

ESSAYS ON SOUTH AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

In this Introduction I mean to offer a few words by way of explanation, critical self-examination, and also apology for the essays that follow. It is clear that a major thread weaving through them all, concerns the difference between what I call Latin, or South American ‘culture’, and, Northern, Occidental, or North-West European and Neo-European ‘culture’. This involves all the complexities of interpretation that immediately emerge when one speaks of ‘culture’. Does one refer to ‘ways of life’, customs, and everyday behaviour; or to forms and structures of thought, sensibility, and feeling; or to aesthetic objects and activities in the visual, literary, and musical realms; or to particularly important and/or beautiful individual works of art; or to all of these things?

My simple answer is: all of these and more. But I am more than aware of the enormous pitfalls inherent in dealing at one and the same time with such enormous clusters and complexes of meaning and behaviour.

A number of these essays use an implicit *Weltanschauung*, idiosyncratically and essentially unconsciously constructed out of core ideas taken from Karl Marx, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Herbert Marcuse. From Karl Marx comes the view that most of the modern world is made up of essentially capitalist socio-economic formations, characterized by peculiarly capitalistic forms of human exploitation and alienation. From Max Weber comes the notion of an all-encompassing ‘rationality’ that pervades the modern capitalist world, the more so the further and deeper capitalism develops. Weber’s ideas about capitalistic efficiency and bureaucratic organization tie in with Freud’s ideas about the psychic repression of the erotic, the aesthetic, and the fantastic, from activity and experience: into the ‘unconscious’. Modern bourgeois societies and civilizations construct their achievements upon the repression of desire; efficiency, organization, and rationality are bought at the price of burying, forgetting, or suppressing basic desires, as also the thirst for beauty and for love; this latter conception lies at the core of Marcuse’s critical theories of advanced technocratic capitalist and ‘state communist’ societies.

The third and fourth essays in particular relate to the above themes, more or less successfully as the reader will judge for him or herself. In the fifth essay an issue connected with these themes is touched upon: part of the whole Freudian-Marcusean worldview is the belief that the more the ‘id’ is controlled and suppressed, the more Eros and the Aesthetic Dimension are crushed and betrayed; and the more do human tendencies towards, or ‘instincts’ for, aggression, intensify in turn. But this intensification of aggression in the most ‘advanced’ capitalist societies is not an ancient, archaic kind of Dionysian ‘agonism’, nor a hot-blooded Shakespearean-Elizabethan inclination to ‘lose one’s temper’. It is a coldly calculated, organized aggression; a kind of

turning of men, and by extension women, into rational, ordered machines for killing, in coldly planned and undertaken, coolly-analysed wars. The turning inwards of cold, repressive controls over the individual's body and psyche, is mirrored in the ruthlessly callous belief that thousands of people have to die or suffer physical and mental mutilation when 'Civilization' decides this must be. The more the civil societies of the advanced bourgeois world become dull, grey, efficient, organized, predictable and unexciting, the more art, sex, love, and fun are tucked into compartmentalized boxes of consumerized or privatized experience, in what Marcuse called 'repressive desublimation', well away from the *serious* worlds of the Economy, Government, Commerce, Education, and War. These societies are able to launch, with their mind-boggling advanced technologies of mass murder, the most colossal and horrific wars, that are talked about 'pragmatically' in terms of 'national interests', and are analysed in coldly ruthless and clinical terms. The numbers of deaths expected and the economic implications of such wars are analysed meticulously in terms of their costs, benefits, and their likely effects upon financial and other markets.

I am in many ways an intellectual and spiritual child of the 1960s, during which period a particular kind of radical politics was born. It was not entirely new, having had clear antecedents in the early Nineteenth Century Romantic Movement, in the Twentieth Century Avant-Garde movements known as Da-da and Surrealism, among many others; but the 1960s 'counter-culture' when it merged with Marxist Revolutionary Politics, produced a movement with a temporarily distinctive mood, or flavour: a kind of euphoric Utopianism, of which 'Make Love Not War' was one of its most emblematic slogans. It was from this kind of Marcusean-R.D. Laingian-Jimmi Hendrixian 'psychedelic' perspective, that I originally found myself absorbing - in an almost ecstatic shock of 'recognition' - Latin American culture during my first journey through it in 1971 - 72.

This element of my appreciation and study of Latin America has always remained with me. Naturally, I hope it has matured and grown, but I certainly feel these essays in some sense return to that early vision of mine.

Now, if social scientists know anything, it is surely that no discourse on any social phenomenon is wholly 'objective'; it is always connected to or enmeshed within particular processes of selection, to the mental methodology, values, and implicit social projects, whether of transformation or conservatism, willed for by the investigator whether consciously or unconsciously.

Both for the 'natural' and the 'human' world, one of the achievements of the 20th C was to show that it is an unachievable goal for science to form an exact image of reality, as Jacob Bronowski showed in his *Ascent of Man*. Just as quantum physics has shown that the observer inevitably affects, alters, or even constructs what he or she observes, so in the social sciences it is now understood that what is undertaken involves more a perceptual and conceptual strategy for obtaining knowledge than a neutral analysis, and never achieves more than a partial, fragmentary, and inevitably contradictory exploration of an inexhaustibly infinite reality; which knowledge remains, whatever its merits, eternally and ineluctably bound to the individual researcher's psyche and biography, and to his or her collegiate, socially contextual, historical 'moment' or 'habitus'. The social sciences, like the physical and biological sciences, have to

work with a multiplicity of perspectives, not with only one, single, 'objective' mirror image of *the* world, in the singular.

In the light of these observations it appears as one of the greatest tragic ironies of the modern world that natural scientists are not trained to question what science itself really is. Scientists do not normally learn about the philosophy, sociology, or history of science in any depth as part of their scientific education and training. This observation applies also to the structure and position of natural science generally in the modern world, to the self-reflection (or lack of it) inscribed into the very scientificity of modern society.

The limitations of the worldview through which I have viewed the objects of my interest in these essays are in none more clear I feel, than in the eighth. I worry that I have been unfair to Charles Darwin in this essay both in the sense of suspending recognition of the extent to which he, like anyone else, was a prisoner of his socio-historical context, but also in the sense that further reading undertaken after I had already written the bulk of this essay indicated to me the extent of his enlightened, liberal, and humanitarian attitudes in certain other situations outside of his account of the Fuegians, both during the voyage of the Beagle and at other periods of his life. His argument with Captain FitzRoy in Brazil over slavery - Darwin against, FitzRoy in defence - which Darwin feared at first might require him to leave the voyage, is only one rather noble example.

