane, and Airo pai (McCallum 2001; Karadimas 2005; Belaunde 2006), these thoughts are considered to diffuse from the heart into the blood stream and circulate throughout the body, turning it into a knowledgeable body.

Crucial to the process of fabrication of persons/bodies through the transfer of ritual knowledge are gifts of magical plants known as *epe'*. Parents, relatives, or friends can present such gifts at any time in a person's life, but they are especially given in the context of male and female initiation rites. *Epe'* are small sedges with elongated leaves and a small onion-shaped tuber classified in Western botanical taxonomies as belonging to the *Cyperus* genus. Some can be found in the forest in a wild state; others are found only as cultivars. The more common varieties are grown in small gardens close to their owners' houses. The rarer and more powerful varieties are planted in hidden places, far from areas of human activity or habitation, to prevent others from stealing them. Some say that the knowledge of these magical plants was originally acquired from spirit beings in dreams; they contain powerful subjectivities. The *epe'* thus obtained are carefully kept and reproduced by their owners. Only they know the plants' properties and how to use them correctly. Mishandling of such plants by someone who does not know what they are for, or the way to use them, can backfire and cause death to the transgressor. For this reason, these plants are valuable only when they are transferred together with the ritual knowledge necessary to use them effectively.

There are many varieties of *epe'* (Santos-Granero 2004: 252). Some are meant to improve the productive, artistic, or musical capacities of men and women; others are used to influence interpersonal relations; still others are meant to strengthen the user against sorcery attacks. To acquire their properties, most *epe'* are consumed as infusions. This act is often accompanied by dietary proscriptions, sexual abstinence, and vigils aimed at ensuring the efficacy of the plants. Boys are given several varieties of *epe'*, known as *eñetsa* or *queñquehuash*, so that they become good hunters. They may also receive a variety of *epe'* to attract specific

kinds of animals. These *epe'*, named after the animals they are supposed to attract, are said to call those animals and render them vulnerable to the hunters' arrows, shotgun shells, or traps. When they go hunting, men chew and blow in the air the appropriate *epe'*, absorbing its pseudoanimal subjectivity and thus becoming attractive to the animal they want to hunt. These same *epe'* can be used to train dogs to chase and catch these particular animals. Boys may also receive *shopat*, a variety of *epe'* used to make them good fishers, or to *cure* a fishhook that no longer attracts fish. Or they are given *muechmantsopar*, an *epe'* used to cure shotguns that have lost their capacity to kill prey. Girls, in turn, are given *mamtar*, an *epe'* that turns them into superior cultivators and grants them the capacity to grow large manioc tubers. They may also receive gifts of *tenapsopar*, a plant that enhances their skills as spinners and weavers. In the past, they were also given an *epe'* that turned them into excellent potters. In addition, to improve their singing abilities, boys and girls are given *morreñtsopar*; likewise, to turn them into skillful flute players, boys may be given *requërcantsopar*.

Gifts of magical plants go hand in hand with the transmission of both practical and ritual knowledge. Boys who are given hunting *epe'* are instructed on the practicalities of hunting—animal habits, hunting techniques, fabrication of weapons and traps—as well as on the formulas they must utter in order for these plants to be effective. Girls who receive gardening *epe'* are taught the knowledge of good farming—soil types, plant characteristics, timing of planting and harvesting—but also the songs they must sing in order for particular cultivars to grow abundantly. These different forms of knowledge penetrate the body and are stored in the heart and in the blood stream under the form of thoughts. Such incorporation is thought to bring about important transformations of the learners' bodies. This is particularly noticeable among those who have undergone initiation rites. As the proud father of a young *ponap'nora'* told me, "See how she walks. And how she's no longer shy. She's a woman now." In effect, girls come out of their ritual seclusion with plumper bodies and greater poise, manifested in the way they walk, speak, and relate to others. Boys, in turn, look leaner, tougher, and more self-confident, having lost their childish coyness and gained in outlook and eloquence.

