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## **A Medium of Magical Power: How to do Things with Voices in the Western Amazon**

### **Abstract**

This contribution is about functions of the voice, specifically the voice of singers among the indigenous group known as Shipibo-Konibo who dwell in the Western Amazonian rainforests. Among these people, much of curing and sorcery (commonly called 'shamanism') is achieved by singing certain chants or songs. This is done by specialists (*médicos*) who acquired a certain magical power for their voices during year-long training. Voice electrification is treated in a twofold approach: first, the question is raised, why recorded and reproduced voices do not work as carriers of said magical power; second, how electric devices can be summoned by the specialist singers in order to enhance this power. Therefore it is necessary to explain how Amazonian magic is constructed. Language (in this case the Shipibo's) plays a crucial role, because its power of conceptualizing the conceived environment allow for active manipulation by the means of uttering certain songs or phrases. Thereby, the voice is viewed as a substantial item of transmission in an animistic ontology. By recording, this substance cannot be reproduced, the recording is but an image (like a photograph).

### **Introduction: Electrified Voices do not Work<sup>1</sup>**

The regional radio programme *Voz de la Selva* (Voice of the Rainforest) has been operating for more than a decade now in Pucallpa, a provincial town deep in the eastern Peruvian rainforest. Pucallpa is situated on the shore of the Ucayali river, a main tributary to the Amazon. Along the river's shores, for about 350 kilometers upriver and downriver, the Shipibo-Konibo dominate the demographic

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to the University of Vienna and the Austrian Academy of Sciences for grants they provided for my fieldwork in Amazonia. More specifically, I acknowledge the invaluable help by my wife Laida Mori Silvano de Brabec, translating and explaining Shipibo terminology and song lyrics. Artemio Pacaya Romaina likewise provided song translations and information about the history of Shipibo radio programmes. Finally, I thank Dmitri Zakharine for surprisingly inviting me to the conference *Electrified Voices* and to contribute to the present volume.

image of the region. The Shipibo-Konibo (or Shipibo) are an indigenous group, calling themselves *noa jonikon* (“we, the Real People”). Their language *non joi* (“our word”, “our language”, or “our voice”) has been identified by linguists to pertain to the Pano linguistic family. The Shipibo comprise about 45,000 people, and many of them listen to *Voz de la Selva* once a week. This programme broadcasts in Shipibo language, and it is not the first to do so. Already in 1970, Laurencio Ramírez founded the *Manguaré Shipibo*, and many more are broadcasting today.

Glorioso Castro, founder of *Voz de la Selva* and also its operator, talks into the microphone at 5 a.m., telling international, national, and regional news, greeting relatives, delivering messages to remote communities (a battery-driven radio can be found everywhere), and he plays regional pop music between his talks.

Since around 2003, satellite telephones have been installed in many Shipibo communities, and only a few villages remain dependant on radio communication. Radio communication means turning on Glorioso’s programme, or using the *radiofonía*. In the mornings and afternoons, *radiofonía* is operated in most villages, and it works better in the afternoon, when the batteries are well-charged by solar panels. Radio communication has been increasingly common in Shipibo settlements for about two decades now<sup>2</sup>.

It is therefore not exactly accurate to speak of the Shipibo’s voices as voices that resisted electrification. However, they have a strange attitude towards electrified voices: Pancho Mahua, a singer and specialist for magic (a *médico*, an indigenous doctor)<sup>3</sup> told me in 2005, that recorded magic songs would not work properly. For instance, curing songs, songs for sorcery or for establishing (or separating) love relationships can be regarded ‘magic’. But these magic effects seem not to be caused by what we could define as the acoustic phenomenon, by sound waves in certain frequency spectra at certain amplitudes extending spherically through a medium, preferably air. There seems to be something else at work as well. Maybe it is because recorded magic songs would not work properly, that Pancho, as well as all his fellow magicians, healers, and sorcerers did not hesitate to have their—presumably powerful—magic songs recorded and burnt on CDs by the fieldworker. They would not work. Why?

Without initially paying much attention to this question, I tried to investigate

2 Before around 1990, indigenous people depended on radio communication provided by missionaries, or logging and oil companies.

3 I prefer to use the term *médico* instead of the more common *chamán*, “shaman”, because it is more often used in native discourse. Both terms are nevertheless introduced from Spanish and reinterpreted. However, they carry a slightly different meaning: *médico* is usually more often used to designate specialists who work in curing people by applying indigenous medicine and magic, while *chamán* is most often used to designate (and also autodenominate) specialists who work mainly with visitors, that is with researchers, tourists, and “shaman apprentices”.

whatever was the reason that made magic songs ‘work properly’. This was part of my fieldwork in western Amazonia from 2001 to 2006, which I conducted in order to provide an ethnomusicological documentation of the area. This served for my M.A. and Ph.D. thesis, and as a process of safeguarding for the people who dwell on the Ucayali river. Beside the Shipibo, I also have been working with members of the Yine, Asháninka, Kakataibo, Iskobakebo, and Kukama-Kukamiria indigenous people, among a few other groups. Although peculiarities in treating the human (and the non-human) voice could be observed among all mentioned groups, most of what will be said here about the Shipibo-Konibo also applies for them—in different languages, of course.

## Understanding Amazonian Magic

Many cultural anthropological studies have been conducted in order to understand how indigenous people perceive, (re-)construct, and manipulate their world, but few have understood and studied the importance of music, songs, and voices in this regards. Anthony Seeger can be considered a pioneer who undertook ethnomusicological fieldwork among the Suyá, a small indigenous group of central Brazil. An essay he co-authored (Seeger et al. 1979) laid way to many newer theories about Amazonian understandings of human beings, non-human beings, and about the process of defining individual and social bodies as well as cosmologies. In 1987, Seeger contributed with his book *Why Suyá Sing* to what he coined a “musical anthropology”. Music performance in ritual contexts, Seeger argues, is a key process for constructing, affirming, and recreating social structures as well as “social” relationships between the human Suyá and non-human others. Following this approach, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have ventured further into the topic of ritual (and also recreative) music in South American lowlands (Menezes Bastos 1986, Hill 1993, Olsen 1996, Lewy 2010, among others). In most of these studies, it appears that not merely what we would understand as *music* (instrumentally or vocally performed), but also speaking in certain circumstances may be charged with magical power. The *voice* seems to be crucial. However, in order to foster interdisciplinary collaborations, and to understand what is meant here with humans and non-humans, I will provide a short introduction to Amerindian ontologies as formulated in recent anthropological theories, before tackling with voices.