Nevertheless, the central purpose in writing the essay was to show how narrow a view of the Fuegian Indians even a great genius could have, and how the contrast between his genius for scientific understanding of nature and his socially prejudiced views of a culture very different from his own, might be seen as deeply symptomatic of the horrible, tragic fact that one hundred years after Darwin's encounter with them, 'progress' in the surrounding and intruding semi-Westernized forms of society would result in their complete genocidal extermination. For although one of the themes that holds my attention in these essays - especially the first and second - is the crucial fact that post-Columbian South American societies are at bottom ethnic and cultural syntheses and syncretisms from Iberian, Amerindian, and African roots, there is no doubt that throughout most of their history it is the European, now global-occidental leg of that tripod that has been and still is the most powerful tendency.

Two wonderful cartoons by Quino, an Argentinian cartoonist, express some of the thoughts considered above in a wry, humorous form. In one, a man returns to his home at night (we know it is night because there is a radiant moon shining outside). He checks there are no unwanted people outside his house before he bolts and padlocks a hundred locks on the inside of his door. Then he sprays the gaps around the door and the windows of his house with an enormous can of insect repellent. Having thus 'dealt with' both society and nature, he prepares to go to bed and sleep, by donning a crash-helmet and strapping himself into his bed with a safety belt. Holding on to a safety handle strapped to his bedstead, he goes to sleep, and *dreams* - the cartoon ends with him flying over tiny houses with people far below.

Quino thus senses the growing requirement for technological control over life - human and non-human - in South American society, as 'Westernization' creeps in and encroaches. A person still dreams, is still a potential shaman, but he must be restrained, strapped down, held into his slot in the world-order, even as he flies in his dreams. Spontaneity in life, within either human society

or nature, and above all in the realm of Imagination, must be controlled: the thresholds of tolerance or acceptance of nature, desire, and human fallibility go down all the time.

In the second cartoon, people are seated at tables in a split-level cafeteria or bar, presumably within some kind of workplace. Some smoke compulsively, others drink coffee or other beverages nervously, others are hunched depressively over their tables. All their faces are half scratched out or dotted over as if by hazes or cobwebs. Under the picture is this caption, evidently spoken by a particular woman to her male companion:

“Sabe usted cuándo este trabajo era hermoso? Cuando la gente traía en la cara más sus facciones que sus problemas.”

In fact however, people in Latin America, wear expressions on their faces a great deal more than in the West or the North. Feelings, moods, and emotional reactions are much more in evidence in people’s facial expressions. But Quino obviously senses this is changing: society is becoming more organized, predictable, efficient (in the Western sense): boring, standardized, anxious, affluent (for some), stressed, mechanized, and destabilized.

But also of course, if you have huge-scale modern Capitalism, as in Bogotá, Lima, or Sao Paulo, yet without the ‘efficiency’ of Tokyo, Frankfurt, New York, or London, and without any kind of ‘safety-net’ provided by a Welfare State, there is a price to pay. That price is above all *poverty*, on a massive scale. Dreams still continue, but as if within a Hell of basic suffering different from that of the ‘advanced’ capitalist versions of Hell.

The Colombian poet Gonzalo Arango expresses this well:

“Y TU, SENADOR”

“Y tu senador, que devoras a los humildes en tus banquetes oratorios, buscando votos y ovaciones a tu sartal de mentiras y pompas retóricas, alimentando la ilusión de pobres inocentes con vanas promesas de prosperidad, cuando en tu oscura mente solo piensas en tu poder personal, saciar tu vanagloria, y llenar tus alforjas de tesoros para forjar las medallas de oro de tu reputación pública.”

“EN PIE DE GUERRA”

“La ciudad oscila entre la miseria y la opulencia, la necesidad y el derroche, la esclavitud y la superficialidad, pugna suicida entre el orden y el trastorno con un saldo fatal de violencia, sangre y fuego, cataclismo social.

“Todo pobre oprimido es un polvorín en potencia. En este circo de lobos hambrientos en riña en dentellada feroz por la rapiña, los ricos están sentenciados a muerte.

“Las ciudades modernas son ciudadelas en pie de guerra, arsenales secretos en potencia, hambrientos de subversión sangrienta: zozobra, temblor, saqueo y rapacidad de fortuna o poder, voracidad de acaparamiento en las fuentes abastecedoras de producción-consumo, para instalarse

seguros en la inseguridad: propiedad privada, capital. Exterminio de líneas rivales de fuego y barricadas de intereses creados en pugna entre partidos de izquierda y derecha, negros y blancos, orden y revolución. Polos celosos explosivos, polaridad suicida.

“Las ciudades son emporios de violencia. Antros exclusivos para esclavos subyugados por amos técnicos afeminados, cerebros totémicos de formulas electrónicas mágicas, enfermos de miedo, codicia y lujuria. Capataces y obrero que se vuelven masas.

“Soterradas de furias, nudos de nervios, saboteadores de sutiles engranajes. Circuitos de velocidades aceleradas en competencia de producción de complejos síquicos con hilos de dependencia suicida, que explotan a las mas leve chispa de discordia al repartir el botín del balance de la ambición y el despojo; y arrasar al primer soplo ese continente negro de egos resentidos y rencores dormidos, venganzas entre asalariados y patronos, ejecutivos y ejecutados, que cosechan los que oprimen en los oprimidos por estar hechizados por el poder explotando a los humildes, humillando a los desposeídos, arruinando sus vidas y sus frutos, abrumándolos de necesidades y cadenas, tornando la tierra en un encadenamiento de corrompedores y corrompidos.

“El amor esta desterrado, y la justicia, de estos muladares donde predominan el balance y la codicia, la envidia y la ambición, la traición y el crimen. Todos devorándose enceguecidos y deslumbrados por la pasión suicida que ata y mata: el oro, el poder, capitales corruptas y malditas, blancos sibaritas infalibles al torpedo atómico, el rayo de la maldición, sacro Apocalipsis logicamente redentor de la armonía terrena !La rea salvadora de teo!”

“LOS CEROS AUMENTAN EL VACIO DEL RICO”

“Cristo no lucho por el poder político,
sino por el amor a la conciencia
de ser en Dios
Cristo creía en él, no en la espada.
La palabra era su templo.
El no predicó la violencia sino la justicia, y la predicó con su vida
ofrendándose en sacrificio.
El ejemplo es el arma.”

“ZORRA ATIGRADA”

“Que crimen matar los tigres en la selva
Para que las zorras del comercio
Sexual exhiban sus cuerpos felinos
En los salones de moda
Y en los privados cabarets
De la noche del pecado.
!Que crimen horrendo contra
La soberana majestad de la vida!”

Several quotations from the Colombian artist Fernando Botero are also very pertinent here:

“Me interesan las cosas inesperadas.
No me gusta lo imposible, pero sí lo improbable.
Trato de buscar poesía en la improbabilidad
En las cosas improbables existe libertad creativa.”

“Latinoamérica es uno de los pocos lugares que quedan en el mundo que aún pueden ser transformados en mito. La gente tiene una idea vaga de Latinoamérica y esto es una buena cosa para un artista. Los lugares que ha sido super explicados y super exhibidos ofrecen pocas posibilidades de transformación poética. El artista está diciendo una “mentira”, pero esta se vuelve la verdad acerca de un sitio”.

