

the role of words in Aguaruna hunting magic

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In the world of the Aguaruna, a Jivaroan people of the Upper Amazon, the spider monkey (*Ateles* sp.) holds a special place. With epicurean zeal, the Aguaruna extol the virtues of its flesh, which has a thick layer of fat during the times of year when wild fruit is locally abundant. The spider monkey is also an animal whose cleverness and caution challenge the skill of even the best hunter. For these and other reasons it is regarded as the quintessential game species.

The special position of this primate in Aguaruna thought is evident in the myth of Tsewa, the primordial spider monkey. The myth explains that Tsewa possessed knowledge of hunting implements and magic at a time when the ancestors could kill monkeys only by the inelegant method of climbing trees under cover of darkness and then clubbing the sleeping monkeys with a stick. Tsewa generously shared his knowledge with an Aguaruna man, who repaid this kindness by using the newly acquired skills to prey upon Tsewa's kin. Enraged by such an egregious breach of trust, Tsewa broke the man's blowgun and rammed one piece into his anus, thereby transforming the hapless hunter into the *uum washi*¹ (literally, "blowgun spider monkey") the Aguaruna hunt today. Since this new form of monkey retained its previous knowledge of hunting skills, it is particularly adept at eluding its hunters and escaping even the most carefully aimed dart (Chumap Lucía and García-Rendueles 1979:277).

Contemporary hunters outwit the wary spider monkey by various means, prominent among which is the performance of special songs. These songs are said to exert a powerful attracting force that leads the monkeys to abandon their usual caution. The following is a free translation of one hunting song known to men of the Alto Río Mayo, Peru, where my field research was conducted. It illustrates what Tambiah (1968:200) calls "anticipatory effect" in that it describes the ideal outcome of each stage of a specific task before the task is actually performed.

In their interpretations of magical acts and utterances, anthropologists frequently argue that magic and technology are informed by two different kinds of logic, the former "expressive" in character, the latter "instrumental." A close analysis of magical hunting songs used by the Aguaruna of Amazonian Peru reveals that the songs are part of a general ordering process that encompasses the strategic use of thoughts, speech, objects, and acts to achieve practical ends. In Aguaruna thought the expressive imagery of magical songs is an instrumental tool that shapes events in the performer's world. [magic, ritual language, symbolic/cognitive analysis, native peoples of Amazonia]

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Song 1. The spider monkeys come
 The spider monkeys come
 From their hill they come
 The spider monkeys come
 With their stiff children they come
 Without seeing me they come
 From this hill they come
 From that hill, too, they come
 I will shoot the spider monkey [using a blowgun]
 High, high, I will shoot
 High, high, I will shoot
 Turning, turning, I twist kapok onto the dart
 Turning, turning, I twist kapok onto the dart
 This monkey I will shoot
 High, high, I will lift it [with the force of the dart]
 Like manioc pierced
 High, high, I will lift it
 I will shoot to its *wampa* fruit [i.e., intestines]
 I will shoot to its *wampa* fruit
 Piercingly I will shoot
 Piercingly I will shoot
 I go, never missing the spider monkey
 I go, never missing the spider monkey

For the Aguaruna hunter, this song and others like it are as much a part of his practical knowledge as are familiarity with animal behavior or the proper use of a blowgun. The myth of Tsewa stresses the simultaneous acquisition of hunting magic and hunting technology. This apparent juxtaposition of an expressive medium—song—and an instrumental one—hunting technology—raises questions that have troubled anthropologists for decades: What are the properties of songs or spells that make such beliefs plausible? How are words supposed to derive their efficacy? And is this efficacy of the same or of a different order from the principles of material causality as understood by the practitioners of magic? These questions shape the following analysis of the role of words in Aguaruna hunting practices. My goal is to explain how the Aguaruna integrate speech with other means of achieving control in the material world—that is, how speech becomes part of their repertoire of order-producing operations that are ultimately underwritten by a logic of practical effect.

theoretical background

Everyone agrees that words do things, but precisely what they do and how they do it have long been the subject of fierce debate in philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology. Magical texts pose a particularly difficult case for language theorists for at least two reasons. First, they often consist of arcane language whose relation to the intended goals of the spell resists easy interpretation. This suggests that magical language may be informed by rules different from those operative in ordinary speech. Second, the magician's belief in the "mystical" efficacy of spells usually stands in marked contrast to the thoroughly "empirical" attitude prevailing in the practical activities that magic is intended to expedite (Evans-Pritchard 1937).