While parents and grandparents—in the broad, classificatory sense of these terms—are the most important transmitters of productive and ritual knowledge and, thus, of personhood, other relatives and family friends also play a key part in the making of Yanesha persons. This is especially true of those in a relationship of *shall* (namesake) with a given person. Among the Yanesha, the *shall* relationship is not accidental. When a baby is born, its parents choose one or more persons to become namesakes of the child. Such selection operates along gender lines: boys are given male namesakes and girls are given female namesakes. In the past, the names transmitted through these means were native or *true* names. Today, it is becoming increasingly common to pass on the foreign (that is, Christian) names with which children are inscribed in the national civil registry. If the baby is a firstborn, more frequently than not, the namesake will be one of his or her grandparents—including the brothers and sisters of their biological grandparents. But if the baby is not a firstborn, namesakes can be chosen among a variety of relatives, as well as among close friends. In all cases, the *shall* relation subsumes any previous kinship tie that might have existed between the name-giver and the name-receiver. Sometimes both parents agree on who the *shall* of their baby

should be but, more often, each parent chooses a person to be their baby's *shall*, in which case they tend to choose them from among their respective relatives and personal friends. In this way, the range of people engaged in the process of social fabrication of any given child extends well beyond the scope of close kinship, and babies may end up having a large number of names.

The *shall* relationship creates a strong and intimate bond between the name-giver and the name-receiver (see McCallum 2001: 22 for similar ideas among the Cashinahua). In Yanesha thought, names stand for the person they denominate, and are often used by sorcerers to ensorcell their victims. For this reason, people do not reveal their true names, and avoid using true names to address others. By agreeing to be a baby's *shall*, a person not only bestows on the baby his or her name, but also their subjectivity. Such sharing of subjectivity is very important for the formation of the baby as a person. Until they are named at around one year of age, babies are not considered to be fully human. During this stage, their identities are subsumed under that of their namesake(s). Babies are referred to as *baby* (*ema'*), or as so-and-so's *pa'shall* (his/her namesake). Their identity is derived so much from their *shall* that if a baby falls ill, his or her parents may change the baby's *shall* in the hope of deflecting the harm that has been sent to him or her. In such contexts, name-givers stand for the babies who will receive their names, and as such they can be said to be, to a certain extent, interchangeable with them. Once the baby has been formally named, if he or she falls ill, the parents will change his or her name. In both cases, what parents seek to do is change the baby's identity in order to deceive the sorcerous agent that is attempting to make him or her sick.

People-making processes do not stop with the transition from adolescence to adulthood. They continue throughout a person's life. Key to these processes is the everyday relations that people establish with their relatives, neighbors, and friends. As an old man told me, "We are of one body with the people we live with," meaning with the people one interacts with and cares for. Spouses are especially important in this category of people. It is said that in the past Yanesha men preferred to marry pubescent or even prepubescent girls, in order to have the opportunity to shape them to their taste. Such men restrained from having sex with their wives until they were fully developed and sexually mature. The idea here is that prolonged cohabitation, daily provision, multiple gifts, and small attentions made the girl *of one body* with her husband and, thus more pliant to his wishes. As the result of sexual exchange, daily contact, and the sharing of food and other substances, married people are thought to increasingly resemble each other. This is held to be especially true of older couples past the age of reproduction. These older couples, unbridled by social expectations linked to gender roles, often share otherwise highly marked gendered activities, such as spinning. The making of shamans and other religious specialists requires more specific people-making operations—such as adding a few drops of tobacco juice to the mother's milk—but these are in addition to, not in replacement of, the more general bodily treatments described above. Whether specialists or ordinary people, Yanesha persons are always believed to be in the making, until the moment of death, which marks the beginning of the process of dissolution, or unmaking, of the self.

Contagious magic or incorporation?

Amazonianist ethnographies are full of examples of body-making processes involving the ritual manipulation of a variety of animals, plants, artifacts, and things in order to transfer some of their powers and qualities onto the person being made. What is novel, here, is the interpretation of how this transference takes place, and its implications. Previous ethnographies rely more or less implicitly on the Frazerian notion of "contagious magic," which explains the transmission of desired qualities of a variety of entities as a result of the laws of similarity and contact (Frazer 1996).