“Yo ensayo experimentar una realidad que he conocido en mi infancia y mi adolescencia en América Latina, yo creo que el arte, por ser universal, debe comenzar por ser local o “parroquiano”... Así se toca. Las cosas locales son siempre las que se vuelven universales: todo el mundo siente el color, la belleza del dibujo y la poesía. Así es como una obra se vuelve universal.”

The profound yet frequent ignorance evinced by physical and biological scientists in fields outside of their professional training is matched it often seems, only by their extraordinary arrogance in presuming that they can nevertheless speak with supreme authority on matters of social, historical, political, and ethical concern. Consider the following statement given by a somewhat ‘biologicistic’ evolutionary psychologist, Robert Wright, in his book *The Moral Animal*:

“To a layperson, it may seem natural that the evolution of reflective, self-conscious brains would liberate us from the base dictates of our evolutionary past. To an evolutionary biologist, what seems natural is roughly the opposite: that human brains evolved not to insulate us from the mandate to survive and reproduce, but to follow it more effectively, if more pliantly; that as we evolve from a species whose males forcibly abduct females into a species whose males whisper sweet nothings, the whispering will be governed by the same logic as the abduction - it is a means of manipulating females to male ends, and its form serves this function. The basic emanations of natural selection are refracted from the older, inner parts of our brain all the way out to its freshest tissue. Indeed, the freshest tissue would never have appeared if it didn't toe natural selection's bottom line.”

Now this statement is at best only partially valid. It is probable that the human entities which entered into evolutionary competition after a certain stage had been reached in human history, would more and more be ‘types of society’, related perhaps to specific gene pools, rather than individual human beings, though evolutionary competition between individuals would never have disappeared. Types of society, including their cultures, involve family structures, patterns of belief and consciousness, which latter also therefore involve modes of romantic feeling also. It is not self-evident that the latter are ‘refractions’ from older imperatives connected to natural

selection, certainly on the level of individuals at any rate. The issue in short, is not merely 'to what extent pressures of Darwinian selection' continue to operate in human beings, though this is a real question; I agree with Robert Wright that much of human thought and behaviour is "to some extent innate". The point however, is, to *what* extent and in *what ways*? As he says:

".....one good reason to suspect an evolutionary explanation for something - some mental trait or mechanism of mental development - is that it is universal, found everywhere, even in cultures that are as far apart as two cultures can be. Second: the general difficulty of explaining such universality in utterly cultural terms is an example of how the Darwinian view, though not *proved* right in the sense that mathematical theorems are proved right, can still be the view that, by the rules of science, wins; its chain of explanation is shorter than the alternative chain and has fewer dubious links; it is a simpler and more potent theory."

One can agree with this latter overview, but it begs completely the question of how Darwinian selection operates within or between human societies and cultures. This is a very complicated, qualitative as well as quantitative question, which involves the entirety of what the social sciences are supposed to study, not only biology or 'evolutionary psychology'. Wright's use of the word 'refraction' to refer to the relationships that operate between human behaviour and human genetics, in fact leaves unanswered all the great questions of the human sciences about what the links - which surely no intelligent person can deny exist - are, between genes and human behaviour and cultures.

In general, evolutionary biology can focus on only certain facets of a very complex picture with respect to human beings, though these may sometimes be valid so far as they go. A fundamental feature of this limitation is that, for example in Wright's book as with other similar books, the fundamental, 'totalising' theoretical paradigm is Darwinism. Facts taken from the social sciences, particularly anthropology, are lifted out to support, help 'prove', and 'flesh out' the biological assumptions. Ideas and evidence from the social sciences are subsumed within the Darwinian paradigm, in an inevitably *ad hoc* way. What is not developed, because the necessary understanding is absent, is a perspective that brings together and integrates, without an unconscious hierarchy that prioritises biology, all the biological and human sciences.

Thus, although I agree strongly about the need to bring the biological and social sciences jointly to bear upon the study of human beings, I do not believe this can be done through a biological 'intellectual imperialism', which seeks to interpret specifically *human* behaviour in terms of biology. In this approach, biology is dogmatically assumed to be 'objective,' 'neutral,' and 'scientific,' whilst the social sciences are assumed to be none of these things, if they are believed to exist at all. As if this were not bad enough, the unexamined and unscrutinized prejudices of these scientists concerning every conceivable social, historical, or ethical issue creep in anyway, to become strangely enshrined as 'objectively given.'

For example, in dealing with phenomena such as human sexual behaviour and morality, as Robert Wright does, the basic concerns of sociological theory should be brought in to the centre of the paradigm. The age-old issues in sociology, concerning functionalist explanations of norms and action, Marxist theories of class and other kinds of power relations, the perspectives of individualistic action or rationalist theories: these complex issues of interpretation of human

social behaviour cannot be left out, as Wright does entirely. The result is a study in which pearls of insight (derived however, solely from Darwinian evolutionary theory), have to be picked out very carefully from a morass of unscientific, unexamined assumptions that operate on a multitude of levels.

In the light of such complex considerations as these, the existence of contradictions within the consciousness of Darwin in 1832 is perhaps hardly surprising. Rather it appears as a microcosm of the biologicistic, scientific consciousness of the modern world, in which, as the *apparent* knowledge, control of, and domination over nature increases, the capacity of the dominating political powers to understand or solve human problems ever decreases. “And man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave,” as Shelley so perfectly put it.

Progress, science, technology, and ‘objective’ knowledge on the one hand; decay, poverty, oppression, and ‘subjective’ misery on the other. These contradictions are expressed in ways that are different in the West than in Latin America, and it is some of these differences which occupy me in these short essays.

In connection with the crucial issue of Science’s claims to ‘objective’ knowledge, its fantasy illusions of existing in a realm where the pursuit of truth occurs outside of human society and history, we might return to the quotation from Daniel Gade given above. And we might recall that even in Marx’s writings there are two absolutely incompatible threads of thought about the epistemological and ontological status of Science. In the first, according to which there is “only one science, that of history,” all human thought and knowledge is understood as being linked to material practices within society, as part of social *praxis*. Science, like all other thinking activity, is therefore a part of the ‘superstructure’ of society, dialectically interrelated with its ‘base’, in processes of continuous, dynamic transformation, both of and within human society and of and within nature. Science’s pretensions to pure ‘objectivity’ in modern bourgeois society are therefore *ideological*, false self-representations generated within that very society through relations of power and domination.

In the second thread of Marx’s thinking about the epistemological status of Science, Marx grants it the same power of attaining neutral, objective knowledge that Nineteenth Century Positivism and other scientific ideologies accorded it. In this thread, science is above ideological distortion, outside of the socio-historical structures of intellectual formation within contradictory, conflictual, dynamic social processes. In his *1859 Preface to A Contribution To The Critique of Political Economy*, he even compares his own methods of studying economic laws to those of the natural sciences; thus, in an apparently complete volte-face, he situates not only the natural sciences but Marxist Economics also, within the above-mentioned disembodied realm of objectivist fantasy.