One of Seeger’s former students, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, investigated various aspects of affinity and relationships among the Araweté in central Brazil, elaborating a model of different perspectives, for examples comparing the very Araweté’s point of view with the point of view of their cannibalistic gods. Thereupon, he presented the concept of Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de

Castro 1998). With this theory, he proposes that in Amazonian ontologies the concepts of bodily-exterior form and mental-interior content works contrary to the naturalistic Western conception. Westerners typically see a human being defined by a certain body, and locate the principle of differentiation in the mental-interior domain (for individuals, their 'soul' or 'psyche'; for groups, their 'culture'). That said, humans, as mammals, share a determined physicality, even plants and 'inanimate' beings like rivers, or mountains share physical existence with humans. However, Westerners distinguish humanity based on mental abilities ('reflexive consciousness'), and also distinguish humans among each other by their mental individuality. Therefore, beings in a Western ontology share physical similarity (a pig is very similar to a human, it is said), while the mental-interior category serves for distinction. In Amerindian societies, on the other hand, Viveiros de Castro argues, all beings would share humanness in mental-interior ('soul', 'social', or 'cultural') categories, while the bodily-exterior serves for distinction and for individuality. When Shipibo-Konibo, for example, call themselves *noa jonikon*, 'we, the Real People'; this does not mean that all non-Shipibo are not human, but quite contrary, that *all* non-Shipibo (neighbor indigenous groups, mestizos, whites, animals, plants, spirits, rivers, and so on) *are* humans but dispose of different bodies.

In that sense, it is perfectly possible for Amazonian indigenous individuals (with a certain intra-culturally determined training) to change their bodily appearance. Whereas it proves impossible to escape from humanness in a mental-interior sense—quite contrarily to what is possible in our Western, naturalistic understanding (we can change our 'culturality', while we are eternally determined in our 'physicality'). It is important here to understand that most Amazonian indigenous people do not understand being human as a social state in an environment of independent nature. The environment is part of the social. Animals, plants, or rivers, are thought as similarly human persons living a human social, or cultural life, in different bodies. In consequence, it is possible to contact these persons and establish social relationships with them<sup>4</sup>. Such contact, however, is not pursued by 'common' people, because it is understood as a very dangerous endeavor. If someone would, for example, get in contact with the river dolphin people, he or she would risk to be captured by them and become one of them. Therefore, it is most important to maintain the order of things: 'We Real People' shall stay 'really human', while 'other humans' shall not disturb us. The main task of trained specialists (*médicos*, commonly referred to as 'shamans') is not to

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4 Cf. the conceptualization of animistic, naturalistic, totemistic, and analogistic ontologies in Descola (2005).

provide contact to non-human beings for their community but on the contrary, to defend and prevent their community from the non-humans' influence<sup>5</sup>.

Remarkably, in anthropology, the visual has been much more emphasised in this context than the acoustic. Viveiros de Castro, for example, is right that "Amerindian cultures evince a strong visual bias of their own—one not to be confused with our own visualism" (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 26). The connection that he and others<sup>6</sup> draw between visual perception or terminology and the ritual use of hallucinogenic drugs does not lack reason. In the Western Amazon, much of the *médico*'s work is done with the influence of the hallucinogenic plant preparation *ayawaska*<sup>7</sup>. However, the same applies to acoustic phenomena, as aural hallucinations are as often reported as visual ones. Although indigenous people excessively use visual metaphors, the fact that these receive more attention than the audible, I would like to nevertheless interpret as a result of the Western researcher's "visualism". What startled me, the ethnomusicologist, most in Shipibo people's reports from their drug-induced perceptions was the consistency of enunciations like "When I am singing, I sing like the *Inka* who I hear in my *mareación* (drug influence)".

Lewy argues in this context that although seeing is emphasized as the sense for distinction, the aural skills (hearing, listening, speaking, and singing) are used to communicate among 'others', that is, inter-specific interaction. "Different seeing, similar hearing" (Lewy forthcoming: title) is the key for understanding the mode of communication and in consequence of transformation between 'Real People' and 'other people'.

## The Spirits' Language

The important role of talking and singing makes oral language use<sup>8</sup> a more delicate issue than in a Western naturalistic understanding. Whereas language use in Western societies may be delicate, too, this delicacy is due to possible

5 For an explanation of border management in the 'multiverse' and the tasks of 'shamans' therein, see Halbmayer (forthcoming).

6 An important contribution to South American anthropology of the senses involving hallucinatory experience is presented by Classen (1990).

7 *Ayawaska* is cooked from two forest plants (*Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* in the most common recipe). Preparation, pharmacology, and modalities of use of this preparation has been studied extensively. For a comprehensive collection of essays about *ayawaska*, see for example: Labate & Araújo 2004.

8 That is, language use in general, because there was little to no written language in the Amazon before the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. For a highly interesting historical reinterpretation of written language (and songbooks!) among the Shipibo, see the investigation about legendary Shipibo 'design books' in Tournon (2002: 82–86).

social or political consequences. In Amazonia, and among the Shipibo people, language use however is considered an application of power, a power understood as ‘magic’ by Westerners because we lack any scientific explanation of what indigenous people are talking about.

“To speak”, in Shipibo language is expressed with the verb *yoiti*. This verb is composed by its stem *iti* and the prefix *yo-*. The stem on its own, *iti* is generally used to denote or (as a modal verb) substitute intransitive processes, and can be most adequately translated with “to be” (to exist) or “to do” (with intransitive acts). In Shipibo, “to sing” lacks a general term and can only be expressed directly when adhering to the current genre performed: *mashá iti*, for example, has to be translated exactly with “to perform *mashá* (repetitive song accompanying the *mashá* round dance)”, or *bewati* with “to perform *bewá* (song genre with a certain descending melodic/rhythmic structure)” —in both cases “to perform” is expressed with *iti*. The only way to translate “singing” as a general term for melodic voice production is via *iti*, or *i-xon-ti*, the latter including a morpheme of benefit (*-xon-*), meaning “to sing (be) for somebody”. *Iti* therefore denotes a current mode of being, of existence; in case of song performance the current mode of existence embodied by a performing singer.