I propose an alternative explanation, namely, that the acquisition of the powers, knowledge, capacities, and properties of animals, plants, and things is realized, not through contiguity and contagion as Frazer would have it, but rather through the actual incorporation of the bodies and subjectivities of such entities. From a native Amazonian point of view, these are not only living beings but also possessors (in different degrees) of the kind of subjectivity associated with human persons. Such incorporation is realized through two modalities: *embodiment*, which entails the incorporation through objectivation of external substances and subjectivities, and *ensoulment*, which involves the incorporation through subjectivation of external artifacts and bodily substances. Instances of embodiment include the incorporation and transformation of the subjectivity of the liana *eñsesrec_h* into hard straight bones, or of particular forms of ritual knowledge into a strong heart. Examples of ensoulment include the incorporation of personal ornaments (chestbands and wristbands), clothes (tunics), and tools (spindles and bows), and their gradual transmutation into somatic or extrasomatic body parts. These two modalities of incorporation operate in parallel, in such a way that whatever is embodied becomes part of a person's spiritual dimensions, while whatever is ensouled becomes part of a person's body. This is so because, from a Yanesha point of view, the corporeal and subjectival components of self are systemically connected. Given that a person's body (*chetsots*) and vitality (*yecamquëm*) are considered to be mirror images of each other, whatever object is ensouled will be reflected in the vitality, whereas whatever subjectivity is incorporated will find expression in the body. The same is true of the relation between body and shadow (*yechoyeshem*), since whatever object or subjectivity a person incorporates will be immediately replicated by that person's shadow. These conceptions explain why many Yanesha claim that the loss or destruction of personal ornaments may induce a person to fall ill, or that the injuries received by a person's vitality during dreams will show in their bodies once they wake up. Similar processes of embodiment and ensoulment figure prominently in recent studies on people-making among the Tukano (Hugh-Jones 2009), Urarina (Walker 2009), Mamaindê (Miller 2009), Matis (Erikson 2009), and Cashinahua (Lagrou 2009).

This reinterpretation of the data, made possible thanks to a more detailed knowledge of native Amazonian people-making processes, has some important practical and theoretical consequences. First, if the transference of desired qualities is realized through the incorporation of the subjectival qualities of human and nonhuman entities, the incorporating subject must necessarily be consubstantial with the incorporated subjectivities. Second, if the incorporating subjects are

consubstantial with a variety of entities, they must forcibly have composite bodies and subjectivities.

Conclusions

In the Thomist tradition, the subject is considered to be ontologically complete and incommunicable (Wippel 2000: 250). Aquinas understands incommunicability as the property that characterizes persons and, to a lesser extent, irrational beings. It refers to a person's individuality, distinctness, and independence, and is therefore tightly linked to the notion of subjectivity. From this point of view, each person is incommunicable insofar as he or she constitutes a center of relation, freedom, thought, and action that can only be itself, and cannot become another center (Rolnick 2007: 54). Through reproduction people can transmit biological traits to their children, but they can transmit neither subjectivity nor personality.

Such a view is totally alien to Yanesha people, who would agree that persons are unique and singular, but would challenge the notion that they are complete, indivisible, and self-contained. From a Yanesha perspective, persons are communicable and it is this quality that makes human persons one with many other living beings. As we have seen above, subjectivity can be shared in a number of ways. It can be passed through the sharing of bodily substances, such as blood, semen, breast milk, saliva, excrements, and perspiration. Being part of a subjectivized body, these substances participate in the subjectivity of the body that produces them. When the sharing of these substances results from an intentional act, they contribute to the formation of the receiver's body and subjectivity.

Subjectivity can also be shared through gifts fabricated by the giver with his or her own hands. Such objects are endowed with the maker's will, thoughts, and affects. In other words, they are endowed with his or her subjectivity. When they are given as presents, the constitutive subjectivity of the object is incorporated by the receiver through prolonged and intimate contact and becomes part of his or her self. Subjectivity is also shared through commensality. Like other objects, foods and beverages incorporate their makers' subjectivity—under the form of feelings, emotions, and capacities—during the process of elaboration. When consumed by others, such subjectivity is passed on to the receiver and becomes part of his or her own self. Such a transmission can have positive but also negative effects. A Yanesha woman told me that when a wife is angry with her husband while she prepares manioc beer, the beverage might become imbued with her anger and ill wishes and make her husband sick. While this may be an unintentional result, it is said that in some cases women may do this on purpose in order to make ill a person whom they dislike.

The transfer of ritual knowledge—under the form of myths, songs, charms, or ritual formulas—also entails the sharing of subjectivity. Such knowledge, stored under the form of thoughts in a person's heart, is not only embodied by the person who obtained it but becomes constitutive of that person's subjectivity. When transferred to another as a gift it allows the receiver to share in the giver's subjectivity. Finally, subjectivity may also be passed on through names. From a Yanesha perspective, names have a tight connection with the persons bearing them, so much so that they are thought to stand for the persons who possess them. This is why names are not pronounced needlessly or carelessly. By giving one's name as a present, the name-giver is endowing the receiver with aspects of his or her

subjectivity, thus establishing a nexus of identity that can only be broken when the name-receiver renounces to the name—often in order to deflect an evil charm or curse.