Clearly, for science to understand its own practices as occurring within human society, and for technology to become an agent of human growth and emancipation, rather than an agent of human oppression and destruction, it is in terms of the first of Marx’s two conceptions of science that human self-consciousness must emerge. The physical and biological sciences should become more humble, while confidence in the capacity of human beings to understand themselves more effectively within society, should grow. Thus might technology be understood less as an

uncontrollable, external, alienated force driving ‘progress’, and more as something which could and should be shaped by society self-consciously, towards such ends as human happiness and freedom, or beauty.

A different kind of concern I have about these essays is that I may have been too generous, or perhaps too complacent, about South American societies when I claim that racism and racial prejudice are generally less significant in South America, than is the extreme hierarchization of society in terms of socio-economic-political classes. However, I continue to find that when I ask South Americans of all shades of colour from dark to light, whether there is racism in their countries, the majority answer *yes, but* socio-economic inequality and oppression is more important. Not surprisingly, the darker the person is the more emphatically they insist racism exists, while the lighter his or her colour the more likely on the whole is the person to insist that inequalities and injustices are more class- and regionally-based than racial-ethnic. (Politically-minded ‘intellectuals’ offer an exception here, as they are likely to insist on the presence of racism to degrees independent of their particular skin colours.)

But if my views in the first essay are unsatisfactorily grounded from the viewpoint of recent academically rigorous, radical analyses of racism in South America, I hope, as elsewhere in these essays, that I may be excused a little error on the side of idealisation of the continent, in respect of my insistence that racism in South America, except in certain pockets, is not like that in North America or Europe. The history of mixing, racially as well as culturally, is much more important in the South than in the North. Mixing has always occurred among the majority of people in South America, within the mainstream of society, in spite of the late persistence of slave-owning white elites, and in spite of the oppression of indigenous peoples. This is partly why most South Americans view their societies as relatively tolerant racially, and as *culturally* egalitarian, democratic, and humanitarian in spite of the objective realities of poverty, injustice, and oppression. It is this aspect of things that I am trying to draw attention to in this essay, as in others.

It might be worth my giving a little more of my biography here, in order to explain certain things about these essays. I was born very much an Englishman, under the shadow of the Second World War, in which my father fought as a tank commander. When I was eleven years old, he became Professor of Zoology at the University of Khartoum, in the Sudan, and so from then on I was split between two very different kinds of culture, two utterly different worlds. No doubt that formative experience has influenced all my thought and development since, including my preoccupations with South America.

Long before I knew anything about politics, let alone Sociology, I sensed the great difference between a warm, spontaneous ‘Third World’ culture, and a cold, organized ‘First World’ Britain. I was amazed and fascinated by the hospitality, apparent tolerance and openness of the Sudanese, and by their easy-going style of life. “What a shame,” I remember my father saying, “should the Sudanese ever adopt our beastly, stand-offish ways.”

And yet, though this may seem to have introduced me to an enlightened worldview, critical of the power and pretensions of Western Civilization, in fact my father always remained a true British Imperialist, proud of Britain's history of conquest and domination, and disturbingly reluctant (from my point of view) to question the whole project of European Colonialism.

This has always put me in a state of internal conflict, an emotional and psychological schizophrenia, in which loyalty to one flame has been at the expense of treachery to the other; a condition which I try to interpret intellectually, but can never properly resolve emotionally. For much as I have always loved and admired my father, I have also always found some of his opinions unbearable. And though I feel guilty about writing this, I think that it is necessary to do so in order to explain my intellectual 'interests' in what might be considered 'Marxist-Weberian' senses of the term.

But if some of the desperation, spiritual chaos, and suffering that has always ensued from this predicament for me, has fed into the ideas underlying these essays, and if they present themselves even to only a few people as of some use or interest (and as with any writing whatsoever they represent no more than the thoughts of one person), then in the end it has all been worth the pain and bother. For, as Gonzalo Arango puts it: "From suffering comes all knowledge....." I feel this is true, without taking the metaphor of Christ's suffering in any literal or theological sense at all.

Strange it is, but true, that a man can love a country, indeed a continent, as he might love a woman; with the whole range of passions, excitements, disappointments, senses of betrayal, and obsessions; yet ultimately with such joy and light! Thus it has been, and is for me, with respect to South America: an Englishman happy in South America, eager to show his love for her, to help her if possible, or at least to be a friendly companion; always aware however that she has given him far more than he could ever give her.

I came, in the summer of 2003, upon a book by Hilary Fraser and Daniel Brown called *English Prose Of The Nineteenth Century*, which discusses the emergence of the 'periodical essay' as a form of prose in nineteenth-century Britain. It indicates very clearly some of the characteristics of the essay, as a semi-academic form, which have drawn me to its use. Daniel Brown writes:

"Coleridge's prose writings exemplified this dilemma (of inevitable intellectual relativism in the modern age) early in the (nineteenth) century, for while he envisaged the production of a grand, totalising theory, the work towards it which survives is remarkably fragmentary and dissipated, consisting mainly of notes and scattered journal entries. Coleridge can be regarded rather ironically as one of the pioneers of the genre of the literary fragment.

"In trying to establish an all-encompassing system of science, morals and metaphysics Coleridge was following the model of the German Romantic philosophers. Of these philosophers, Hegel, who worked during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, was the last of the great systematic philosophers, a tradition which had begun with Descartes in the seventeenth century.

Coleridge's failure to establish his over-arching theory of the world signals a new intellectual environment in which fragmentary forms able to express the diversity and changing nature of knowledge came to supersede the imposing systematic edifices, the 'grand narratives,' which discerned a unity of purpose to all things, an ultimate *objective* Truth.

"In an intellectual milieu in which there is no radical consensus, but rather, as Carlyle puts it, only a 'stunning hubbub, a true Babel-like confusion of tongues', the possibility of establishing over-arching systems of thought retreats and traditional forms such as the treatise lose their authority. The protean form of the essay is better adapted for representing the diverse range of tentative and fragmentary perceptions and speculations thrown up by a modern world of constant change. Montaigne, an originator of this genre, sees it to be predicated upon instability and uncertainty: 'If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions.'" (Quoted in John Snyder, *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay and the Theory of Genre*.)

Snyder cites another saying of Montaigne's which similarly illuminates the aptness of the genre for the fluctuous nineteenth century: 'I do not portray being: I portray passing.' The essay is a very free mode of discourse. It presupposes no specific types of content or attitudes, and ranges in subject matter and point of view from formal expositions of new scientific theories to private musings on Indian jugglers and the fear of death. It may follow a rigid path dictated by logic or its own playful belle-lettristic wanderings. It has a peculiarly fluid potential. Because of the 'freedom from generic limits' it allows, the essay has been aptly described by John Snyder as the 'non-genre'.