Malinowski's (1935) *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* contributes to the resolution of the first issue by showing that Trobriand spells are generally intelligible once one understands the conventions of the magical idiom. Tambiah's (1968) celebrated reanalysis of Malinowski's data carries this project further by demonstrating that the purpose of the spell is to make a symbolic transfer of desired properties from one substance to another through the strategic use of figurative language. Subsequent studies have unraveled the complexities of

magical language with notable subtlety and precision (e.g., Strathern and Strathern 1968; Rosaldo 1975; Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975) while establishing the link between magic and other forms of “metaphoric predication” (Fernandez 1974).

The question of how, or whether, magicians perceive their magic to work has proved less amenable to resolution. Skorupski (1976) argues that anthropologists are divided into two camps on this issue: one faction (the “intellectualists”) asserts that magic and other forms of ritual should be understood in terms of indigenous notions of cause and effect; the other (the “symbolists”) insists that ritual acts are expressive phenomena the rationale of which can be revealed only through hermeneutic analysis. Beattie (1970:245) states the symbolist position concisely when he contends that a magician knows that “when he was making magic he was performing a rite, not applying laws of nature, however dimly apprehended.” Tambiah’s analysis of Trobriand magic follows a similar path.² Despite his reservations about some of Malinowski’s conclusions, Tambiah stands by Malinowski’s statement that the Trobrianders do not confuse magic with technology. Magic “inaugurates” practical work but does not form part of it. With characteristic elegance, Tambiah (1968:202) states his case as follows:

It is a truer tribute to the savage mind to say that, rather than being confused by verbal fallacies or acting in defiance of known physical laws, it ingeniously conjoins the expressive and metaphorical properties of language with the operational and empirical processes of technical activity. . . . Let me emphasize that there is only a simulation involved here.

The expressive/instrumental distinction upon which this argument rests begins to look less plausible when examined closely. How, for example, do we know when an act is instrumental and when it is expressive? Leach (1976), who shares with Beattie and Tambiah the conviction that one must distinguish between these two types of phenomena, defines them in the following way. Instrumental acts (or “technical acts,” as Leach prefers to call them) “serve to alter the physical state of the world out there—digging a hole in the ground, boiling an egg,” and so on. Expressive acts “simply say something about the state of the world as it is, or else purport to change it by metaphysical means” (1976:9). As an example of the difference between instrumental and expressive acts, Leach contrasts the Sinhalese peasant who uses a hammer to drive a stake into the ground with one who stands still and utters a spell when faced with a charging elephant; the latter expressive action is “palpably quite different *in kind*” from the former instrumental action (1976:30). This case illustrates the muddle into which Leach has gotten himself, for surely the man who stands still as the elephant charges is doing something quite “instrumental” from our point of view and, no doubt, from his. Nor can Leach’s formulation be reconciled with accounts that, following Marx, demonstrate the expressive quality of practical labor itself. Purposeful acts always “say something about the state of the world” even as they endeavor to change it.

It is in the analysis of the use of objects for magical ends that symbolist theories face their greatest challenge. Leach mentions direct physical contact as an important defining characteristic of instrumental acts, yet even a brief review of the literature turns up cases in which direct contact is essential for “expressive” magical procedures to have an effect.³ Obvious examples include the practice of bringing a love charm into contact with the object of one’s affection or the procedures by which plant substances are rubbed on a hunter’s weapon. Tambiah (1968:194) argues that this use of objects merely mimics technology by “clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action.” While Tambiah’s claim that metaphor and analogy figure in this process is surely correct, one cannot assume a priori that the performer sees this metaphorical act as inherently different from an operational one.

There has been a curious reluctance to challenge the validity of the expressive/instru-

mental distinction in a direct way.⁴ Some recent analyses of magic have offered compelling evidence that people do believe in the practical efficacy of their magic and have spelled out in explicit terms how this magic articulates with culture-specific notions of causality. Ahern (1979:9), for example, reports that at least some Chinese rituals represent “strong illocutionary acts” in that the performer “regards considerations related to the effect of his act as relevant, intends his act to have certain consequences, and wants what he requests.” In other words, the Chinese are concerned with something beyond the felicity of their rituals: they want them to change the world in a palpable way. In an analysis of magical concepts in Kiriwina, Trobriand Islands, Weiner (1983:702) asserts that magic is believed to “activate a range of agents (Malinowski’s medium) in the physical environment.” The practical efficacy of magic is ultimately based on Kiriwina notions of the ontological role of speech and the way figurative language can be used to project the will from the narrow confines of “personal space” to the wider world of social relations and objects.