Still, there is the prefix *yo-* in the verb “to talk”, *yo-iti*, that stands for power: Illius describes this power as “charged with energy [energiegeladen]”, and presents a list of words that are composed with this prefix (Illius 1999: 41 – 42)<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, “to speak”, *yo-iti* can be translated literally as “a mode of being charged with (magical) power”.

This power involved in voice use implies a series of consequences. In spoken language, the *boman* skill proves most important (Brabec de Mori 2009: 132 – 140). *Boman* signifies direct or indirect manipulation of the world via ‘charged speaking’. This way of speaking can be trained by the way of *samá* (“diet”, “fasting”), and every trained *médico* is thought to hold this power; they are *boman koshi*, “*boman* powerful”. Although this skill can be applied for any manipulation regardless of its moral implications, it is usually viewed rather sceptically. In general, *boman* is thought to be mostly used as a tool of cursing or even attacking:

“a sorcerer may utter ‘look, the girl over there stumbles!’ and when looking there one will see the girl falling down. Or he could say, ‘a tree branch is falling on Juan’s head’, and Juan will be brought home from the woodwork with a serious cranial problem” (Brabec de Mori 2009: 143).

<sup>9</sup> Illius (1999) mentions e.g. *yo-ina*, “wild animal” (as opposed to *iná*, domesticated animal); *yo-shin*, “demon, spirit” (from *shin*, “in darkness” or *shin(-an)* “thought, feeling”); or *yo-bé* (a dart magician or “shaman”).

In everyday life, the term *boman* is also often used with a certain ironic touch when somebody's assumption proves right. For example, one Shipibo art seller may say "look at this foreigner, he will buy our art", and if this proves true, her companion may reply, "you're quite *boman koshi!*" From this can be read that the act of the visitor buying artwork can be seen as an occurrence by chance (Shipibo people would also normally tell so), but also as a consequence of prior powerful uttering by the vendor. Consequently, some Shipibo art sellers train their *samá* in order to develop *boman* skill, as it greatly improves sales figures<sup>10</sup>.

Singing, as was indicated above, is considered a special mode of existence, in particular a 'higher' one than the normal being *iti*. This becomes obvious, for example, when Shipibo people tell about the *chaikoni jonibo*. These are legendary people who live far removed in the woods, invisible for untrained commoners (and whites), and who retain a way of life which is considered prototypically "correct" (*kikin, jakon*) by the Shipibo. The *chaikoni jonibo* would, as a consequence, live in well decorated houses, wear most delicately embroidered garments, use many perfumes only known to them (which also make them fairly irresistible if they wanted to conquer a common Shipibo), have the power to command all sorts of animals and to perform any rainforest magic. And, remarkably, they do not talk to each other, they always sing.

*Chaikoni jonibo* may make their appearance among common Shipibo people, in secret when visiting a Shipibo lover during night-time, but also publicly, during the great drinking festivities *ani xeati*. These festivities were periodically performed in Shipibo communities until a few dozen years ago. One of the main features of such festivities was excessive singing—drunk (*paena*) Shipibo are understood as entering another mode of existence, too, a mode wherein singing is likewise considered the adequate form of communication. Having reached a fair level of inebriation, all Shipibo present used to communicate only via singing. In such a context it appears almost natural that *chaikoni jonibo* may join the party and delight the audience with their especially refined singing.

Remarkably, outside of festivals or other communal or ritualized opportunities the performance of love songs, drinking songs, or dance songs is very rare. Illius argues that singing in general means to apply the "spirits' language"<sup>11</sup>

10 Besides *boman*, Shipibo (and other Western Amazonian) people use many different magical techniques for *negocio*, "commerce", like the popular perfume preparations *pusanga* which are also used for love magic. At this point, it shall be mentioned that olfactory senses and skills are likewise regarded crucial in Shipibo magic, but treating this issue lies beyond the scope of this chapter. In some instances, olfactory and audible sensations or actions are combined and complement each other even to the degree of synaesthetic perceptions; see Classen (1990), Santos-Granero (2006), or Brabec de Mori & Mori Silvano de Brabec (2009).

11 Illius (1997: 216): "Musik ist die 'Sprache' der Geister; das Singen die angemessene Kommunikationsform mit ihnen".

and using their language would mean to summon them, or at least to be perceived by them. This is definitely not intended by common Shipibo people during everyday life.

However, what is it that makes a simple drinking song the spirits' talk? There is, on the one hand, the formalization of an 'existence charged with power': speaking, *yoiti*. This means that using words, human talk (in particular, Shipibo language) makes us (the Shipibo) something special—powerful. It is one of the main factors that distinguishes the 'Real People' from 'other people', among artwork, body paint, body deformation, and house or village structures (cf. Halbmayr 2010). Viveiros de Castro indicates with "cosmological deixis" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: title) that 'we, the Real People' (*noa jonikon*) do not only exist as the others do (in Shipibo, the others do *iti*), but exist as 'we', as those who use the "correct words" *joikon* or "correct tongue" *janakon*, both terms which are synonymous to *non joi* "our language". Applying these markers of correctness, we 'yo-exist', we exist charged with power. Speaking in Shipibo language reveals our own 'Real Humanness'. As a consequence, those more powerful than we are supposed to use even more 'correct' words or tongues. The *chaikoni jonibo* use the common Shipibo language, but they super-formalize this language because their talk is song; with this they evidence their unquestionable super-humanness.

Sung words are by definition powerful, and so they are thought to take effect also in non-magical contexts like in drinking and love songs. I formulated this concept with an example in a recent publication:

"a man, for example, may sing in order to have his desired girl fall in love with him. A woman may sing to address her secret lover's potential understanding that she would like to flee with him to another village. As illustrated by these examples, numerous songs—however "secular" they may be—are thought to cast effects upon persons sung to. This understanding of effect is coded in metaphoric language. In song lyrics, for example, people are referred to as certain animals. This ascription of animal identities to human persons is not descriptive but prescriptive: the male singer who tries to seduce a girl would, for example, name her *bontoish*. The *bontoish* is a beautiful small bird, and in the code of Shipibo song lyrics it is used to address a young, good-looking and marriageable person (whose sex is usually the opposite of the singer's sex). Mentioning *bontoish* in this context does not describe the girl's behaviour but actually prescribes it: the singer defines her ideal reaction for the near future through meaningful naming" (Brabec de Mori 2011a: 170).