In all these instances, communicability is embedded in a process of corporeal fabrication, and is manifested as a sharing of subjectivity under the form of affects, skills, agency, and capabilities. Such sharing is unidirectional insofar as subjectivity is communicated from the maker to the made, and not vice versa. The agents involved in the making of human persons are primarily human, but nonhuman persons may be engaged to contribute their properties, virtues, or qualities to the formation of particular human persons. Humans—generally parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends—mediate interspecific communicability. They are the ones who select the plants, animals, and objects that they consider to be significant for the making and development of the fabricated child. To be effective, this kind of communicability requires some degree of ritual manipulation by which the agency of these nonhuman persons is activated and engaged for the benefit of the recipient. Baths or steam baths, with a variety of plant infusions, and personal ornaments made with key animal body parts are the prime means through which nonhuman subjectivities are passed on to human beings.

As a result of these ritual and quotidian operations, human persons are thought to have composite anatomies, which is to say that they have compound subjectivities. The Yanesha people consider that all the components that go into the making of a human body are infused with the subjectivity of their previous owners. In this sense, people are made up of bodily substances, objects, foods, knowledge, songs, and names obtained from a variety of human and nonhuman beings. Most of these elements are highly gendered and are thought to contribute to the formation of gendered bodies: healthy, knowledgeable and industrious men and women, who will be able to raise families, create harmonious communities, and lead a good life. The transmission of these elements is not, however, accomplished through strict gender lines. As a consequence, all persons are thought to share not only the subjectivities of different kinds of beings but also the subjectivities of a variety of male and female beings. In the words of McCallum, a child "gradually accrues personhood in gendered form in an on-going process that is dependent on constant hard work, both on the part of the individual concerned and those in relationships with her" (2009: 44).

This notion has important philosophical consequences that put into question the Western definition of persons as complete, indivisible, and self-contained. Yanesha people would not agree that persons are complete (that is, not part of anything else), because they conceive of persons as being constituted by the subjectival substances of multiple entities, and as being constitutive of other persons. However, rather than being just an objectivation of the social relations that constitute them, as Strathern (1990) argues is the case in Melanesia, in this conception people are viewed as the particular conjunction of the subjectivized substances that compose them. It is this consubstantiality that appears as an index of the social relations—understanding the sphere of the social as encompassing both human and nonhuman persons—that constitute them, both the relations that were chosen for them by parents, relatives, and friends during their infancy, or those they have chosen throughout their adult lives.

Like the Kayapo, Yanesha "treat persons in their capacity as agents or acting subjects as constructed of heterogeneous, concretely embodied modes of

subjectivity that change and become substituted for one another at different times and in different contexts" (Turner 1995: 166). For this reason, they would agree with the notion that each human person is unique. Every person appears not only as the materialization of a distinctive set of social relations but also as a particular combination of embodied subjectivities involved in "sequences of multiple transformations" (Turner 2009: 38). They would not, however, mistake uniqueness with individuality or indivisibility. Yanesha consider that people are an assemblage of the subjectivities of a multiplicity of human and nonhuman, male and female beings, and so are prone to processes of composition, decomposition, and recomposition—often associated with changes in their developmental life cycles—entailing the incorporation of new subjectivities, as well as the shedding of old ones. More importantly, since adult persons are permanently involved in the fabrication of other people (children, spouses, lovers, kin, and friends) they are always sharing their subjectivity with others. For similar reasons, Yanesha would question the notion that human persons are self-contained, complete and independent units in and of themselves. Although they acknowledge personal autonomy as a cardinal virtue, they admit that nobody is self-sufficient, that sociality and mutual dependence—even with dangerous or ambiguous others—is the basis of human existence.

The above discussion suggests that Yanesha notions of beinghood, bodies, and subjectivities differ widely from those entertained in Western societies. More importantly, in native Amazonia these conceptions are predicated on completely different premises from their Western equivalents. This is especially true in regard to three important questions that surround topics of personhood and individuality that permeate Western thought: 1. Does nature precede culture in people-making processes? 2. Are nature or nurture the main shaping forces of personhood? and, 3. Is the individual a product of society or does the individual precede society?

