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A hundred years ago Theodor Koch-Grüneberg arrived at the junction of the Apaporis River with the Caquetá River at the frontier of Colombia and Brazil. The 16th of April of 1905 Koch-Grüneberg collected six masks and other items related to the peach palm dance. The still existing masks are conserved at the Ethnological Museum Berlin with the inventory-numbers V B 6242, 6243, 6244, 6245 and 6247.
The Ecology of a Masked Dance: Negotiating at the Frontier of Identity in the Northwest Amazon

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Abstract. The paper is an approach to the subject of a masked dance from the perspective of an ecology of religion. This particular dance was performed in the locality of Comeyafu in the lower Caquetá River in Colombia. The mask dance has the characteristic of being a multietnic dance where the objective is to negotiate with the “other” (people of different languages and political units or spatial social heterarchy) through a ritual of incorporation. In a vertical dimension (time delayed reciprocity) the dance is performed as a process of negotiation where the objective is to secure the continual supply of animal resources, as pursued through balanced reciprocity with the “other” (“the other” in this case being the spirits of the forest, animals, and their owners). The mask dance can be seen in terms of ecology of religion with multiple liminal rituals of social, political, and ecological exchanges of gifts and balanced reciprocity with the environment in Northwest Amazon.

Dances are the ritual synthesis of the human cosmology. They can express multiple discourses of the groups that participate and cannot be reduced to a single description, analysis, or theoretical interpretation. This article presents one of the possible forms for viewing a mask dance that was performed in the locality of Comeyafu in the lower Caquetá River in Colombia. The observation of the mask dance appears to support previous theoretical explanations on the relations of indigenous people and nature where such a dichotomy is seen to be absent. The mask dance has the characteristic of being a multietnic dance where the objective is to negotiate with the “other” (people of different languages and political units) through a ritual of incorporation. On another dimension, it is a process of negotiation whereby the objective is to secure the continual supply of animal resources through balanced reciprocity with the “other” (in this case being the spirits of the forest, animals, and their owners). The mask dance can be seen in terms of multiple liminal rituals of social, political, and ecological exchanges of gift reciprocity in Northwest Amazon.

The Northwest Amazon has a high diversity of dances that are seasonal as well as others that are performed in cycles of years (e.g., Yurupari, Feather Dance, Fish Dances, and Pineapple Dance) (Hugh-Jones 1979; Reichel-Dussan 1987: 207–210; Miech 1994; Arhem 2004: 145,151; Kapffhammer 2002). Most of the Northwest Amazon dances have the characteristic of being done with the affinities or potential affinities to the house societies that are dispersed in this broad area (the concept of house in Northwest Amazon is defined by Hugh-Jones 1995). For the Tukanoan groups, mask dances, where representations of the spirits (called “demons” as well) of the forest, the owner of the animals, and the animals themselves occur, are frequent. The extensive ethnographic survey of Koch-Grünberg (1910, II: 309–312) at the beginning of the twentieth century illustrates the diversity of mask use, but all contain a common structure. In the diversity of dances, the members of a roundhouse or long house perform some of these exclusively for the sake of the house. However, frequently dances involve the participation of affines and allies to the house. In these cases, the dancers are not the owners of the house or its neighbors, but are the members of the invited house, who usually speak a different language, and are politically and ethnically different. It is these people who perform for the host.

The mask dance discussed in this article is common in the lower Caquetá River, lower Apaporis River, and their tributaries. This is a mask dance that is called the Peach Palm Dance or chontaduro or pupuña dance because of the consumption of fermented bever-
age made of the seeds from the peach palm (Bactris gasipaes) (Vilch 1994: 76; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997: 168; Karadimas 1997: 575; Landaburu and Pineda 1984: 254). It is also called the “Doll Dance” or “Baile de Muñecos” (Schackt 1994: 331; Camacho and Yukuna n.d.; Fiori and Morsalve 1995; Arhem 2004: 154), as well as the “Dance of the Spirits” (Arhem 1998: 124, n.d.: 55). This dance with similar masks and general sequence is performed by Arawak speakers such as the Yukunas and Matapi (lower Caquetá River and mainly the Miriti River and tributaries). The Tukanoan groups that share this exogamic dance are the Makuna, Letuima, Tatimuku, Yhuna (Aparéris River and tributaries), the Mirañas (Bora-Miraña language of the lower Caquetá and Cahuinari Rivers), and the Ardoque (Arica and Quinche Rivers and Araracuara in the middle Caquetá River). A common knowledge exists about the origins of the dance. The myth argues that the dance was learned by a shaman in ancient times on the “beach of the dolls” at a lake with the name of Caparú, located close to the mouth of the Aparéris and the Caquetá rivers. The first shaman to learn the dance was a Letuima who saw how the fish dance when they jump out of the lake (cf. Arhem for the case of the Makuna 2004: 155–156).