"The platonic dialogue is another genre that suited the relativist mood of the time. It, like the similarly discursive essay, accommodates a plurality of voices and points of view: 'Dialogue.....that wonderful literary form which, from Plato to.....Bruno.....the creative critics of the world have always employed, can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every fancy, and reality to every mood. By its means he can exhibit the object from each point of view and show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things' (Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*). All that is required of essays is that they be relatively short and use words to discuss a subject or subjects in a way that maintains the interest of the reader (or even just the writer writing them), for one of their main functions has been to entertain."

Brown continues with a discussion of an essay by Walter Bagehot, which he then quotes from at length:

"Writing almost a quarter of a century after (Carlyle's essay called) 'Characteristics', Bagehot is much more at ease with the self-consciousness of the times and the other corollaries of relativism that so troubled Carlyle and many of his generation. In his essay on 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers' (1855), Bagehot, like Wilde after him, enjoys the range of possibilities opened up by contemporary experience and literature. He distinguishes 'modern' writing from all that went before it. What he refers to as 'ancient writing' is described as 'profound' and 'systematic', and he likens it to 'the lecture of a professor':

“There is exactly the difference between books of this age, and those of a more laborious age, that we feel between the lecture of a professor and the talk of the man of the world - the former profound, systematic, suggesting all arguments, analysing all difficulties, discussing all doubts, - very admirable, a little tedious, slowly winding an elaborate way, the characteristic effort of one who has hived wisdom during many studious years, agreeable to such as he is, anything but agreeable to such as he is not - the latter, the talk of the manifold talker, glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in jest, unfolding unanswerable arguments in an absurd illustration, expounding nothing, completing nothing, exhausting nothing, yet really suggesting the results of a more finely tested philosophy, passing with a more Shakespearean transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low, in season and out of season, with a word of illustration for each and a touch of humour intelligible to all, - fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends, disconnected yet impressing what he maintains. This is the very model of our modern writing. The man of the modern world is used to speak what the modern world will hear; the writer of the modern world must write what that world will indulgently and pleasantly peruse.

“In this transition from ancient writing to modern, the review-like essay and the essay-like review fill a large space.”

I am certainly not so immodest as to suggest that these essays of mine achieve what Bagehot considers the potentially positive features of ‘the review-like essay and the essay-like review’, but the above quotations from Daniel Brown certainly resonate very well with my thoughts on the issue. Though Sociology normally must strive for a form of knowledge which is as ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ as possible, there is a place for the kind of Sociology that Daniel Brown would term ‘subjectivist’:

“Wilde brings this tendency into strong relief in *The Critic as Artist*, where he argues that criticism (for which read here these *Short Essays On South America*) cannot claim scientific objectivity but must recognize its basis in acts of interpretation and hence in personal sensibility:

“.....it has been said.....that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very serious error.....Criticism’s most perfect form.....is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret.” (Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*.)

Daniel Brown concludes:

“This new model which regards knowledge as subjectivist, as contingent upon individual experience.....involves the loss of the conception of knowledge of the outside world as.....an objective truth that can be uncovered.”

I

TRAUMA AND SYNCRETISM IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AMERICA

The history of South America is all about switches and changes, rapid or long drawn out, of very extraordinary kinds. First, the unification of South America with North America about two and a half million years ago. This 'Great American Interchange' let flora and fauna move from one to the other continent, altering both very greatly. The jaguar, animal *par excellence* of the Amazon, evolved from species spilling down across the newly-formed Panama connection.

Then, the connection between Siberia and Alaska was formed during the last Ice Age, and that let groups of human beings cross from Eurasia to America, probably between c. 20,000 and 10,000 years ago - the details of which still remain very much in dispute.

Then of course, came the gruesome, extraordinarily murderous, mind-blowing European Conquest, which ultimately had intensely creative outcomes, as it followed on from Christopher Columbus's 'discovery' of 'America' in 1492. This sad, fantastic, tragic, treacherous, cruel and violent, yet sweet dream-soaked history, is one of the greatest and most awful 'stations' of human existence yet experienced on this planet Earth.

It might seem paradoxical, if not outright callous, to suggest that a history which has included and still includes such immense human misery, could also be astonishingly creative of, and for, the human spirit. Janet Malcolm, in her book *In The Freud Archives*, records how a Jewish-American psychoanalyst once noted that a survivor of the Nazi Death Camps had said to him that "Auschwitz made a man of me." Obviously, though the person to whom this psychoanalyst was talking did not understand him, he did not mean to justify or rationalize the Holocaust in any way at all. He meant to communicate that sometimes, out of the most grotesque suffering, great transcendences of the human spirit can occur. As with the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, born

within his agony of deafness, the cultures and products of the imagination in post-1492 South America, both lived and objectified, do not demand only tears of grief, and dismal speculations, but can also evoke triumphant awe, amazement, and love.

Many historians, social scientists, and cultural commentators seem nowadays to be smitten by an attitude of mind according to which societies and social processes *should* be characterized by the highest rationality, and the most ideal ethical principles, before they can be admired or appreciated in any way at all. Societal organizations should spring from the purest plans and calculations of the human mind, otherwise it is a treachery to the project of human betterment to enjoy living within them at all. The idea that social development is usually, if not always, the outcome of accident, contingency, and unforeseeable kinds of conflict, rather than a preconceivable process conforming to patterns susceptible of analysis before the event, is thus a moral anathema, and regarded as identical to a rejection of any 'scientific' or ethical-rational comprehension of culture and society at all.

Recently, a new ethos has entered academic discussions of race relations in South America, according to which it is now proclaimed that Brazil in particular harbours anti-black racism and racial exclusion. An example of this is provided by *Race In Contemporary Brazil*, a book of essays edited by Rebecca Reichman. What was previously believed by many to be, if not a completely genuine racial melting-pot, then at least something nearer to it than any European or North American society, is now held not to be that at all. The fact that even a long line of Afro-Americans have praised Brazil for its relative lack of racial discrimination is of no avail; these new experts find or read now, a narrative or tendency of white racism in Brazil as vicious as that which is endemic to the United States.

Now, in no way would I wish to argue that there is no racism in Brazil; that would be foolish and naïve. But there is truth to the myth that the Portuguese colonialists did not resist sexual mingling with African and Amerindian women, as did the British for the most part in Asian India, Africa, and North America. And as a result of that, there was a huge racial mixing in most parts of Brazil, which makes clear-cut, caste-like racial discriminations very difficult in mainstream society. Anyone can see a Japanese-looking man sipping a drink with his whitish girlfriend, or a whitish girl dancing with her black boyfriend, almost anywhere in Brazil. Families with several children frequently evince black, white, and 'red' children, such is often the nature of chromosomal mixing and aggregation in sexual reproduction. At the same time individuals can display mixtures of African, Indian, and European features.