In the Western tradition, nature is regarded as the given, and culture as the constructed, while in native Amazonian thought the lines between these two spheres are simply blurred. In some Amerindian mythologies, culture, in the form of artifacts, is thought to have preceded the creation of humans, animals, plants, and other beings. This is the case of Tukano myths that assert that the first creations were the Instruments of Life and Transformation, which were used by the Grandparents of the Universe to create the bodies of the first human beings (Hugh-Jones 2009). This is also true of Yanesha and Ashaninka mythologies, which claim that all cultural artifacts were invented at the beginning of time by a technological deity (Benavides 1986). In these native traditions, the body parts of present-day humans, animals, and plants are said to have been primordial artifacts: the skin of the anaconda was a hammock, the sting of wasps was a spear, the spotted fur of the jaguar was a basket, the red fruits of coca bushes were the beads of a necklace, and the tassels of maize ears were a feather headdress. In other Amerindian mythologies, by contrast, cultural artifacts are thought to have been the transformed body parts of primordial humans (Van Velthem 2003: 124–25). In both instances nature and culture are not seen as separate spheres but as one and the same, resulting either in the existence of *artifactual anatomies*, or in *corporealized objects*.

In Western societies, there is also an increasing tendency to attribute the singularity of individuals to nature—the uniqueness of a person's genomic configuration—with nurture playing a secondary role, while in native Amazonian

societies nature and nurture are given the same weight. In Western contemporary societies, behavioral genetics is gaining ground to explain all kinds of behavior as the result of a person's genetic makeup, whereas genetic enhancement and gene therapy are becoming increasingly accepted options to modify and improve—that is to singularize or individualize—an unborn child's genomic configuration. By contrast, in native Amazonian thought the input of parental generative substances is regarded to be as important as the input of the creational and socializing substances provided by a broad range of human and nonhuman beings. In this view, it is the particular combination of these multiple material and immaterial substances that accounts for the singularity of any given person.

Finally, in Western societies the individual is regarded as preceding society, while in Amazonia society and individuals—or, more properly, dividuals—are perceived as being mutually constitutive. In effect, in the Western tradition, society is generally viewed as an aggregate of individuals bounded either by a *social contract* à la Rousseau or by a *political covenant* à la Hobbes. The individual is regarded as the active party and society as the product of individuals' actions. In contrast, in native Amazonia society and the individual are seen as having emerged simultaneously. This is reflected in many Amerindian mythologies that claim that the appearance of normal biological reproduction went hand in hand with the establishment of proper—convivial—social relations. Before then, women died at birth or gave birth to nonhuman beings. From a native point of view, then, individuals are the product of the joint efforts of the collectives to which they belong, as much as society is the result of moral efforts by the individuals that compose it.

These radical differences suggest that the opposition between Western and native Amazonian conceptions of personhood goes beyond the simple dichotomy between Western *individualism* and native Amazonian *relationality*, an opposition that, as Conklin and Morgan (1996: 659) have rightly pointed out, is less straightforward than is often assumed. Rather, the main difference seems to be one between Western segmental and native Amazonian holistic understandings of the world. Or, to put it in Latourian terms, between Western purification—the act of distinguishing and separating ontological spheres into binary oppositions—and non-Western forms of mediation—the act by which nature, culture, and society are regarded as constituting a single ontological sphere (Latour 1993).

Coda

Even though I have adopted a constructional approach over a perspectival approach here, abundant evidence indicates that, at least in the Yanesha case, these two explanatory models are not mutually exclusive. Yanesha mythology is full of instances of people who, in ancient times, risked losing their human perspective through commensality with nonhumans. Consider, for example, the woman in the myth of origin of harmonious social relations, who almost lost her humanity by drinking the fermented heart, liver, and kidney beer offered to her by the ghost of her murdered husband (Santos-Granero 1991: 37). Yanesha oral traditions and shamanic narratives are full of examples of encounters between Yanesha and a variety of forest, water, and mountain animals and spirits' intent on seducing or abducting them by imposing their point of view in order to recruit them and increase their numbers (Santos-Granero 1991: 230; 2006: 57, 76). At the same time, Yanesha uphold the notion that people-making requires the incorporation of

the bodily substances and subjectivities of a broad range of human and nonhuman beings. However, such sharing does not entail a radical change of perspective but is perceived as conducive to the fabrication of persons with compound bodies and subjectivities.