The Vertical Dimension of Negotiating with the Cosmos: Reciprocal Animism

The western dichotomy between nature and culture is not universal. It is problematic and exotic to most indigenous societies (see Descola 1996: 82–83). Gisli Pálsson (1996) identified three kinds of paradigms in the human-environment relationship. The first one is Orientalism, characterized as demonstrating a negative reciprocity toward the environment, where the objective is the domination or domestication of the environment. The second is Paternalism, a form of balanced reciprocity where the protection of the environment is pursued. Both approaches are a product of the Renaissance, enlightenment, and positivist science. The last perspective is Communalism, where the separation of nature and society is rejected. Relations are more in line with generalized reciprocity, in which the indigenous consciousness of the Amazon seems to be embedded (Pálsson 1996: 67–76).

In this last perspective, Descola (1996) clearly defined a logical scale of relations between the self and others, including non-humans. He identified three modes of relations, which are reciprocity (like the Tukanoan relationships, see Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997: 7–76; cf. Arhem 2001), predation (like the Jivaro, with their predatory animism domains), and protection that implies a direct and permanent contact typical of interactions with domesticates. These relations when they are combined with a mode of categorization, such as animism, totemism, and naturalism, become a powerful heuristic tool of analysis that can go beyond what has usually been accomplished under the Orientalist or naturalist paradigm that anthropology has traditionally employed.

The reciprocal animistic system can be defined as “the relation between humans and non-humans fueled by a constant exchange of services, souls, food, or generic vitality. The dominant belief in such systems is that humans have a debt toward non-humans, notably for the food they latter provide. Although humans may try to dodge their obligations, they also readily admit that it is legitimate for non-humans to try to re-establish the balance of reciprocity by capturing components of the human person, by partaking of their food, or by tapping a part of their vitality” (Descola 1996: 94).

The Northwest Amazon mask dance supports this characterization of relationships of reciprocity with the environment. As well, the ethnographies support the perspective that animism is a common characteristic of all of the Northwest Amazon groups. This is
the case in Central and Eastern Tukanoan groups (e.g., Bará, Desana, Tatuyo, Makuna, Barasana, Guarana, Carapano, Taiwano, Cubeo, Letuana, Yahuna, Tanimuka, Yurutí) including Arawak speakers such as the Yukuna, Matapi, Cabiya, or languages like the Macú-Puinave, the Bora, and the Witoto families with Uitoto, Ocaina, and Nonuya languages, as well as the Miria, the Caribe language of the Carijona, and the independent language group of the Andoke. This is an area that is also characterized by exogamic multilingualism (Correa 1997; Jackson 1983).

How far back does this system of reciprocal animism go in time? It probably goes back to the first occupation of the Northwest Amazon by foragers and collectors around 11,000 years ago who carried with them a basic shamanistic view of the relationship with animals from Siberia. The dispersion of the mask dance and its relationship to hunting and animals of the forest, as well as to the consumption of fermented drink of the semi-domesticated peach palm and the absence of domesticated plants except for tobacco, suggest that it is rooted in the past of hunters-gatherers’ shamanism. The fact that this system exists over different language groups and cosmologies indicates a broad dispersion of common relations with the animistic world that was selected as a successful form of relationship between humans and non-humans.

Reciprocal animism is promoted and maintained through the dance performance. The reciprocity is not limited to the animals per se; after all, it is clear that in the shared cosmology of Northwest Amazon animals are people. As a consequence, it can be said that the dance plays the role of establishing and maintaining reciprocal relations with other people as well.