It is certainly true however, that there is in Brazil a huge class of very poor, oppressed people, who are disproportionately black. That is surely the serious issue; that is the reality to be addressed, but it is doubtful if anything is helped or changed very much by maintaining that 'standard' racism exists in Brazil, for reasons almost of some ideological purity.

Brazil is a highly stratified class society. Generally, the further up the pyramid then the whiter people are, whilst the further down, the darker and less European-looking they are. Together with this, a generalized cult of whiteness is to be found everywhere in the Brazilian media - in commercials, in *novellas* etc., and in the ideals of female beauty conveyed by them, which means status surrounds whiteness in much of Brazilian society. One hears this state of affairs described

as 'economic racism' by some Brazilians: given the inclination of richer people, as elsewhere, to hold poorer people in disdain, this disdain is to a considerable extent linked to colour identification. But, the same Brazilians say, a rich, 'educated' black person is fully accepted in more affluent, 'educated' circles, just as whiteness does not shield a homeless street child from discrimination. And so, given the infinite gradations of colour that extend through most sections of Brazilian society, the overall picture is very complex, and not rigid.

A further point to bear in mind, is that colour preponderances vary from region to region in Brazil as elsewhere in South America. Once again, given the sad inclination of distinct regions within many countries to look down on other regions of the same countries, especially when the former are more affluent, or more cosmopolitan, the cultural superiority felt in the South and South East of Brazil, for example, is almost inevitably tied up with a conscious or unconscious sense of white superiority.

So long as these reservations are clearly held in mind, it seems to me valid to applaud the racial mixing that does exist in Brazil and in some other South American countries. Ethnic, cultural, and spiritual interactions and blendings make the continent as exciting as any on earth: fascinating 'experiments' in human society, tributes to the better possibilities inherent in humanity. Whether one is considering the Brazilian religions of Candomblé, Umbanda, or Santo Daime, the religion of the Quechua people of Peru, the Andean music known as 'folklorico', or the remarkable twentieth-century art to be seen in the Museo Nacional in Bogotá, mixture and syncretism are of the essence of their brilliance.

Another, related kind of argument I have confronted, is that Salsa music, which originated among black people in Cuba and on Colombia's northern coast, has in some way been 'appropriated' by non-black musicians and audiences. I heard it argued at a Conference on Latin American Culture (at Glasgow University, in August 2000), that non-black Colombians stereotype blacks as personifications of sport, erotic music, and dance, and that there is both a stealth and a condescension involved in the mestizo Colombian love of Salsa music.

I think this is a false and narrow idea. Of course Salsa music originated among Cuban and Colombian black people, just as Jazz and Blues originated among North American black people. But as it influenced others' music, South American Salsa became colour-neutral, just as Rhythm and Blues or Rock music no longer belong exclusively to particular groups in North America, Europe, or anywhere else in the world. Great admiration and gratitude are due to the black people of the Americas, originally from Africa, for their inventions of these fantastic kinds of music. But as with the wheel, the building of pyramids, the worship of gods, the manufacture of automobiles, or the writing of symphonies, such things leave the exclusive provenance of particular human groups by the very nature of cultural diffusion.

From the invention of an alphabet or a sport, to the domestication of particular plants and animals, or the narrating of particular powerful myths, such phenomena never belong solely or in perpetuity to the human groups among which they emerge.

As for the idea that the ordinary *mestizo* people of Colombia hold black people in disdain for their athletic and erotic qualities: such a generalisation is difficult to prove or disprove

definitively, but I would argue that this is essentially an assumption borrowed from North American experience, and is largely inapposite to Colombia.

II

EUROPE AND SOUTH AMERICA

South America is nearly everywhere a little bit European, and yet it is not. Rio de Janeiro feels at moments like Lisbon or Naples, but soon something - like the huge waves on the beaches south of the city, or the vastness of its skyscrapers side by side with very un-European smells, sounds, and smiles - reminds you it is not. Lima or Bogotá can never be Madrid - their crazinesses have something far too Amerindian and African ground into them to be merely Hispanic. The syncretisms of South American religions - from Candomblé to the religion of the Andes - have created phenomena utterly *sui generis*, neither European nor African nor pre-Hispanic Indian, but South American.

A small, but typical example of this in respect of the music played in the Sinú region of north-western Colombia, is described by the ethnomusicologist Dale Olsen, in his book *Music Of El Dorado*:

“The indigenous *gaitas* and rattle are used for entertainment, often accompanying dance and song. In addition, African-type drums sometimes accompany the *gaitas*, and when singing is included, the texts demonstrate Spanish characteristics. Such blending of three heritages (native American, African, and Spanish) is obviously common in the Sinú region today, as revealed by the *gaita* ensemble and its cultural and musical context.”

The free spirit of women in South American countries is also quite unlike that of Latin South Europe. South American women have little fear of strangers, will not be constrained by family,

neighbourhood, or Church; which unfortunately, for all the erotic and expressive colour of Spanish or Italian women, is all too often the contrary with them.

It is of course true that in relation to many of the indigenous peoples of South America - oppressed, hedged-in, tormented - the dominant societies appear as White, Western, and Capitalist. But it is not the case on the whole that black people - people of predominantly African origin - are ghettoised into exploited enclaves, as in the U.S.A. or some European countries.

For South American societies are not Neo-European in the same way that the U.S.A., Canada, or Australia are: they really are Third World melting-pots - this is even true of Argentina.

When thought about in either Marxian or Weberian terms (that is, in terms of Imperialism, or of Capitalist Rationalization), South American cultures are neither European nor Neo-European; they represent something *sui generis*. It would be going too far to suggest that modern South American societies are essentially indigenous (though large areas and populations are so in many parts, especially the Andes), only superficially affected by European influences which in the main they have assimilated. They are not like African or Asian countries after the collapse of European Colonialism, where Asian or African societies and cultures continued to exist, however much they were transformed by Colonialism. Part of this difference stems from the fact that the Spanish and Portuguese interbred with Amerindians and Africans, whilst the British by contrast did not very much. The British Empire emanated from the colonialising project of a modernising, capitalist, industrializing society. Spain and Portugal on the other hand were late medieval, mercantilist, semi-feudal societies at the time of their Conquests of South America, though those structures were already in a process of transforming themselves at the very moment of the Conquest.

The Iberian Conquests and colonisations of Latin America produced a new race, or new races, and new cultures, that are not Neo-European. South Americans are essentially a mixture of Iberian, Indian, and African, both racially and culturally. There are large numbers of unmixed Europeans in parts of Argentina and Brazil, but they are descendents of much more recent immigrations, not products of the Iberian Conquests and colonisations.