I return to the Aguaruna case to apply the insights of Ahern and Weiner to an Amazonian setting. I first analyze the form and meaning of hunting songs and establish their links to broader cosmological concepts. This provides the framework for a more general account of the underlying logic of spells and nonverbal forms of magic.

Aguaruna hunting songs

Like most native peoples of the Upper Amazon, the Aguaruna are excellent hunters, adept at imitating animal calls and employing their finely honed tracking skills to locate game. As Ross (1978) and others have noted, however, game is unevenly distributed in the neotropics, so that even the best hunter may return empty-handed from a day’s trek in the forest. To improve their prospects of success, Aguaruna men make use of procedures that qualify as magic from the standpoint of Western natural science: the preparation of several kinds of attracting medicines and charms (Brown in press), the search for visions that ensure good hunting, the private performance of hunting songs, and the careful avoidance of behavior that may cause an affliction called *shimpankamu*, the chronic inability to find game. These procedures are not marked by a general cover term, nor is there convincing evidence that the Aguaruna perceive them as being different in kind from other sorts of goal-directed behavior.⁵

Hunting songs form a subset of the category *anen*, a genre of songs possessing formidable manipulative powers. Hunting songs are specifically referred to as *washi anen* (“spider monkey *anen*”), in recognition of their mythical source and the special status given to spider monkeys by the Aguaruna. *Anen* differ from ordinary social songs (*nampét*) in several respects. Their lyrics draw upon an esoteric vocabulary that is rich in onomatopoeia, mythical allusions, and borrowings from other Jivaroan languages. The Aguaruna insist that the words and music of *anen* come directly from the ancestors. Social songs, in contrast, are invented on the spur of the moment during drinking parties. Furthermore, use of *anen* requires more than knowledge of their words and music; one must have acquired the songs through a ritual transfer of tobacco water from teacher to pupil, followed by a rigorous fast that gives the songs force and prevents them from “running away” (i.e., escaping from their new owner). Once learned in this manner, *anen* can be repeated quietly as one walks in the forest or sung silently in one’s thoughts. *Anen* have greater efficacy when sung after taking a small quantity of tobacco water through the nasal passages, although the slight intoxication thus produced is not absolutely obligatory for the song to have its effect.

Since the primary purpose of hunting *anen* is to attract game, it should come as no surprise that symbols of attraction are prominent in the imagery of the songs. In Song 2, for ex-

ample, the singer likens himself to a bird called *wiisham*, which is said to have a beautiful call that both charms the listener and inspires confidence:

Song 2. I am your *wiisham*
Friend *wiisham*
Wiisham that loves
Friend *wiisham*
Your *wiisham*
Wiisham of the curassow [*Mitu mitu*]
Unerring *wiisham* [i.e., with darts that can't miss]
Spider monkey *wiisham*
Your *wiisham*
Wiisham that loves
I do not err with spider monkey
Your *wiisham*
Friend *wiisham*⁶

The man who recorded Song 2 stated that the *wiisham* is mentioned repeatedly “so that the singer will attract monkeys like the *wiisham* attracts men.” Yet he also remarked that this *anen* is supposed to be performed when hunting in the company of one’s youngest wife, suggesting that there is an implicit sexual dimension to the attraction sought by the singer. This erotic subtext is more clearly displayed in Song 3, which a man uses while hunting with a widow he has recently taken as a wife.

Song 3. I join with the widow
I join with the widow
With the friend I join
Unerring, I join
With attractive Kagkuí [woman’s name]
I join, I join
With attractive Kagkuí
I join, I join

The verb translated here as “to join with” (*tsanit*) is glossed by the phrase “to form a friendship” in Larson’s (1966) Aguaruna-Spanish dictionary. But in common speech the verb also denotes sexual liaisons. The immediate sense of the song, according to the people I queried, is that the hunter seeks to avoid the possibility that the woman’s presence might frighten away game animals. In the words of one man, the *anen* is saying to the animals: “Join with the widow, Kagkuí, who attracts monkeys. She is your friend. Don’t fight with her or fear her.” The woman is thus used as sexual bait to attract game.