The Horizontal Dimension of Negotiating with the Other: The Reciprocity of Identity and Heterarchy.

The relationship with the “other” cannot be separated from the system of animistic reciprocity because in the Northwest Amazon the “other” are people: the fish, the jaguars, the birds, the snakes, the ants, the danta, the peccary, and the insects. They are people that wear masks, that became animals, but as well have rituals and perform dances. They also have houses typically in the waterfalls. Due to the importance of exogamic marriage, which is an exchange system in which affinal relationships or alliances are built, the dance is the moment in which to find the potential wife or husband. The main obstacle, however, is that the “other” is not the same “gente” or people; only those of his/her own group are “gente” (people); the rest are “no gente” (non-people). As a consequence, there is the need to transform the “other” into ourselves, as well as to reciprocate this relationship by making ourselves the “other”. That is when the liminal phase of the ritual creates the space and time where this transformation can take place. The Dance of the Peach Palm is one such moment, where the “other” who has been invited enters the house with a mask; he is an animal; he is a monster of the forest, a spirit that deceives; he is different. Through the sequence of the dance, only after giving the best of his dance performance and after a gift is given to the dancers by the owner of the house can they remove their masks, and stop being the other and become one of them. They smell and look like all the members of the house after dancing inside of it. Then the next episode of the dance without masks occurs where everyone dances together as equals.
The Dance

Initial Organization: Who Participates

The observed dance took place during the days of the 26th, 27th and 28th of March of 1999 at the settlement of Comeyafu in the lower Caquetá River, located in proximity to the town of Pedrera (Fig. 1). The host of the dance was Gregorio Yukuna (the Yukuna are Arawak speakers and the Tanimuka and Letuama are Tucanoan speakers), owner of the roundhouse. Comeyafu is divided into four parcialidades or communities (comunidade Yukuna, Yukuna-Tanimuka, Yavira, and Bacuri). Most of the members of the community participate in helping with the preparation of the dance. This involves children as well as adults. The owner of the roundhouse mobilizes the members into task groups, through kinship and peer pressure. The dancers were from the community of Camaritawa, located on the other bank of the river in the vicinity of Pedrera. The owner of the invited house and main dancer was Jorge Tanimuka, also called Danta (tapir). He also played the same role in mobilizing the participation of the members of his house. The chanters/dancers that formed part of the community were Edgar Tanimuka, Mario Matapi, Hernando Miraña, and Abraham Miraña (the last name corresponds to ethnic affiliation). Two shamans were responsible for “curing” (meaning to make the space and time free of danger from spirits or shamanic sorcery). The first was Mario Matapi who cured the dancers and secured the trip. The second, who cured the ritual prayers and performed the “ritual cleaning” of the dance area for the host, was the shaman Milciades Yukuna, a renowned shaman from the upper Miriri-Paraná River.

Activities before the Dance

The owner of a house invites the owner of an affinal house or potential affinal house; this is done with a ceremony where coca powder (Erythroxylon coca) is offered by the owner of the host house and the invited reciprocates by also giving coca to the owner of
the dance or roundhouse. If the owner of the house accepts, then the time, hour and location of where the dance will be held is defined. This process begins from 15 to 30 days before the dance. It has to be said that the process of invitation is related to hierarchical relations. Both parties pursue the optimization of their prestige as a great house that offers high quality coca, drink, and comforts to the invited, as well as for the invited to be recognized as great chanters and dancers with wonderful participation of dancers with masks. Both parties put in risk their prestige in relation to other houses as well as to individuals that live in the town of Pedraza that are invited to observe the dance. Both parties initiate the shamanistic curing processes to ensure the success of the dance.

The activities of the invited before the dance are mainly three. The first one is the manufacturing of masks, shirts, and skirts. The shirt is made of bark cloth (*marina*). The skirt is made of bark fibers (*cargero, pona*). In the case of the hard part of the mask, balsa wood is used, covered with a natural dark pitch and painted with the soil colors of yellow and white (see Schultes and Raffauf 1990). The second is to practice the dance and chants as well as to teach those members of the roundhouse that are new to the participation. The last activity is the shamanistic rituals of protection for those that are involved.