The English/British Conquest and colonisation of North America by contrast, did not produce a new race. The majority of North Americans are neo-Europeans, as is their culture. People of mixed blood, i.e. of mixed European, Indian, and African descent are in a minority, and they do not shape the dominant North American reality ethnically or culturally. Non-European minorities, such as the Black and Hispanic communities, though sizeable in number, do not significantly shape the hegemonic cultures of North America except in certain distinct areas, but rather they represent sub-cultures though extremely vibrant ones.

The Iberian societies that conquered and colonised South America had very distinct features; they were hierarchical, semi-feudal systems, quasi-theocracies, authoritarian and metaphysically doctrinaire. But at the same time, in extremely paradoxical ways, both the Spanish and Portuguese possessed strongly anarchic and individualistic qualities in their cultures, their social characters, and in their behaviours. Obviously these characteristics varied according to where in

Spain or Portugal people came from, and from which social group or class. Colonists from Spanish towns, *comuneros*, were particularly likely to be rebellious, independent-minded people, reflecting the recent and contemporary struggles for liberty of these towns against the absolutist Spanish Crown. But a generalisation can nevertheless be made, that cuts across all Iberian cultures, concerning the individualistic spirit of the *Peninsulares* in the Age of Conquest, despite their absolutism, religion, and the feudal order.

There are thus many enigmas and ambiguities in South American societies concerning what exactly they are.

An overriding feature of colonial, republican, and modern South American cultures is the continuous inflow of influence from Europe and Neo-European North America. But this influence has never been a process of passive reception or absorption; it has always been both selective and transformative. The process (and I am not talking here about the equally powerful and complex flow of historical influence from South America to Europe) has always been conflictive, contradictory, dynamic and dialectically inventive. The first great colonial painter in Bogotá, Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos, was strongly influenced by the Spanish painter Zurbarán, and worked within the prescribed norms of colonial Spanish religious iconography. Yet he used indigenous Indian techniques and materials, and demonstrated a distinctly indigenous sense of colour.

Similarly in what is today Paraguay, the Jesuits taught traditional Guaraní artisans to sculpt and paint according to their own, Jesuit, technical notions and religious prescriptions, yet the magnificent Guaraní-Jesuit art still to be seen in Paraguay today is not European. Its world of colour, form, and expression is something else; it is Paraguayan.

If we jump to the present day, I can randomly pick up two books which demonstrate something similar. A book of engravings and inks by the Colombian artist Luis Caballero: *Selección De Obra Gráfica Y De Ilustraciones*, Banco de la República, Bogotá, (2001) opens with a quote from Paul Valéry:

“What is called ‘Great Art’ is simply that which makes demands upon all the faculties of the man who creates it, and whose works awaken another man, and cause all his faculties to participate in it.”

My other example is a book of essays by the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, called *The End Of The Savage*. This book begins with and constantly returns to quotations from Michel Foucault. Yet it is a unique intellectual statement, in no way dependent on Foucault. Indeed, as with the graphics of Caballero, it is precisely because the work is so distinctive and powerful, that there is no fear of its being overshadowed by quotations from a European author. There is no reason not to acknowledge important Europeans when the South American contributions are so strong.

I am tempted to give another example of a very different kind. A bar in Palermo, a district of Bogotá, has photographs of the following rock/blues stars all over its walls: John Lennon, The Rolling Stones, John Lee Hooker, Jim Morrison, and Jimmi Hendrix. It has photos of these and

none other. The bar is like a shrine to these particular gringo rock/blues musicians. Yet how well chosen! What better selection of visionaries could they have made?

As for Latin American rock music, it bears the same sort of relationship to British and American rock that José Silva bore towards Baudelaire and Mallarmé. It absorbs, or rather takes styles, rhythms, even particular songs and melodies, but in order to make something new and distinctly Latin American out of them.

In so many areas of thought, culture, and modes of living, South America's distance from Europe allows it to 'see the wood for the trees', to extract 'the kernel of rationality' in things European, to separate the wheat from the chaff, the pearls from the dross; in order to get at the crux of things and avoid the obfuscations.

The most profound interpretation I have ever heard or seen of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* was in the opera house in Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil. Even in the *Programme Notes* the understanding displayed towards Mozart's beauty, the intensity of his love for humanity, of the depth of his message of Universal Brotherhood, and of his music's miraculous wonder, were greater than I have ever felt at a performance in Europe.

III

THE GRINGO IN SOUTH AMERICA

The difference between Anglo-America and Iberian America is one of the most important and fascinating phenomena of modern history. The two modes of conquest and colonisation undertaken by the two kinds of European civilization, Catholic Spain and Portugal on the one hand, and Protestant England, later Britain on the other, present two very different models, and gave rise to very different kinds of 'New World', an issue admirably analysed and discussed in the writings of James Dunkerley, especially in his *Americana. The Americas In The World, Around 1850*.

My aim here is not to rehearse these themes, which I have touched on and intend to pursue further elsewhere, but merely to ruminate on one aspect of this great divide, which I consider to be essentially psychological, or cultural in a social psychological sense.

North America is powerful, organized, rational (in Max Weber's profound and contradictory sense of the word). It is successful, productive, influential, and masterful. South America is weak, disorganized, irrational (in the same Weberian sense); not very successful economically, either quantitatively or qualitatively, nor very influential at the global political level. In Britain for example, especially when compared with the coverage of North America, South American economic and political affairs are discussed very little in the mainstream media; few people

know much about any of the South American countries, nor see them as important nations on the world stage (except of course, in football).

Yet many would assert that South American cultures, especially on the level of lived experience, are far richer than those of North America. South America does not draw huge tourist crowds from either Europe or North America, but those gringos who do visit or travel in South America tend to have an adventurous spirit, open to different cultural realms from their own and are inclined to eschew the almost automatic superiority complex that pervades the outlook of so many North Americans and Western Europeans. This is detectable for the individual gringo staying or travelling in South America, in the fact that, amazingly, gringos are rather liked and welcome, so long as they are not pompous nor too unadaptable, everywhere on the continent. Given the histories of frequently unfriendly intervention on the parts of the U.S.A. and Britain in particular over the last 150 years this might seem surprising: one can only conclude that part of the reason for this lies in the type of European or North American who comes to South America. Those who dislike the disorganization and anarchy in everyday South American culture, do not stay long and do not return. Those who do, admire and love it, and continue in some way to be part of that long historical tradition of Europeans and neo-Europeans who sought El Dorado there, whether that amounted to gold, women, adventure, scientific discovery, or artistic, spiritual, or psychological release.

Among the first wave of Old World wanderers into South America are the Conquistadors, whose legacy of cruelty, boldness and greed still remains. But there were also the inspired explorers and mariners, the seekers after Paradise in the lands of Eternal Spring, whose biographies and personalities can often provoke deep responses of awe and respect today. The second group, the scientific explorers of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and H.W. Bates being among the most intriguing - were either bearers of extraordinary new theories or, and in some cases also, very remarkable human beings of major humanistic significance. In the first category lie von Humboldt and Darwin, in the second, von Humboldt again, Wallace, and Bates.