Sex and hunting are inextricably linked in Jivaroan thought, as they are in other parts of the Amazon (Kensing 1983). Harner (1972:81–82) reports that the Shuar or Jivaro proper consider hunting trips to be an ideal opportunity for husband and wife to enjoy sexual intimacy, a view that is shared by the Aguaruna. Aguaruna men will sometimes talk in a sentimental way about the hunting trips they made with a young wife, the man carrying his firearm or blowgun, the woman tending to the hunting dogs. My own observations indicate that these trips are fairly rare, mostly for practical reasons—usually the need for women to perform garden work or look after children. Nevertheless, the husband-wife hunting team remains a cultural ideal and a key image in hunting songs. This connection finds mythic expression in the link between Etsa, the sun’s human form (often referred to as Shakaim in hunting *anen*⁷), and Nugkui, the powerful feminine being who taught women how to cultivate plants (Brown and Van Bolt 1980:171). Each is a strongly condensed “master image” (Whitten 1978:839) that stands for competence in male and female tasks. Together they exemplify the complementary skills that allow society to perpetuate itself. The collaboration of an Etsa-like man and a Nugkui-like woman produces a beneficial synergism, the results in a sense being greater than the sum of the parts.

The notion of beneficial complementarity is not, however, entirely free of contradic-

tions. In some instances one sex can endanger the success of tasks associated with the other. When men clear a new swidden, the woman who will subsequently cultivate the garden performs special *anen* that prevent the plant-destroying activities of the men from damaging her growth-promoting powers. Similarly, men recognize that the presence of women, who do not generally possess the magical knowledge needed to attract game, may frighten animals away. The sexual activity associated with conjugal hunting trips presents further perils, as described in the following account:

When a man has intercourse with his wife while hunting spider monkeys, his blowgun sometimes becomes jealous. The blowgun says, "You have committed adultery with my wife." Then it won't shoot straight. To cure this, the man must give the blowgun to his wife to carry for awhile. The blowgun then says, "Everything's fine because I have had sexual relations with my wife." After that, the blowgun shoots straight and the man can kill monkeys again.

Such contradictory sentiments with respect to gender roles and sexuality are by no means restricted to the domain of hunting magic. Suffice it to say that contact between the sexes is perceived as being fraught with dangers and at the same time potentially fruitful. In this sense, the collaboration of spouses is similar to headhunting. The headhunting raids of the past carried significant risks, yet when a man took an enemy head he ritually transformed its dangerous soul substance into a source of life-giving power for himself and his family. The symbols of conjugal hunting derive their expressive power from the underlying tension between the benefits and risks of bringing together the distinct realms of men and women.

The way that notions of male and female complementarity can be used to construct an imagery of hunting success is evident in Song 4, a more elaborate variant of Song 2:

Song 4. Gatherer *wiisham*
Wiisham that loves curassow
Gathering, gathering *wiisham*
Wiisham that loves game
Wiisham that loves the deer
Wiisham that loves the partridge
Gatherer *wiisham*
I will have a miscarriage for curassow
To the Nugkui woman [i.e., the singer's wife]
I will give a miscarriage for curassow
Tsewa, Tsewa [ancestral spider monkey]
Make me find spider monkey
I will have a miscarriage for spider monkey
I will have a miscarriage for monkey fat
To the Nugkui woman
I will give a miscarriage for monkey fat . . .

The meaning of "miscarriage" in this song merits clarification. The Aguaruna say that pregnant women are subject to intense food cravings which, if left unsatisfied, can induce miscarriage (*usupágbau*). When a pregnant woman feels a strong desire for specific foods, her husband does his best to satisfy that desire if at all possible. The idea central to miscarriage, that an unfulfilled desire can result in physical harm to the desirer, is even extended to illnesses of men. There is, for example, a category of illness called "vagina miscarriage" (*chuki usupágbau*) that may afflict a young man experiencing a strong desire for a woman who spurns his affections. This illness manifests itself by a set of symptoms similar to those of true miscarriage (e.g., intense abdominal pains) and is treated by a similar set of techniques.

The allusions to miscarriage in Song 4 mean that the hunter's desire to find game is very strong and that he might suffer harm if it is not satisfied immediately. This miscarriage is then transferred to his wife ("To the Nugkui woman / I will give a miscarriage for monkey fat"). As noted earlier, women are consistently identified with Nugkui in magical songs, but

in this case the identification is particularly significant given the Aguaruna's belief that Nugkui cannot suffer a miscarriage, owing to her legendary ability to produce any sort of food simply by commanding it to appear. Chants used to treat miscarriage invoke the name of Nugkui precisely for this reason. Nugkui never lacks for food, so by definition she cannot have a miscarriage caused by unfulfilled food cravings. The implication is that if a man transfers his strong desire for meat to a "Nugkui woman," she will use her Nugkui-derived powers to help him find game.

The next song was recorded by a man who explained that it is to be sung at dawn after a man has instructed his wife to feed the dog in preparation for the day's hunt.