The activities of the host are mainly concerned with food collection and processing. This includes the collecting of seasonal fruits of peach palm (*Bactris gasipaes*) and processing into a mash. Boiling, peeling, and grading of the mesocarp and removal of seeds accomplishes this process (Fig. 2). The mashed fruit is stored in a pit of close to two meters in depth and one meter in diameter. The pit is covered with leaves of *platanillo* (*Phenakospermum guianense*) and is sealed with them and earth. A few days before the dance, the fermented mash is transported to another container built above ground close to the exit door, in the back of the roundhouse. The other important activity is the processing of manioc (*Manihot sp.*), in which the starch is extracted. The starch is stored in a container made with parts of the cortex of a tree, which is cured by the shaman and which only the wife of the owner of the house can touch. This container is sealed and only opened on the day of the dance. Early that morning the starch is baked over a budare into a thick cake of starch cassava, which is offered to the dancers at the end of the mask dance. Other activities include the processing of tobacco (*Nicotiana*...
tabacum) — snuff (toasting, pulverization, and mixture of Cecropia sclerophyla ashes, and sieving). This is consumed in the early stages of the dance. The last activity is the processing of coca powder that is offered to the invited participants. This work includes the toasting of coca leaves, pulverization, and mixing with Cecropia ashes, and smoked with gentle blowing of a lighted resin of Protium heptaphyllum (Schultes and Raffauf 1996: 174–175) (it should be noted that the aromatic flavor added to the coca seems to be an exclusive practice of the Tanimuka of the Igarapé Peritome, an affluent of the Apaporis River).

In order to be prepared for the dance, the host has to organize a hunting and fishing party since at the end of the dance, game food must be offered to the invited members. The owner and adult members of the roundhouse spend several days in the hunting of peccary (Tayassu pecari) and common tapir (Tapirus terrestris). They smoke the food, and these are given as presents to the guest dancers. The most prestigious gifts are the heads of the peccary that are given to the invited owner of the roundhouse, the shaman, and the main chanter. Some fish is also smoked and is given following the rules of ranking of the members of the community that participate with the invited party. All of these activities of preparation of food gifts are accompanied by constant ritual curing by the owner of the house as well as by the shaman of the roundhouse.

The Day of the Dance

Pre-dance Activities: Morning Ceremony: 9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

The first event that takes place before the arrival of the dancers and other guests, in the presence of very few individuals from the roundhouse, is the shamanistic curing of the space and praying to the spirits. This was performed by the shaman Milciades Yukuna. He smokes a large ritual cigar, of approximately 30 cm in length, dispersing the smoke around the four main poles of the roundhouse. At one point he sits down at each of the four poles and makes a private prayer. Minutes later a short dance is performed by a few males (seven) to the rhythm of two rattles. The dancers move around the four poles of
the house (Fig. 3). The purpose of the dance is in memory of a relative ("uncle") of the owner of the roundhouse that had died the year before. It is also commented on that he was buried inside the roundhouse and that because of this dance his spirit will not interfere with the dancers later. After the short dance, the shamanistic "cleaning" with tobacco smoke continues. The shaman first settles down around each pole and then stands and continues a conversation with the spirit of the difuato (deceased).

After the cleaning of the space, male individuals attached to the house engage in facial painting with a plant used for red dye (karayury, achilea, [Rica orellana]). The painting of hands and feet is done with the black dye obtained from smashing the seeds of huilo (Geripu americana). Males also wrap the joints of the ankles and wrists with dry plant fibers. After doing this all the males are ready for the arrival of the animals. They will sit around the edge of the maloca (the roundhouse) comprised of 16 smaller poles and four main poles (esiantillos). Those males who are closely related to the owner of the house will be at the back of the roundhouse near the female door.

The Others Arrive

Upon arrival of the guest dancers, a ritual of separation or the preliminal rituals begin. It is known that the dancers are not human; they are beasts, animals, and the wind; they are not people because they do not belong to the house. This is clearly defined in the use of space. The dancers enter through the male door and after each performance, they stay in a temporary shelter built for them a short distance from the roundhouse on the route to the river port. When the visitors arrive, their families hang the hammocks and put the mask on display at this shelter where they remain hanging until their use is required. This separation of space is maintained during the whole time that they wear the masks.