This function of sung music, especially regarding lyrics, does not appear magical to Westerners, because from a naturalistic point of view, we can interpret the process by sociological means. For Shipibo people however, both this sociological and the magical effects of sung words are completely comprehensible and

rational<sup>12</sup>, because they are rooted in Western Amazonian ontology, where bodily transformation is an ever present threat as well as a most effective tool.

## How to do Things with Voices

Going further with a sociological, or rather linguistic interpretation, one could refer to speech act theory<sup>13</sup>. Very similar to the singer's prescription of the girl's behavior by naming, Austin defines performative speech acts as a specific variant of illocutionary speech. As an example he presents the famous quote of a man responding to the priest at a wedding, "I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)" (Austin 1962: 12). This is illocutionary because it definitely exceeds the mere act of description, and it is performative, because the very act of utterance is part of the far-reaching consequences for the involved persons' future agency. As far as I am informed, in linguistics there is no reasonable explanation what is actually the power behind such a promise: there is no measurable substance involved during and after such a performative speech act.

In Shipibo understanding, the voice itself is viewed as such a substance charged with power respective to what it utters. Drawing upon the *boman* skill mentioned before, one can see that this substantiality can be trained, or enhanced by 'dieting' (*samati*). With 'dieting', the voice's power is 'fed', and in both speaking and singing, a *médico's* voice unfolds different powers of manipulating or changing the world. The *médico's* voice can therefore enter a patient's (or victim's) body and operate on it like a surgeon's scalpel; it is a common perception in Shipibo rituals that a patient feels "pierced by the voice/word", *join tsakana*, or "pierced by the song", *bewan tsakana*, as if the voice was a spear. For comparison, a speared fish is "pierced by a harpoon" (*pian tsakana*).

In order to elude the substantiality of voice more clearly, in the following I am going to explore the effective principles of three techniques of magical singing: *koxonti* (to blow/whistle), *yointi* (to connect), and *naikiti* (to transform into a non-human). Magical songs are not explicitly separated from secular songs in Shipibo terminology but they can be distinguished by context, and by their implicit purpose of actively manipulating the world. They are, as well, only performed by trained specialists, by *médicos* (although anybody might try, but this could result in disaster). These techniques are usually performed in specific

12 Here, I am following the historical definition of magic by Tambiah (1990).

13 I refer to the terminology as coined by Austin in his influential work *How to do Things with Words* (1962). Before and after Austin, many authors have written about speech and its effects (magic or not), e.g. Wittgenstein, Burke, Searle, Turner, Tambiah, or Derrida, only to mention a few. A comprehensive analysis of magic with a strong focus on performance and speech can be read in Tambiah (1990).

situations: *koxonti* is mostly undertaken during daytime, and in everyday situations. *Naikiti*, the transformative faculty, on the other hand is only performed during controlled rituals, like sessions involving the hallucinogenic *ayawaska* plant drug, or also without psychoactives, most prominently in legendary curing rituals by master healers (*meráya*). In all cases, *yointi* is the most important aspect of the singer's voice uttering. In the following, *koxonti*, *yointi*, and *naikiti* will be explained in detail, focussing on the function of the voice.

The most discrete and least spectacular use of voice in magical singing is in *koxonti*. *Koxonti* is always directed towards an object:<sup>14</sup> a song is performed in order to charge a substance (usually plant preparations, tobacco, perfumes, or any objects used in indigenous medicine or sorcery) with power. This is achieved by holding the object close to one's mouth while whistling (in a sense of melodious blowing) the appropriate melody. At the same time—most importantly—the performer has to *think* the appropriate lyrics<sup>15</sup>. This substance is then applied, for instance tobacco smoke is blown over the patient's body, and the power of the song is transmitted via this substance.

*Koxonti* is performed very silently and resembles a somewhat homeopathic approach. After performance, the whistled voice and the imagined lyrics stay in the object, therefore transforming the object's semantic interiority. A tobacco cigarette is just a cigarette before *koxonti*, but afterwards, it is *the* cigarette. The 'song in the cigarette' can be transported, and the cigarette can be smoked elsewhere, much later, even by somebody else than the original singer (whistler). Besides tobacco, liquids are often used as 'voice carriers', like perfumes which are then blown over the patient in a fragrant explosion of olfactory experience. The mestizo *médico* Julián Vásquez often used *koxonti* (*icarar* in regional *Loretano* dialect) on a glass of water which his patient then drank. Similarly, *koxonti* is almost always applied if a *médico* prepares a remedy of plants or other sources which will then be ingested by the patient. Therefore, the *médico* may blow on a whole bottle or canister before handing it over, or just on one dose in a mug which is then drunk at once.

The praxis of applying songs as 'whistling with lyrics' contributes to the image that *médicos* would only sing aloud during *ayawaska* sessions. Therefore it appears that loud songs would not play a great role in indigenous magical practice outside the *ayawaska* context. I think that this praxis indicates something completely different: *ayawaska* sessions (if not staged for tourists or researchers) are practically reserved for 'serious cases' or for occasions when more

14 During *ayawaska* sessions, *ayawaska* drinkers may at times also perform *koxonti* at the start of a session without focusing on a concrete target object.

15 This technique of imagined music or texts is also known among the Venezuelan Warao in *hoaratu* magical songs, see Olsen (1996: 259–260).

than one patients should be cured at the same time. *Koxonti*, on the other hand, is used by *médicos* in everyday situations anytime and anywhere, for example, for healing the neighbor's child of diarrhea, when handing over remedies as described above, for taking away bad dreams, and so on. Such 'small' treatments actually occupy most of a *médico*'s time of practical labor (again, except those who work with foreigners). It can easily be understood that—during such 'small' intervention—the *médico* does not sing aloud, in order to not attract the annoying attention of non-humans summoned in this way. Non-humans, as argued by Illius (1997: 216), understand the 'spirits' language', song. On the other hand, during long and intense rituals like *ayawaska* sessions, such confrontations are often sought actively. In reports about the *meráya* (the great healers of the past), it has to be noted that they did often not ingest *ayawaska*, but performed intense rituals including songs uttered loudly with pronounced lyrics, sometimes in masked voices (see below). Therefore it is wrong to see a connection of loud singing of magic songs with the *ayawaska* praxis. Instead, it is merely important that in everyday situations it is crucial not to attract potential danger by (unintentionally) summoning non-humans, but to restrict the latter to controlled and concentrated rituals. With that, it should also be clear that by concealing the lyrics it is not intended to hide the semantic contents from human audience but definitely from non-human audience (cf. Brabec de Mori 2011b: 429–430).