Song 5. Nugkui woman, Nugkui woman
 Instead of lying sleepily
 You arise
 To my wild dog *putúkam* [*Ictyon venaticus*]
 The chewed manioc
 May you give
 The mouth of new tobacco
 May you give
 The hand of new tobacco
 May you give

 The son of the wild dog *maigkú* [*Atelocynus microtus?*]
Ja ja ja jata [onomatopoeic: barking dog]
 I shall let loose
 The branch of new *baikuá* [a hallucinogen; *Brugmansia* sp.]
 Being difficult to harm
Ja ja ja jata
 I shall let loose
 The son of *tsajak* [reference obscure; possibly a mythical race of large dogs]
 Keen, keen its sense of smell
Ja ja ja jata
 I shall let loose . . .

 Brother, brother [i.e., the dog]
 What do you think can happen to you?
 Sadly you awake
 Is it your own bad dreams?
 Scraping hesitantly your claws
 You are
 You go, you go
 I, I
 Having dreamed armadillo
 I awake
 Having dreamed agouti
 I awake
 Having dreamed paca
 I awake
 Having dreamed peccary
 I awake

 A Shakaim man, a Shakaim man
 I too say
 I too following
 Nugkui woman, Nugkui woman
 You, you,
 Do you confuse the wild dog *putúkam*?
 Sad you arise [as if from a bad dream]
 I, I
 Having dreamed armadillo
 I awake, etc.

Song 5 opens with the command that the woman, again referred to as "Nugkui woman," feed chewed manioc to the hunting dog. She is then told to give the dog "the mouth of new tobacco" and the "hand of new tobacco." These two metaphors were subject to various in-

terpretations by Aguaruna consultants, but most felt that here tobacco stands for magical songs in general, since the transfer of tobacco juice is so closely associated with the performance of *anen*. The song therefore implies that the singer is urging his wife to use her newest and most powerful *anen* to bring luck to the hunting dog. This stanza shows an elegant progression of images: “chewed manioc” becomes “the mouth of new tobacco” (i.e., tobacco recently chewed to prepare tobacco juice essential for the transfer of songs), then “the hand of new tobacco” (i.e., the hand that transfers the juice to the recipient of the song). By this process of linguistic substitution, something ordinary (chewed manioc) becomes something powerful (chewed tobacco).

At no point in Song 5 is the hunting dog referred to by the ordinary word “dog” (*yawāa*). Instead, a variety of pseudonyms are used, at least two being the names of wild canines. The more prominent of the two is *putúkam* (*Ictyon venaticus*), a species noted for its speed and keen sense of smell. Reportedly, *putúkam* are sometimes captured, tamed, and taught to perform as hunting dogs (Guallart 1962:159). The use of the names of wild dogs instead of the ordinary word “dog” summons an image of swiftness and cunning that the common word cannot convey.

The last two stanzas of Song 5 allude to the dreams of the hunter, his wife, and the dog itself. Dreams are important omens of hunting success and are often a critical factor in determining whether a man will set off into the forest to hunt. Favorable dreams take various forms: a dream of embracing an attractive woman is an omen that one will encounter *paca*; a dream of handling a string of beads foretells that a hunter will soon be handling peccary tripe, and so on. People maintain that through these dreams a man “kills the soul” of a game animal. To take advantage of the soul killing, the hunter must immediately arise and set off in search of the animal. The final stanzas of Song 5 imply that although both the dog and the woman have had unfavorable dreams, the singer has had good dreams: “Having dreamed armadillo, I awake / Having dreamed agouti, I awake,” and so on. These lines declare the hunter’s infallibility, in effect saying, “The bad dreams of others are irrelevant since my good dreams will prevail.”

To summarize the properties of the hunting *anen* known to the Alto Mayo Aguaruna, it can be said that the songs consist of a densely constructed series of images built upon an esoteric lexicon and highly figurative language. People consider the songs to be both aesthetically pleasing and practically efficacious. One key image of the songs is the conjugal hunting unit—Shakaim man and Nugkui woman—which is a cultural ideal representing the fruitful collaboration of husband and wife. This relation is prominent in the songs because they attempt to create a second, auxiliary order that flows from it: the hunter successfully providing meat for his family. The erotic connotations of husband-wife hunting empower the metaphors of attraction found in the songs, as do the allusions to mythological times when men and animals enjoyed greater intimacy.