The Dances and Chanting: From Chaos to Equilibrium

The main part of the dance starts close to midday. There is some variation in the time, as well as in the sequence of the masked dancers entrance and performance, but the basic structure is the same. This is the case of the description by Fiori and Monsalve (1995) who observed a dance that took place between April 18th and 20th of 1991 in the maloca of Abelardo Yukuna in Puerto Córdoba. In this description they mention the use of pan flutes (Chirurus) in the first dance that seems to be similar to the use of rattles in the dance done previous to the arrival of the guest masked dancers. Mich (1994; 43) also participated in a dance that took place on May 21st and 22nd of 1987. The dance begins with the Tori or the "ugly" (around midday). The same variations in the sequence of the dance seem to exist in the cases reported by Århem (1998; Århem et al. 2004). One pattern that is recognized in all of these brief reports is that there is a sequence that runs from chaos to equilibrium. This sequence is expressed with the aggressive dance of the Tori and ends with the gradual and theatric Dance of the Butterfly and the Owners of the Animals dancing in harmony with the animals and monsters of the forest. It is also recognized as the change from the overabundance of sexual energy displayed in the attack of the Tori with their gigantic phalli and aggressive male behavior of the "other" with masks in the first part of the dance. This is followed by the equilibrium of the performance of males with females dancing together, with no distinction between the host and guest in the Dormiel dance of the second part of the dance.

One aspect that continues to be intriguing with no clear-cut explanation is the sequence of the languages of the dance, as well as of the chants and their meanings. It is clear that the sequence of the songs varies as well and that most of the dancers know
what the main dancer and a few others are singing. It is recognized that the repetitive chants use songs from the Carijona, which is a Caribe language, but most of them are Arawakan words. Most of the sequence of chants is performed in a group by the invited dancers. However, there is a sequence that takes place in the first night after midnight where only two to four individuals perform the dance and the chants are ritual elongations of the songs with no meaning to the attendants. The classical answer to the question of what language is being used is that they are singing the “language of the animals.”

The Other’s Dance with Masks

The first dancers that enter the maloca are the Winds (karonajenama) around 10.30 a.m. These dancers use less elaborated masks with no major attributes and their part of the dance is repeated at various times during the long sequence but with different connotations of what they seem to represent (Fig. 4). These individuals upon their initial entrance carry branches in their hands that they move in imitation of the wind. Also it is said that they represent monkeys (macacos). It is a random movement in the clean area of the maloca, with the invited members of the house and other close houses observing the performance while sitting on the long stools to the edge. After a few minutes they exit and reenter on this occasion to perform the Tori Dance, which represent the monsters of the forest with large phalli (around midday). The Tori have masks that stress the image of ugly spirits of the forest (Fig. 5, 6, 7 and 8). Each mask is very individualistic but all of them illustrate representations of monsters with gigantic phalli. For the mask they use tarp to create the dark color and lighter soil colors to stress the facial features, combined with artifacts such as pieces of mirrors and the back of batteries to create shining eyes. They enter in a random pattern moving the rattles attached to their feet and on long batons that produce a strong sound of chaos. These individuals imitate a sexual assault on the observers of the dance, hitting them with the phallus and pretending to copulate with the males and females, as well as children sitting and laughing at
the aggressive behavior. The only way to calm the aggressive attack is by an imitation of masturbation of the aggressor by the attacked through the touching of the phalus by hitting it with the finger along its total length. After the Tori indicates satisfaction with the touch, he will get close to the attacked person and offer him an exchange of tobacco snuff by using the long bones of a bird to blow the snuff into each other's noses. There is also exchange of coca powder. In the meantime buckets of peach palm juice circulate around for those people sitting inside as well as those outside. After this, gradually the Tori will exit the maloca. Then latter the Tori reenters the maloca dancing in a long line.
from the entrance to the front, back and forward. They repeat the same dance over and over for several hours, changing repeated songs.