With this, the rare occurrence of loudly sung magic songs outside the *ayawaska* context is clear. In former times, when the *meráya*'s curing rituals without *ayawaska* ingestion was common, obviously such songs were performed. However, in some occasions until today, healers may sing loudly. In the two examples that follow, both singers sang songs aloud for my recordings by request. Otherwise, they would perform these songs as *koxonti* on a liquid their patients should then drink (water, or a plant remedy). The first excerpt is from a song for healing a child from diarrhea:

joxo yawish ainbaonra	The white armadillo woman
oripari yakayakakin	still is sitting over there
jakon akin tsosinai	and with great care she thickens,
jawen mewe tsosinai	she thickens the mud by wallowing,
mewe tsosinai	thickens the mud by wallowing <sup>16</sup> .

This is one sequence of three this singer performed. Here, he simply describes what the armadillo woman does: wallowing. While wallowing, the mud thickens.

16 Excerpt from a *bake benxoati* song (lines 11–15), performed in an explorative setting by Claudio Sánchez Serafín in Caco Macaya, 2004. All my recordings are archived at the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv, this one with signature number D 5346.

In the two preceding sequences, he mentions that both the white *ronsoco* woman (a big rodent) and the white agouti woman are sitting over there, eating sweet potatoes. With that he resumed what healing diarrhea is about: the child should eat proper food and his or her ‘mud’ should thicken, that is all. In the given context the method is interesting, because the healer achieves (we assume) healing success by mentioning these non-human people. That they are proper people (though not ‘Real People’) is expressed with the use of ‘woman’ (*ainbo*) instead of ‘female’ (*awin*) commonly used for animals. Remember that non-humans can hear, listen to, and understand sung words, ‘the spirits’ language’. In the present example text, these animal-persons are named and specifically attracted. How this mere attraction results in actual attachment is described in the following excerpt from a song for preparing a mother to give birth:

jishaman iká iki	Watch carefully how it is:
jene xaman rakata	she lies in the depth of the waters,
iwin tita rakata	there lies the ray’s mother.
ishkai pacha bake	After giving birth to hundreds of children
ataanan	
jawe iyamarairi	she is still unaffected.
jakipari yoinbanon	Towards her I am going to connect
ainboan yora	connect the women’s body <sup>17</sup> .
yoinbanon	

In two more sequences, the singer mentions the mothers of the fish *nosha* and *wame*, mentioning their perfectly slippery body—and connecting them to the woman. This connection is achieved with the term *yoinbanon*, from the verb *yointi*. The attentive reader remembers: *yo-iti* can be glossed as ‘charged.-with.power-to.be’ and can be translated as a mode of existence expressing power, or more simply as “to speak”. *Yo-iti* is intransitive, and *yo-i-n-(i)ti* is made transitive with the transitivity morpheme *-n-* (Valenzuela 2010: 71, 88). Imagining a transitive powerful mode of existence proves fairly difficult: ‘powerful existence’ which is usually expressed by speaking is applied on something or somebody. Imagining, one may achieve an impression that the ‘voiced existence’ is extended over the one who utters (the singer), the one he addresses (the mother) and the one he mentions (the ray). Grammatically speaking, this is a *raising-to-object* construction, allowing for certain qualities among those

17 Excerpt from a *bakemati* song (lines 6–13), performed in an explorative setting by Víctor Ancón Cruz in Caimito, 2005. Signature number D 5533. The ray, as naturalistic biology explains for us, does not give birth similar to mammals, but its spawn is kept in a portion of the mother’s body and the offspring leave it only after hatching out; therefore it appears that the mother-ray would give birth to living baby-rays.

mentioned to be shared, or more precisely, for their “active zones” constructed by such speech to interact (cf. Langacker 1999: 330–336). By *yointi*, transitive speaking, the singer establishes what I call a ‘performative ontological connection’ among them<sup>18</sup>. The ray-person is named and summoned (because the words are sung), the same with the human woman. With that they ‘meet’ and connect and the ray’s properties are transmitted (therefore ‘performative’). This takes place in the ‘real world’ of dream and visionary experiences of the *médicos*, where space and time are unmade and which hides behind the ‘virtual reality’ of physical existence (therefore ‘ontological’)<sup>19</sup>. When the song is over, the connection lingers and stays effective. In a similar sense as with *koxonti*, where the song stays in the substance, with *yointi*, the song stays in the ontological positions of addressees, which keep in active communication as long as the song ‘endures’ there. All this may appear fairly strange for readers not familiar with Amazonian indigenous ontologies. I may only add here, that in Shipibo understanding this is quite logical and well embedded in their ontology<sup>20</sup>. In the following, some processes will appear even stranger.

The third way of performing magic songs can be observed in rituals dedicated to curing one or more patients, usually during night-time. The powerful specialists of old, the *meráya*, so it is told, would enter the spirits’ world or transform into spirits themselves by the power of their concentration (*shinan*), by ingesting tobacco juice (*romoe poi*), and by the power of their voice. Nowadays it is common that the healers ingest the hallucinogenic plant preparation *ayawaska*.

An *ayawaska* session usually starts after nightfall, and when the common mosquito assault (from ca. 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.) has somewhat diminished. Usually, the healer, one or more patients, and relatives are present, sitting or lying on the floor inside a house (traditional Shipibo houses consist of an elevated floor and a palm-leaf roof but lack walls). At some point of talking about the patients’ problems, family issues, joking, and everyday dialogue, the healer will take a draft from his bottle containing *ayawaska*. The dialogue continues, until the drug shows first effects, indicated by the healer with initial masked sounds<sup>21</sup>. A

18 I am as ever grateful to my wife Laida Mori Silvano de Brabec who explained *yointi* among uncountable similarly difficult Shipibo terms to me. She is native in Shipibo language and her father was a *médico*, so she provides necessary prerequisites for understanding these issues which are seldom object of everyday Shipibo talk.