One curious property of the songs is the relative scarcity of what Rosaldo (1982:209; see also Searle 1969) calls “directive speech.” Few commands are to be found in these *anen*. Instead, they consist primarily of descriptive statements, most of which focus on the singer himself: his attractiveness, his hunting prowess, his propitious dreams, and so on. Moreover, from Aguaruna exegetical comments it is not entirely clear who is supposed to receive the songs—that is, whether there is a listener is the sense used by Searle (1969).⁸ Some people asserted that the songs are “heard” by the animals to which they are directed. This opinion was by no means universal, however, nor was it clear whether “hearing” in this case meant anything other than the state of being acted upon by the power of the songs. The emphasis in Aguaruna accounts was on the act of holding the songs in one’s mind rather than the act of giving commands to presumed auditors.

causality, imagery, and words in Aguaruna thought

Still to be confronted is the question posed earlier: How do songs exert a causal influence on the world at large? Or, to put it in the terms that Beattie (1970:245) so vehemently rejects: How does magical language articulate with laws of nature?

Behind all Aguaruna magic, both verbal and nonverbal, lies an implicit theory of how the self influences the external world of people and things. There is no question that the Aguaruna recognize the essential role of technical acts (to use Leach's terminology) in the process of getting things done. Nevertheless, technical operations are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee the successful realization of specific tasks. Of equal concern are such factors as the internal state of the actor and the kinds of contacts the actor has had prior to, during, or immediately after the actions under consideration. People accept the fact that a woman who plants manioc cuttings must possess the appropriate technical expertise if her efforts are to prove successful; but they also expect that she will pay close attention to her thoughts (by repeating to herself the growth-promoting *anen*), her actions (e.g., by abstaining from sexual relations), and her recent physical contacts (by avoiding foods thought to have a detrimental effect on her crops) on the days when she plants. These measures cannot guarantee success, but each one increases the probability that the activity will come to a happy conclusion.

Virtually every task, whether risky in a Malinowskian sense or not, has its associated songs, chants, charms, medicines, and avoidances. (Here I am thinking of pursuits as varied as weaving, warfare, beer production, animal husbandry, cooking, horticulture, and fishing, as well as hunting.) Such practices undoubtedly serve to "restructure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors" (Tambiah 1968:202). But from the native perspective, these acts are motivated by an instrumental logic, that of bringing a more comprehensive, multidimensional order to bear on practical activity.

This logic is most readily apparent in nonverbal forms of hunting magic. The following account describes a procedure for obtaining a variety of sedge (*Cyperus* sp.) that attracts and stupefies game birds.⁹

A strong sedge for hunting is obtained like this. One must kill a vulture. [The speaker specified the King Vulture, *Sarcoramphus papa*; other versions of the same account specify the vultures *Cathartes aura* or *Coragyps atratus*.] The vulture is left where it has fallen, and one builds a closed shelter over it so that other birds won't eat it. After the vulture's body has rotted, it is burned. From the ashes several sedge plants will grow.

A man must take one of these plants and carry it with him as he hunts in the forest. If he encounters a boa, it means that this sedge attracts boas. It is thrown away. He picks another plant from the ashes. Perhaps this time he meets no animals while hunting, but instead dreams of women that night. This means that the plant attracts women. Then he tries another plant from the ashes. This time he finds toucans, many toucans. This sedge attracts birds. The man takes this plant, chews it up, and uses the saliva to clean the barrel of his blowgun. When he blows through the blowgun in the direction of the birds, they sit as if they were asleep. He can kill them one by one. They won't fly away. He takes this sedge and cultivates it.

The connection between carrion birds and magical substances is clarified by a myth which explains that vultures possess special stones that lead them to dead animals (Chumap Lucía and García-Rendueles 1979:549–553). Vultures thus symbolize uncanny attraction and the secret possession of powerful agents. The procedure undertaken to produce the hunting charm uses the symbolism of carrion birds as grist for a transformational mill such as Lévi-Strauss (1969) has found elsewhere in the Amazon: the vulture is allowed to rot (i.e., arrive at a state of exaggerated rawness) before being burned (an exaggerated form of cooking). The shift from super-raw to super-cooked corresponds to the transformation of the vulture from a bird attracted to dead animals to a plant that attracts living animals.

Note the technical quality of the procedure used to obtain the plant, the step-by-step series of actions that includes close observation and testing of the plant's effects under controlled conditions. Rather than diffuse wishes for hunting success, one sees here an explicit, rigorous, and highly ordered procedure that ultimately produces a substance which imbues the prosaic act of cleaning the blowgun with new meaning. This meaning is powerful in an operational sense because it expands the range of intentionally constructed order surrounding the use of a hunting implement.