One activity that takes place outside in the afternoon (2:05 p.m.), after a rest of the Tori dancers, is a ritual of verbal fighting between the main members of the host house and the invited dancers-chanter. On one side the owner of the house, second brother (chanter), and shaman confront the guests of the same rank (Fig. 9). This ritual fight is verbally accompanied with frontal movements, and it is the only time that the owner of the house carries a war club. Both groups engage in a recitation of the genealogy of origins where the history of the roundhouse is narrated (each group talking at the same time). What they talk about is the places where they have been living in the past, and which creeks or part of the river they lived in during their memorial history. With this rapid yelling also there are expressions of aggressive verbal confrontation, and body movement toward the front. After this, the owner of the house exchanges tobacco snuff and offers some drink and food and they reenter into the house. The dance of the Tori continues with frequent changes in songs and also in the number of participants up to no less than twelve dancers. This continues all afternoon with sporadic breaks (Fig. 10) where they drink peach palm juice until close to 4:15 p.m. After a break, where masks are changed, they start the second large segment of the Dance of the Fish.

The entrance of the fish masks begins at 4:30 p.m. This is known as the Nuariya or Nocorn Dance (Fig. 11). It is characterized by a high diversity in the illustration of different species of fish that usually can relate to the seasonal migration up river. Each mask has its own design using in common the dark tarp with created lines and circles made with white and yellow soil colors (Fig 11, 12, 14). When they enter for the first time in the roundhouse, they place themselves in a U shape. After they are in formation the brother of the owner of the roundhouse approaches them and asks them: “Where do you come from?”, in response to which one of them with hand signals indicates where they come from. After that begins the dancing of the group by moving in a line from the front of the roundhouse to the back, in a back and forward movement. In this dance not only young adult males participate but also a few children with less elaborate costumes (Fig 14, 15). Further, some young girls sometimes dance in front of the group or beside them in the rhythmic back and forward movement. The dress of cortex and the covering of the face with the bark cloth costumes causes continual sweating (Fig. 13). This
demands the constant drinking of peach palm beverages, and the repetitive movement and singing create group ecstasies that overcome the fatigue of the dancers. Added to this is the consumption of tobacco snuff and coca powder, which maintain the dancers in a frenetic state of euphoria. The dance continues with sporadic interruption and resting outside the roundhouse. Only at about 8:10 p.m. in the night do four individuals with fish masks enter making noises and moving their hands. Members of the roundhouse confront these individuals and give them four cans of coca powder. After that interruption the dance continues until around midnight.

At 12:30 a.m. begins a new sequence of multiple animal species dancing. The first dance with their songs is related to the bats and the termites. There are few masks with these representations. Masks representing monkeys, armadillos, squirrels, opossums and a jaguar follow with a sequence of chants. Some of the Tori mask dancers also continue, but without the phalli, and indicate that they represent a new species. Many of the Tori masks have a dual use, but in this dance they are linked to the representation of other mammals. At 12:45 a.m., they stop and request food, at which time the owner of the house gives some cassava and meat. After a break they continue with the entrance of masks with representations of different insects, such as bees and as well a Dance of Frogs. In this sequence about forty dancers are participating that reenter the roundhouse six times in less than an hour.

At 2:30 a.m. starts the Dance of two Butterflies, each carrying two long slabs of burning copal (Protium sp.). The song is like a long lament with slow movements that seem to resemble a Kabuki Dance. It is considered to be the most important part of the dance. This importance is reinforced by the silence in the roundhouse by those concentrated on the ritual theatrical movements of the two Butterflies that move in circles around the audience (Fig. 16). At one point there is another pair of masks that represent the owners of the animals. The lengthy songs of the four individuals continue up to 4 a.m.

After the Butterflies’ choreographic display of the dance, the dance of multiple masks begins again around 4:30 a.m. They engage in a frenetic fast tempo moving back and forward to an euphoric song with the rhythmic sound of the rattles. In this part of the dance all the masks participate, with a song that repeats the word “marío... marío... marío... marío” (knife). After a break there is an entrance with songs related to the parrots (colorrás). The dance follows a circle in the periphery of the inside of the roundhouse.
Fig. 11  Dance of the Fish.

Fig. 12  Detail of the mask of the Fish.

Fig. 13  Back of the Fish dancers.
Fig. 14 Dance of the Fish.