It could very well be that these contrasting views of beinghood correspond to a continuum in which the extremes are occupied by pure types of constructional and perspectival native Amazonian societies, whereas those in the middle display a combination in varying degrees of both modes of understanding beinghood, the result of different historical trajectories and cultural influences. Some evidence supports this possibility. Steve Rubenstein asserted, for instance, "you can find examples of [perspectival] elements among the Shuar. However, I do not think that perspectivism is the idiom through which Shuar express the most important things they think about their situation or view of the world" (personal communication, January 31, 2011). Rubenstein believed that perspectivism was alien to the Shuar, although he was careful to point out, "There is of course always the old possibility that certain traits (e.g. myths) diffused widely throughout Amazonia without assuming the same meanings in every society" (personal communication, February 1, 2011). On the other extreme of the continuum, we would find the Wari' (Vilaça 1992) and the Yudjá (Stolze Lima 2005), among whom the perspectival mode seems to color and permeate all perceptions of the world.

As appealing as this possibility is, I am more inclined to view these two approaches to beinghood as coexisting aspects of native Amazonian cosmologies and ontologies, which manifest themselves under different conditions, very much as in the case of the so-called dual nature of light. According to modern physics, light has both wave and particle properties. In the past, it was thought that these two properties were exclusive; something could be a particle or a wave, but not both. Today, scientists accept that these two attributes are not mutually exclusive, with the caveat, however, that light does not act as a particle and a wave simultaneously. Rather, according to Ball, "whether [light] behaves as a particle or a wave depends on the property being measured" (2006: 5). In other words, it depends on the specific context in which the properties of light are examined. I would suggest that in societies like the Yanesha, the same holds true of the coexistence of constructional and perspectival views of the world. The prevalence of one over the other depends on the circumstances under which intersubjective contact and the exchange of substances take place.

Perspectival explanations prevail in situations in which intersubjective encounters occur inadvertently, in remote or wild spaces, and as a result of the predatory intentions of a variety of nonhuman beings attempting to turn humans into one of them in order to increase their ranks (Huxley 1957: 180; Goldman 1963: 168; Vilaça 2002: 357; Barcelos Neto 2009: 130). Such attacks, I contend, are a manifestation of the generalized interspecific competition for vitality, or life force, that characterizes Amerindian "political economies of life" (Santos-Granero 2009d). Constructional views, in contrast, are prevalent in contexts of people-making, in which intersubjective relations are sought, take place in social or socialized spaces, and are ritually mediated. In the first type of context, the sharing of substances results from unmediated predatory attacks from enemy Others who try to impose their points of view on their unsuspecting victims, whereas in people-making situations the sharing of substances involves either human beings who are

close to the treated person—parents, relatives, and friends—or nonhuman entities whose help is engaged by demonstrating respect, and whose potential hostility is neutralized through a diversity of propitiatory rituals.

If this were true, we would have to conclude that constructivism and perspectivism are not really conflicting theoretical models—in the sense of offering different interpretations of the same set of data—but artifacts of placing the focus on different levels of social interaction: the local sphere of human relations versus the outside sphere of interspecific communication. This should in no way be perceived as a theoretical weakness, as each of these approaches raises, in its own terms, important philosophical questions while simultaneously challenging many premises in Western philosophy. At present, Amazonianists seem to be experiencing a bad case of perspectivism, with each party considering itself the bearer of the proper point of view, but the time may come when we will realize that the richness of Amazonianist theory lies precisely in it being, as it were, *une théorie fait de regards*.

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Êtreté et façonnage des personnes en Amazonie indigène. Une approche constructiviste avec une coda en perspectiviste

Résumé : Cet article examine les notions Yanesha d'êtreté et les pratiques de façonnage des personnes d'un point de vue constructiviste. Il vise à révéler en quoi les conceptions Yanesha de la personne diffèrent des celles de la tradition Occidentale, en se focalisant sur la composition des personnes/corps comme un processus phénoménologique plutôt que sur la nature des processus par lesquels personnes et corps sont socialement fabriqués. La tradition occidentale dérivant des travaux de Saint Thomas d'Aquin conçoit les *personnes* comme des êtres individuels, singuliers, et indépendants, à la fois complets et incommunicables. En revanche, les Yanesha voient les personnes comme composites, résultant d'apports créationnels, génératifs, et socialisateurs venant d'une variété d'entités humaines et non-humaines, et donc présentant des anatomies et des subjectivités composées. Cet article discute le contraste entre les approches constructivistes et perspectivistes de l'êtreté, du corps, et de la subjectivité en Amazonie indigène. Il y est proposé que ces approches ne sont pas tant des modèles théoriques conflictuels que des artefacts dérivés d'une attention accordées à différents niveaux d'interaction sociale : elles sont le résultat de points de vues divergents. Cela suggère alors que la richesse de la théorie amazonianiste repose précisément sur cette qualité d'être *une théorie faite de regards.*

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