19 For the “real” vs. “virtual reality” see Santos-Granero (2006: 61); for the ontological concept involving performance among human and non-humans see Descola (2005). This communication is performative in Austin’s (1964) sense, because it includes the speech act as part of the effect, and the effect determines future agency.

20 Cf. Viveiros de Castro (1998), Descola (2005), Santos-Granero (2006), or Brabec de Mori (2011a, 2011b, forthcoming), among others.

21 The concept of voice masking in spirit transformation is well described by Olsen (1996: 159–162, 192) in the context of musical curing among the Warao.

hush falls and at some moment the healer starts singing. Usually a series of songs is performed for each patient. Finally, the healer stops singing, and people go to sleep without much fussing. Shipibo traditional *ayawaska* drinkers do not use ritual paraphernalia or spectacular openings or closings as in ceremonies staged for Westerners. The ritual time and space are defined by its mere application.

The basic conception within these rituals is the transformation (*yoshinti*, *naikiti*) of the healer into a non-human being in order to obtain a subject positionality different than, and a competence of manipulation more powerful than the common position of Shipibo people. During this state of altered positionality, the healer will sing songs of power by non-humans which he receives, or hears during his altered state of perception. He then imitates, translates and performs these originally non-human songs for the audience (especially for the patient). However, the main address of this singing is not the human audience in the ritual but the non-human beings that can now be directly addressed by the singing healer. Here, the singer's mode of existence is again heightened due to two effects: he is drunk (*paena*) with the hallucinogenic drug and he is singing. While the singer may directly experience synaesthetic perceptions in his altered state, the human audience is also confronted with a multimedia package: the singer changes his shape in the dark, by moving his body from one place in the ritual room to another, inhabiting different positions of transformation and often indicating this with certain gestures and postures<sup>22</sup>. In most cases, the healer also uses perfumes (in former times for example the *mapichi* fragrant plant, nowadays most often industrially produced perfumes like the popular *Agua Florida*) and provides massages (*xeyóti*) to the patient. Although it is usually pit dark at such rituals, almost all senses of the patients are stimulated.

The main source for orientation, however, are sounds, specifically the singer's voice. In both cases—in a *meráya*'s performance like in the past, without drug intake, and in *ayawaska* rituals—communication with and transformation into non-humans plays the crucial role. Thereby, two different conditions have to be distinguished: the singer can mimic (*paranti*) non-humans, or the singer can transform into (*naikiti*) non-humans (or even into other 'Real People'). This distinction can only be undertaken by the executing specialist himself reporting on his own experience, because the observable phenomenology of applied voice production is similar in the conditions of *paranti* and *naikiti*.

The mentioned masked sounds at the beginning of an *ayawaska* session indicate the healer's transformation. The use of (visual) masks in Amazonian

22 This kind of postures must not be confused with Felicitas Goodman's "shamanic" postures in popular neoshamanism. Here, the posture is not taken in order to reach an altered state, but it is an effect of transformation of the singer who already inhabits an altered state. The posture is perceived visually (!) by the audience in the gloom as if the singer would have changed his shape into something non-human.

societies is explained by Viveiros de Castro (1998: 482): Wearing a mask does not provide the mask with life, but it provides the wearer with an alternative body. These masks are not like carnival masks but are used similar to diving suits or astronaut's space suits. They enable the wearer to navigate in regions usually inaccessible for 'Real Humans'. The same is true for voice masks, however with said distinction: when mimicking, the healer retains his humanness (like wearing a carnival mask) but deceives others with his voice's sound. When transforming, Viveiros de Castro's description applies: the voice mask provides a heightened power of *yointi* to the singer, dependent on who he transforms into. These non-humans, according to animism, perceive themselves as humans, too. In the healer's self-perception, he therefore still retains humanness, but now, because he is re-located in the world aspect (*niwe*) of the non-humans he transformed into. But the healer's audience now hears the non-human's voice and sees a different shape of the healer's physical appearance in the gloom. He is now something else: *jara moa yoshina* (he is now transformed into a spirit).

It is commonly known in literature about *ayawaska* singing, that the singers claim to 'receive the songs from the spirits'. However, by analyzing a broad corpus of recorded performances by different *médicos*, one will be aware that actually the musical structures and basic lyrics are transmitted from father to son, of from teacher to student. It was not yet recognised<sup>23</sup> that 'a song' in Western Amazonian ontologies is not defined by its musical and textual structure as in Western understanding (where most 'songs' are written down and therefore fixed in structure). A 'song' is defined by its actual performance, and every rendering of similar (musical or textual) structures is another 'song'. Consequently, it is not the structure, which is transmitted from the spirits, but the form of the actual performance: additionally uttered unique lyrics phrases and most importantly the performance style. The applied voice mask defines pitch, intonation, timbre, tempo, and accentuation. A musical structure, obviously a 'Real Human song', is therefore rendered in the way the respective non-humans sing. Voice masks include for example a nasal singing style, high tempo, or on the contrary, a grave voice with throat-generated roughness. The most common mask is a high falsetto voice, with or without nasalization. The 'brilliant voice' (*wirish*) indicates current contact with powerful non-humans or super-humans (like the *chaikoni jonibo* or the *Inka*).

Almost ridiculously high falsetto singing is also a common feature of 'secular' singing at drinking feasts, for example. One male singer, Benjamín Mahua, performed a drinking song in a pitch reaching a4 (877 Hz), while his wife Antonia Ahuanari still clearly pronounced her lyrics at a pitch of c5 (1,023 Hz).

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23 I have presented a more detailed analysis of song transmission and performance styles in a conference paper (Brabec de Mori 2007).

This raises the question, if high falsetto singing is but ‘only a culturally determined stylistic feature’ of Shipibo singing in general and therefore is also applied in magical singing (dismissing voice masking as fantasy). On the other hand, and I adhere to this interpretation, could voice masking also be performed in non-magical singing, in drinking songs, or love songs? If yes, why?