Fig. 15 Mask dancers with female companions to the side. Note mask with a female head.
At 6:05 a.m. with the first light of the morning, enter the Butterflies, followed by the Tori masks that represent other species of animals. When this stops around 6:50 a.m. begins the last sequence with the “dance of the big ears” (danza de los orejones) or of the Owners of the Animals. The two singers and dancers practice the songs outside the roundhouse before each entrance (Fig 17). The Dance of the Orejones is a long song that takes close to an hour where each dancer is carrying a gigantic leaf in each hand. They move from opposite directions and meet in the middle of the maíz o.

At 8:40 a.m., after a break, there is a theatrical Dance of the Fishermen where a few individuals with the masks of the Tori enter with bags to simulate the collection of fish. This is done with the Butterflies and the “big ears” masks. There is also one mask of a heron.

Around 9:20 a.m. there is the performance of a dance where the songs are about the Owner of the Sun. He wears the same mask as the Owner of the Animals. This dance continues with changes to the ears of the mask. A total of three different forms of ears occur including round, rectangular, and triangular. The dancers are alone in the center of the roundhouse and with their songs move gradually to the different sectors of the roundhouse joined by some of the Tori mask dancers around the periphery of the roundhouse. At 9:50 a.m. the placement is reversed with the Tori dancers at the center and the Butterflies carrying leaves of palms dancing around. Close to the bench there is a masked dancer that imitates an electrical eel with a shaking movement.

At 9:55 a.m. there is a significant break in the sequence. An individual referred to as “the crazy” becomes the focus of the dance. This individual appeared frequently during the dances of the Tori and in other parts of the choreographic display but is not coordinated with the other dancers. At this time there is no more beverage of peach palm (close to 100 gallons of peach palm juice have been consumed), tobacco or coca. The crazy enters the roundhouse and attacks the storage recipient of peach palm juice and destroys it. After making noises and after a theatrical display of aggression and madness, he falls on the ground at the center of the roundhouse. After this performance, which highlights the lack of food and beverage by the host, the owner of the house goes to the center and offers the heads of smoked peccary with cassava bread to the two Owners of the Animals and the two Butterflies. Each of the other dancers enters and
receives pieces of the peccary meat and tapir meat as well as smoked fish, which they take out. In total 35 kilograms of smoked meat was given on this occasion. Everyone leaves the center arena of the roundhouse, with the exception of the two Butterflies (Fig. 18, 19) that continue dancing around the perimeter of the interior of the maioca. At one point they are accompanied again by the masks of the “big ears”, in this case with the rectangular shaped ears that perform a slow dance where they move back and forward holding a strip made of palm (Fig. 20). This change towards the ritual confrontation of singing and movements occurs at 10:50 p.m. between the two Butterflies and the two
masks of the Owners of the Animals (Fig. 21). This dance continues with diagonal movements of the Butterflies and the entrance of the Frogs (more imitation of movements with the same masks of Tori) which move in the periphery. A song and the throwing of ashes to the dancers follow this movement. They leave the house with the sticks that they carry, and one of them is able to grab a ham of a peccary. After a repetition of the Butterfly Dances and the Owner of the Animals (Fig. 23), the sequence ends around 11:05 p.m. with the shooting of a gun, at the opening of the maloca what means the symbolic killing of the harpy eagle. After the shooting all the dancers and the spectators of the dance join together following the lead of the Butterflies and the Owner of the Animals in a long line dancing around the maloca (Fig. 24). They exit through the front door and move to the back of the roundhouse and then to the open areas of the path that goes to the port. In a large open grassland space the dance stops, and everyone removes their masks, marking the end of the mask dance.
After a relaxing time outside the roundhouse, the second part of the dance commences which can be conceptualized as a post-liminal dance. Everyone dances together without masks, the hosts and guests are mixed in a frenetic dance involving a large line moving back and forward with a repetitive song that continues from 1 p.m. in the afternoon until the next day. The dance stops just before the first light shows up on the horizon when the guest dancers leave and everyone returns to their homes. This is called the Dance of the Dormilon, which is a fish. There is no choreography and no major features or sequence. It is just a dance of happy sharing of group ecstasies generated by all the individuals dancing in a constant and rhythmic movement. This is the time where everyone is human and equal.
Final comments