Both the structure and the content of *anen* contribute to this same process of order production. Magical songs are supposed to be performed without improvisation in melody, rhythm, or lyrics, which makes them the most formalized genre of utterances known to the Aguaruna. Bloch (1974) identifies ritual songs performed by rote as an extreme case of formalized language, one possessing great directive power owing to its disengagement from the give-and-take of ordinary propositional discourse. In an analysis of the structure of Ilongot spells, Rosaldo (1975:178) remarks: "By combining rich and vivid imagery with a limited and formulaic use of language . . . [the magician] subordinates the world's diversity to a simple and compelling conception of the world that he, through magic, can control." The invariant quality of Aguaruna *anen*, like the formulaic aspect of Ilongot spells or the almost impossibly complex internal symmetry of Cheremis incantations (Sebeok 1964), has an antientropic function that supports the more explicitly manipulative role of the lyrics of the songs.

Still to be reckoned with is the ontological status of musical production itself. Many of the powerful utterance forms used by the Aguaruna, both in public and in private, are musical. Nevertheless, I was largely unsuccessful in eliciting statements about the instrumental properties of music. People frequently remarked that *anen* are beautiful songs and therefore appropriate for attraction, but this does little to clarify the use of music for other ends. The answer may lie in two attributes of music identified by Merriam (1964:85, 233): its ability to induce synesthesia, or intersense transfers, and its role in calling forth designated emotions. If, as I argue here, a function of *anen* is to alter the world through the intentional ordering of the performer's interior states, it follows that the creation of designated emotions and the structuring of sensory experience would contribute to the ordering process.¹⁰

Turning to the specific contribution of words to order production, I feel obliged to consider one persistent claim made about verbal magic—that its practitioners have fallen prey to "nominal realism" (Hallpike 1979:409), that is, the illusion that names create or control the things they denote. This hypothesis cannot be dismissed casually. There is substantial evidence that the Aguaruna consider words, especially the names of powerful beings, to have the ability to "wake up" or activate the things to which they refer. A man once advised me that upon encountering a jaguar or an anaconda one should avoid uttering the creature's true name, lest the sound of its name make it feel fierce and therefore more inclined to attack. It is safer, he said, to call it *pasún* (a term denoting a wide variety of phenomena that are vaguely menacing but not immediately life-threatening) or, in the case of the jaguar, simply *yawáa* ("domestic dog").¹¹ Similarly, people are reluctant to call certain magical charms by their true names owing to a belief that the unnecessary use of a name might diminish the power of the charms. Yet while the activating power of words undoubtedly strengthens a belief in the manipulative potential of magical songs, it cannot explain the spell's complex imagery, nor does it further an understanding of the connections between spells and the nonverbal magic with which they are frequently associated. On balance, the evidence leads me to conclude that Aguaruna notions of magical efficacy have less to do with words qua words than with words as indices of structured mental operations.

Jivaroan ethnography frequently alludes to the key role of visionary experiences in the ongoing process of self-realization (Karsten 1935; Harner 1972; Whitten 1976). For the Alto Mayo Aguaruna, a salient feature of many visions is that images of a desired future state are displayed before the vision seeker.¹² Sometimes the images are rendered verbally by powerful beings, in the form of statements about the dreamer's destiny; in other cases the dreamer sees directly the events that will come to pass. In both instances the experiences tend to be highly conventional, part of a restricted canon of visions the significance of which is widely known within the society. Visions are rarely spontaneous events. They come as the result of days or weeks of fasting, solitary vigils in the forest, and the steady consumption of psychoactive plants. A vision is thus a dramatic epiphany as well as a personal victory. It marks the successful culmination of a campaign to enter the dangerous realm of dreams and spirits, to obtain a specific kind of personal experience, and to bring that experience (with its implicit directive power) back to daily life.

The similarities between visions and *anen* are striking and suggestive. Both are constituted by evocative imagery—visual, auditory, and tactile—that illuminates a desired future state. Although both are in essence private experiences, they place the actor in direct contact with primordial sources of knowledge, thus forging links to the past while structuring the future. Visions and *anen* are also reified: the Aguaruna grant them a density denied other kinds of interior experience. Shamans can see visions within the chests of their owners; *anen* are often spoken of as if they were an animate presence that might flee their possessor if neglected. In this we can see an Aguaruna version of what Ricoeur (1977:225) refers to when he writes of the almost material solidity of poetic language:

Language takes on the thickness of a material or a medium. The sensible, sensual plenitude of the poem is like that of painted or sculptured forms. . . . Poetic signification fused thus with its sensible vehicle becomes that particular and “thingy” reality we call a poem.