In a prior section, I presented an explanation that the ascription of animal identities in love songs is a prescriptive act, or a performative speech act. Here, we have to consider that the singers are still rooted in Amazonian ontology: they do not think like sociologists, but while singing, they use “the spirits’ language”—this also applies for drinking songs. Non-humans would understand this language and therefore be attracted by singing. The singers therefore make sure that not the dangerous water demons, for example, are attracted (by applying a hollow, low voice with slight staccato, for example), but instead powerful entities viewed as positive, benevolent, and superhuman (as the *chaikoni jonibo*, for example, or bird-persons). If the male singer, in his love song, addresses a beautiful girl with the bird-person identity of *bontoish*, he ideally performs this song in high falsetto voice. This mask provides him with a voice that can be understood by the *bontoish*-bird-people who therefore may establish an ontological connection with the girl, in a way similar to *yointi* in magical singing.

However, there is a difference to be noted which sheds more light on the power of voice and masked voice: In magical songs, the singer does not identify his patient directly with the non-humans. In the example texts, the armadillo woman, or the ray’s mother were mentioned in third-person perspective, not in second-person address like a *bontoish* in a love song. This is due to the ‘powerfully charged voice’ of magical specialists, who have the *boman* skill. In magical singing for curing, the connection is established by *yointi*, but no direct identification takes place. If the *médico* would directly address for example the child as armadillo, by the *boman*-power of his voice, he would initiate the child’s transformation into an armadillo, resulting in madness, and death. This technique, however, can be applied in sorcery.

A non-*médico* lacking *boman* power can therefore directly associate the desired girl with a bird in order to establish an ontological connection. A *médico*, when applying his *boman* voice, on the other hand, has to be rather careful in doing so in order not to transmit his own transformative faculty on his patient.

Considering this analysis of singing in Shipibo life, it should be obvious by now why it is no good to carelessly sing along when working (worst if working alone in the woods), or why children who play at the edge of the forest or on the river’s shore should better not sing funny tunes. Singing, *iti* is a special mode of existence which puts one into a position of possible communication with any non-human beings, from the *chaikoni jonibo* who are generally seen as benevolent though however fierce enemies when annoyed, to animals, to forest ogres,

even to deadly diseases like smallpox brought by the smallpox-persons *moro jonibo*. It is no good to enter this mode of communication if one does not know very well about inter-species diplomacy.

## Electrification without Electricity

Amazonian voices do not depend on electrification, nor do they usually suffer from it or are violated by it. As was shown in the examples at the beginning of this chapter, Shipibo people and their neighboring indigenous groups integrate their use of *radiofonía*, radio programmes, telephone and tape, CD or DVD recorders or players into their daily life and their ontology quite easily. When living in the Ucayali valley, I had the clear impression that most indigenous people had much less problems with and were much less skeptical about technological innovations than for example, the Austrians (where cell phones are suspected to cause brain tumors, high-speed trains may cause swollen feet, internet use will damage children's development, etc).

Electrification is used in many ways, but most interesting is voice electrification without involving electricity in the narrow sense. In the following example text, an old singer sung her remembrance of how she used to sing decades ago at the big drinking festivities:

nokon joi <i>rario</i>	My voice/song (was similar to the) radio
<i>tískon ewa makina</i>	(like the) big machine for playing discs.
manetaitoninbi	(My song was) the one maintaining (the rhythm)
<i>tori ewa nakewe</i>	inside the great tower with designs on its interior,
<i>chei xawan joyoya</i>	(where) macaws and parrots (danced) in a row.
manetaitoninbi	The one who maintained (the rhythm),
<i>tsoawanin xaranya</i>	was surrounded by <i>tsoawa</i> -birds <sup>24</sup> .

Here, loanwords from Spanish are used as metaphors for an impressive singing style that does not falter and makes people dance. The radio and the disc player are metaphors for the singer's strong voice which sounds as if it were played from a record. The great tower with designs on the inside stands for the situation of the festivity where all people and objects are as fairly decorated as possible, in particular for the circle of dancers when performing the *mashá* round-dance: all dancers face each other in the circle, so they can see the garments embroidered or painted with designs and the likewise painted faces of their fellow dancers.

<sup>24</sup> Excerpt from an *itiki iká* song (lines 19–26) performed by Carmen Pérez Medina in Paococha, 2004. Signature number D 5243.

The macaws and other birds refer to the dancers, too (in the prescriptive sense explained above).

Also in magical singing, electric apparatus appear:

<i>inkanrai</i> jonibo	The royal <i>Inka</i> persons,
<i>rios rai</i> jonibo	divine royal persons,
noara ikanai	we are singing.
benebenebetani	Together we enjoy ourselves,
<i>makinanin</i> bewai	the machine is singing.
bewábewabetani	We all sing together,
<i>radionin</i> bewai	the radio is singing.
mochan bewabetani	Together, (we are) singing a <i>mocha</i> song,
noara bekanairi	as we are closing in <sup>25</sup> .

This is an excerpt from the lyrics of a ritual song called *mochai*. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explain the *mochai* ritual, but it shall be said here that when it was still performed many decades ago it served for either summoning, worshipping or healing (in the case of eclipse) the sun or the moon, and at the same time for summoning all sorts of powerful spiritual beings (here, the *Inka* persons) and for temporarily transforming into or merging with them (see Brabec de Mori 2011b: 447 – 464). It seems that this ritual was a main instrument for the Shipibo to collectively negotiate their position among their peer inhabitants of their animist ontology. The singer who sang this recorded song in particular however provided an interpretation for current performance of such songs: he said that he would use this kind of ritual songs still for healing cases of severe witchcraft (*saladera*). By summoning and merging with the *Inka* persons in a symbolical way (or during a night-time ritual in a fairly convincing way), the singer bestows their superior healing and cleaning power upon his patient. Here, the singer also mentions powerful Spanish loanwords, namely *rey* (king) and *Dios* (God), as well as the machine and the radio again. In the same way as above, the radio and machine are not meant as a description of actual reproduction of recorded music in the same situation, but a prescriptive attribution of power to the singing voice, which should sound firm and without errors as if it would be played from a record.

Among the specialists for magic singing, in particular those who perform their hour-long renderings under the influence of *ayawaska*, radio and recording metaphors are frequently used. In their songs they often refer to lightning and electricity in general, to telephones, satellite communication, parabolic

25 Excerpt from a *mochai* song (lines 16 – 24) performed in an explorative setting by Virgilio López Córdova in Vista Alegre de Iparía, 2004. Signature number D 5291.

antennae, cell phones, and internet chatting. These items are used as tools for summons, mimesis and transformation in exactly the same way as *chaikoni jonibo*, *Inka*, spirits, plants, animals, rivers, clouds and so on are addressed as was described in the preceding sections of this chapter—and therefore, of course, their use is efficient in the indigenous sense. If using electrification in an indigenous way, without involving actual electricity as Westerners would understand it but summoning the power which is hidden in the ‘real reality’ behind cables and bulbs, electrified voices do work well.