The model of reciprocal direct animism of exchange between humans (host) and non-humans (guest) is observable in the sequence of the dance with the changes involving the redistribution of chaotic sexual energy displayed by the Tori to the balanced negotiation with the Owners of the Animals. This sequence reveals the integration of the spirits of the forest to drink, dance and sing; it is the invitation to the animals by the humans (the host of the roundhouse) to drink, dance and sing, and eventually to become humans like the owner of the house. It is a dance where the continual supply of fish and animals is negotiated with the Owners of the Animals. This dance is also about the maintenance of reciprocal relations between different/neighborhood roundhouses and power relations between those who participate in the dance and the “others”. What is important – the moment or the place? After all, where/when the “others” are transformed from non-humans to people like the host. It is a dance of empowerment of the owners of the malocas in relation to other malocas. At this time, the obligation of gift exchange is established: “in that you dance for me, I will dance for you, and together we have a strong alliance that we can express as great dancers, singers and performers that know how to make beautiful masks”.

In relation to the evolutionary history of the masked dances, we can only speculate. The fact that it is a dance which deals with non-domesticated plants or animals indicates an origin that probably dates to early hunter-gatherer populations. Contrary to this idea is the recent posthumous edition of Irving Goldman’s (2004) study of Cubeo religion. He argues that the body mask of bark cloth historically is part of a shared Arawakan-Tukanoan ceremonial complex. This conclusion is based on the arguments of Koch-Grünberg that its origin is Arawakan. Evidence in favor of this is the language used in the song text of masked dances which seems to be/which is told to be “archaic” Arawakan, however it is clear that the dance also have songs from the Carijona (Caribe), and other groups of hunter-gatherers such as Makú. The Cubeo are not the best example of Tucanoan groups because the Cubeo religious system is Arawakan based. It is part of the complex of Kuwai messianic religious dispersion that affect even remote groups such as the Carijonas of the foothills of the Andes (Schindler 1979: 56–70; Vidal 2002).

In the case of the Yukuna, their religious belief system seems to have been heavily influenced by Tucanoan, particularly from the Letuamas. We are still far from understanding how this complex of dances originated and how it spread, but it is clear that its transformations and the increased diversity of dances are based on how they are performed.

Århem (2001) has analysed the relationship between humans and non-humans represented in masked dances of the Northwest Amazon. His view is different from the one presented here as he argues that the model of animism proposed by Descola (1996) as well as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976) should be reinterpreted as Ecocosmologies. His argument is based on the study of one of the Makuna groups, who are members of the larger Tukanoan family (with a total population of no more than 5000 individuals in the Northwest Amazon). Århem’s main disagreement in relation to their ecocosmological view is based on his notion of “curing”, the purpose of the masked dances being to clean and cure the world (Århem 2004). As it is indicated in the present description of the dance, the notion of “curing” is present in the preliminary activities of the dance such as the initial invitation to the guests, hunting, fishing, traveling, and the preliminary dance, but it is confused with the main body and purpose of the dance, that is to “negotiate” or exchange gifts between humans and non-humans. Århem, also argues that the view of Reichel-Dolmatoff on the relationship between humans and non-humans as a closed system of reciprocal exchange is wrong, because, as he puts it, “nature is by itself sterile” (Århem 2004: 282). The dance contradicts his view by the
demonstration of the existence of sexual energy in the chaos of the spirits of the forest or the Tori and the sequence of the dance toward the equilibrium of energy and the exchange of souls that feed the Owners of the Animals, who control the natural production of the environment. The dance presented here supports the horizontal relation of the "other" and their incorporation into the circuit of exchange relations with the "gente" (masa), but it is a closed circuit of energy exchange and not an open one.

One surprising aspect is that the ethnographies of the Northwest Amazon still only provide a scarce amount of knowledge concerning ritual dances in general. This brief study illustrates not so much what we know but actually how much we do not know. That is why there is no link to mythologies or song analysis done here. In part this paucity of information is due to the low probability of witnessing these dances. Hopefully, the model presented here will give the basis for a more adequate approach to further studies of masked dances of the Northwest Amazon and their diversity.

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