Anen partake of this “thingy” reality. A hunter deploys his songs to impose the powerful order of ancient imagery on the uncertainties of animal behavior. He is under no illusion that his efforts guarantee success—magic is as fallible as any other type of operation from the Aguaruna point of view—but he is convinced that they establish connections which are likely to further his interests. The densely constructed images of *anen* thus serve as tools by means of which a person intervenes in worldly events. The imagery of *anen* brings meaning to human actions; meaning charges those actions with the power of intention and directed energy.

The literalist interpretation of verbal magic advanced here can, of course, prove perilous when extended indiscriminately to all kinds of ritual utterances. Surely there is a place for rhetoric in ritual, especially when the rites under consideration have a public aspect. But an overemphasis on the rhetorical possibilities of ritual utterances leads inexorably to two equally sterile positions: on the one hand, the psychological functionalism of a Malinowski; on the other, a form of cognitive reductionism that focuses attention on logical “errors” that produce a belief in the magical efficacy of words (see, e.g., Burke 1962:42).

The recent convergence of symbolic and cognitive anthropology offers promising avenues for the development of a theory of magic that avoids the pitfalls of both the intellectualist and symbolist positions. In the private magical procedures analyzed here, we see individuals drawing on the collective representations of their society to solve practical problems. Magic is firmly embedded in the general process of making sense of the world and then acting on it in meaningful ways. The symbolic operations of language are a critical part of this cognitive enterprise. And so are the observational and experimental pursuits in which symbolism is brought to bear on the world of things.

notes

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¹ The orthography of Aguaruna words cited in the text follows the system used by the Aguaruna themselves. All letters are pronounced more or less as in Spanish except *e* (the high central vowel ɨ), *g* (pronounced like *ng* in “ring”), and *b* and *d* (pronounced like *mb* and *nd*, respectively). Accents fall on the first syllable unless otherwise noted; nasalizations have been deleted.

² The extent to which the ethnographies of Evans-Pritchard and Malinowski continue to dominate modern analyses of magic is truly astonishing. Offhand, I can think of no other area of ethnology in which so much analytical energy has been applied to such a small ethnographic sample. This odd reluctance to move beyond a limited range of data has hindered development of more creative approaches to the analysis of magic.

³ Analysis based on the expressive/instrumental distinction collapses in the face of native pharmacopoeias, where there is often no clear distinction made between plants that “really work” in a pharmacological sense and those chosen on the basis of plausible but mistaken analogies. As has been frequently observed, plant medicines chosen on the basis of analogical association are often efficacious in scientific terms, though for reasons unappreciated by their users.

⁴ In a recent essay, Asad (1983:251) expresses his misgivings about the “well-known but increasingly unsatisfactory distinction between technical (or instrumental) actions and expressive (or symbolic) ones,” but he does not follow up these comments with a more detailed critique of the dichotomy.

⁵ Contact with non-Indian Peruvians and Christian missionaries has begun to affect this view, since the Aguaruna are soon made aware of the fact that some of their practices are “superstitious” in non-Indian eyes.

⁶ To save space I have eliminated much of the repetition that is characteristic of this and other *anen*.

⁷ Pellizzaro (1978:3) clearly states the connection between Etsa and Shakaim in Shuar thought: “Shakaim, as all the Shuar elders affirm, is the very same Etsa. . . . Nunkui and Shakaim are the archetype of the Shuar couple.” Aguaruna informants in the Alto Río Mayo did not make an explicit connection between Shakaim and Etsa; indeed, the name Shakaim meant little to them. They did, however, consistently assert that Shakaim, as used in *anen*, signifies a man or boy who is Nugkui’s partner.

⁸ In this essay I have not drawn heavily on Speech Act Theory, mostly because I share Rosaldo’s (1982) belief that it shows too little concern for the culture-specific meanings of speech. The over-emphasis on magical *language* abetted by Speech Act Theory also discourages an integration of verbal and nonverbal aspects of magic. It is precisely the magic-technology interface that is ignored in most accounts of magical thought and action.

⁹ In free conversation the Aguaruna name for this sedge, *pijipig*, is sometimes used as a generic term for many charms of botanical origin. As a result, I cannot say for certain that the use of *pijipig* in this narrative necessarily means that the plant in question is a sedge of the genus *Cyperus*. It may, in fact, be some other species.

¹⁰ I have thus far found little in the ethnomusicological literature that clarifies the ontological status of music in private ritual. Works that at first glance would seem to be most relevant for the interpretation of Aguaruna *anen* (e.g., Seeger 1979; Boilés 1978) focus primarily on the communicative role of music in public settings.

¹¹ This statement obviously plays on the name of the jaguar, *ikam yawaa* (literally, “forest dog”).

¹² The visions of shamans are a notable exception to this pattern.

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