### Conclusion: Why Electrified Voices do not Work

When I had recently started fieldworking I was surprised to encounter only very few difficulties when asking indigenous people to record their songs. Contrary to all my expectations, people were eager to have their voices recorded, even when performing presumably secret magic songs, in explorative settings as well as during current rituals. When I returned to the singers and their communities with tapes and edited CDs, they were highly appreciated and listened to sometimes enthusiastically, if possible via the village’s loudspeaker.

I noticed that among the Shipibo, a broad category of song topics could be called *itiki iká* (sung about singing). Many songs about other specific topics were preceded or concluded with some phrases of *itiki iká* when performed in an explorative setting in front of my microphone. I was particularly surprised that this was not done among inexperienced singers, but mainly by renowned and highly experienced ones. It seems that they cared very much about what happened to their voice:

<i>makinanin</i>	biboxon je	The machine receives it,
<i>enkaya</i>	bibokin	(like) I receive it myself,
<i>jana rebon</i>	bibokin je	(like I) receive it at the tip of the tongue,
<i>pino jana rebonbi</i>		at the tip of the hummingbird’s tongue.
<i>makexonbokin</i>		(In the same way as I) make it resound well
<i>yamin ewan makekin</i>		the great metal makes it resound,
<i>jakaya boai</i>		(the metal) carries (the voice) itself away
<i>jawen jeman boai</i>		it carries (the voice) to his home country
<i>abaaon yoikin</i>		and there, they will talk about
<i>joi jakon bixonki je</i>		receiving this very good voice/song. <sup>26</sup>

26 Excerpt from an *itiki iká* song (lines 76–85) performed by Roberto Dávila Barbarán at Sinuya river, 2005. Signature number D 5461.

I translated *biti* as “receive” in the whole passage in order to underline the parallel process marked by the singer who was also a healer, when choosing the same word for describing how he receives songs from non-human beings during *samá* ‘diets’ and rituals and how my DAT-recorder received his own very good song. He also is concerned about the song’s fate: he predicts that after carrying it to my home country, me and my fellow ethnomusicologists will talk about how I received the song, which proved entirely correct. Predictions ranged from such easily imaginable situations to the imagination that I will earn a lot of “round brilliant metal” (which was not yet fulfilled), and also addressed some more precise details of my fieldwork’s effects:

ramakaya ixonban Right now I am going to sing  
 non joi bixonki and our voice/song (the researcher) received  
 jaribi banexon (he will also) leave here (with us),  
 chiní aniaibo (so that) the youngest ones,  
 chiní aniaibaonki the youngest ones while growing  
 jakaya ninkanon can listen to this very (voice/song)<sup>27</sup>.

However, although the machine ‘receives’ the voice or song, and it’s reproduction may serve for research presentations, earning some coins, or educating children, recorded magical songs do not work. Why?

I have shown in this chapter, that profound analysis of indigenous singing styles, singing contexts, and song lyrics can shed new light on concepts known in anthropology (animism, mimesis, perspectivism). The anthropological theories in general rely much on analyzing mythology and other narratives, on kinship relations, warfare, eating and being eaten, and most of all on visual descriptions and clues. Therefore, techniques like ‘existing charged with power’ (speaking), ‘using the spirits’ language’ (singing), or ‘establishing performative ontological connections’ (naming in song) have hitherto been treated peripherally at most. But analyzing the audible helps us to encounter elaborate models (like *yointi*) which allow for magical action and manipulation.

I repeat what I said in the beginning: the term ‘magical’ I have to apply because there is no scientific measure available that could grasp the substantiality of voice. For indigenous Shipibo people, this does not pose a problem, and they do not perceive their voices’ effect as magical, but as something logically embedded within their ontology. Vice versa, for example, for Westerners it is logical that substances contained in certain medicaments are received like keys in a lock by enzymes produced in the human body, and therefore are effective—a

27 Excerpt from an *itiki iká* song (lines 22–27) performed by Antonia Ahuanari Medina in Paococha, 2004. Signature number D 5230.

concept absolutely absurd for indigenous people who therefore perceive the effectiveness of these medicaments as something ‘magical’.

A portrait photograph—this is even fairly obvious to Westerners—does not contain the whole physicality of the depicted person. In the same way, a recording does not contain the substantiality of sounds, or of voices. The recording may carry the voice away and conserve it for the younger generation, but it is an image of the voice, like a photograph. In both cases, also the image carries meaning and a certain magical potentiality implicit to the mimetic faculty of image-producing machinery<sup>28</sup>. The image or recording would be again a tool for magical actions or manipulations. Often, for instance in love magic, a photograph of the one to conquer is positioned on an altar, for example, or soaked in a prepared perfume, or whatsoever. Anyway, it is a mimetic object but not an agent. A recorded voice is definitely not apt to reproduce the original magical effects of *koxonti*, *yointi* or *naikiti* by being played. When considering these techniques, it should be clear by now why recordings of magical songs do not work properly. The *koxonti* recording does not simultaneously think the proper lyrics when played. A CD player’s existence is not ‘heightened’ when singing. The singer has to be a person (human or non-human) to be able to musically socialize with non-humans whose properties are then transmitted. When a CD player reproduces nasal falsetto sound, no listener will mistake the machine with a shape-shifted healer who embodies a tree-person apt to cure an illness. Like the physical body escapes from being captured by a camera’s photon ingestion, the substance of voice which is responsible for its magical potential is not by any means affected by a microphone’s registration of periodic air pressure change.

Maybe, this substantiality of voices—and of sound in general—hitherto unacknowledged in naturalism, results at the one hand in effective techniques of voice-based magic in indigenous societies, and similarly, on the other hand, in this great and well known difference between a live concert and a CD recording in Western societies. Although a recording can be touching and emotionally moving, it does not work properly, as music in live performance works.

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28 This is brilliantly shown by Michael Taussig (1993) with many references to the philosophy of Walter Benjamin.

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