Among the third group, the artistic travellers and pursuers of new identity, experience, and life, must be included the numerous religious and other utopian communities that have transplanted themselves from Europe into South America, from the Jesuits to the Mennonites. (Permanent, voluntary immigration in general, from Europe or elsewhere is something different, which I am not talking about here.) Among the individual adventurers of the mind in the nineteenth century, one might single out the Frenchman Paul Marcoy; in the twentieth century, the Scottish writer Cunninghame Graham, and the American 'beat' writer William Burroughs stand out. (Marcel Duchamp came to live in Buenos Aires for a while in 1921, but apparently did not like it, and returned to New York.)

For the eccentric-minded North American or European who travels, visits, or stays in South America, especially one from an Anglo-Saxon Protestant background, South America offers an unparalleled freedom, warmth, and craziness. These contrast very strongly with what feel to be the over-organized, cold, controlled cultures of the North, which seem bent on suppressing every unpredictable fantasy, every strange occurrence, and banishing every kind of enchantment and inefficiency in life. How good it is for such a person to feel the purposelessness, the pure

sensuality and hedonism, and the lack of ambitious drive that seem to pervade the cultures and psyche of South America! Simply to be alive, not to count the cost all the time, nor measure up achievement against effort at every turn!

After all, what is life for? To maximise profit, to raise one's status and wealth endlessly, to achieve goals whose realizations, if they ever occur, never match or fulfil the original conceptions? Certainly, there is no given entity that can be called 'happiness'; but are human beings 'happier' or 'unhappier' if they do or do not rush around all the time in anxious restlessness, confusing social 'means' with 'ends'? For the 'ends' mutate or evaporate; 'means' become the melody (or lack of it) in life, so that Western society is trapped in urgency, work, achievement, stress, status, and cold arrogance.

In the European and neo-European, Northern mind, time is objectively organized, made measurable, and therefore standardised and homogeneous. Actions are plannable in advance, and easily made repeatable, especially as other 'social actors' can be assumed to have the same mental time. In South America by contrast, mental time remains more subjective, spontaneous, and therefore more variable in quality. This is the time of a farming and crafts-producing society, more than that of an urban, industrial-machine society. It retains elements of magic, and therefore heterogeneity of quality, which makes it less easily measured, planned, or calculated for the purpose of realizing practical projects of all kinds.

All this is not to suggest that South Americans do not work hard. On the contrary, the average working week in most South American countries (for those in formal employment) is as long as it was in nineteenth century Britain when Karl Marx was supporting the campaign for a Ten Hour working day. Nor is it that those who are formally unemployed, such as street-traders, are not quintessentially entrepreneurial and dedicated to making a sale.

Nor indeed is it that South Americans do not work well: if you watch waiters, cooks, domestic workers, quite apart from the excellent crafts workers or artisans to be found everywhere, you see meticulous and careful work being done. It is something in the mind, the personality, that in South Americans lacks a 'Protestant' sense of practical effectiveness, consistency, and the obsession for outward achievement; it is in a sense a profoundly stoical, fatalistic psychological orientation. It is a mode of mentality that lacks the Method of Northern Protestant cultures, their standardisations and systematizations of work practices and human interactions. For a machine to work smoothly, all its parts must be regularly and evenly oiled. Work and the management of work must be above all absolutely consistent and predictable, and this is what is lacking in South America. People will follow a given pattern unflinching for fifteen days: on the sixteenth day, the pattern is broken, apparently inexplicably for the gringo observer. A thing is put in its right place or replaced effectively in ninety-nine consecutive instants: the hundredth time it is put in the wrong place or not replaced. Plans change with great rapidity, according to people's moods, even if with the greatest warmth and politeness. This drives the gringo crazy, and undermines that sense of trust in future developments which is at the heart of business and all long-term projects, at least from a Western point of view.

These are precisely the things that cause a machine not to function in a consistent and uninterrupted fashion. They cause breakdowns, wastage, and above all perhaps, a lack of trust

on the part of all participants in the predictability of the machine in the future. Noone fears sufficiently, or experiences sufficient anxiety, to ensure that they are not the one exposed as the weak link that causes a breakdown or temporary stoppage. Noone can expect that things will be done in sixteen days from now, just exactly as they have been done today. People cannot expect that a hundred items out of a hundred will be put in their rightful place or replaced when necessary.

This consideration parallels exactly the observation made by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the early puritans made good businessmen, because they could trust each other, even when they had never met, and lived in countries separated by an ocean, in for example New England on the one hand and Holland or England on the other. Weber was concerned with the essentially unintended entrepreneurial economic consequences of a religious belief, but his argument can be developed into a consideration of how trust in others' honesty, or morality, involves even more importantly trust in the consistency, predictability, and standardisation of others' behaviour. Thus businessmen's trust in the honesty of trading partners, clients, or providers of services means each does not fear that the other is going to cheat him at any opportunity. Lack of such trust involves great loss of time, effort, and therefore money, as everyone has to carefully count his change. But above all it undermines expectations of consistency. And indeed petty cheating and theft are very common in South America - no doubt partly as a legacy from bureaucratic-hierarchical forms of colonial rule, but also partly as a result of economic depression, frustration, and failure, an unending experience of many of life as a gruelling day-to-day struggle to survive - often for what seem absurdly small financial gains; though not among the really poor, who seem almost always to be honest. But in large towns and cities especially, one sometimes feels as if one were surrounded by a sea of sharks waiting to take advantage of the slightest mistake made; and those warning against such dangers are often the ones most likely to pluck or extort a coin from one's pocket, in some way or other!

I do not wish however to link this point to sweeping generalizations about institutional corruption in South America. Certainly, at every level the popular talk and perception are that corruption is ubiquitous among the political and business classes. But I simply do not know, for lack of objective evidence, whether corruption at these levels really is greater in South America than in the U.S.A. or Northern Europe. It depends on one's definitions of corruption: there are, surely, in a capitalist market economy, infinite grades and shades between formally legal exploitation and illegal means of financial appropriation. My point concerns something else, which is about consistency, systematization, and the rational organization of social life. And it concerns the very much lower 'thresholds of shame' that exist concerning 'dodgy' financial transactions in South America, in comparison with in the North. Scrounging and borrowing money from others, as well as petty cheating, are undertaken or attempted with far less 'loss of face', though violent robbery is *not* more acceptable in South America than in the North; probably the contrary is so, even though the far greater depths of poverty that exist in the former might seem to make violent theft there more understandable than in the latter. I believe such a generalization as this is valid even in Colombia, except of course in areas directly caught up in the 'multi-polar conflict', or *Violencia*.

This last point connects with the fact that, in spite of many Western stereotypes, Latin Americans are generally less physically aggressive and less prone to violence than are members of Northern

societies (see my fifth essay, on this issue).

Another manifestation of the general phenomenon being discussed here, is the way that people in South America such as restaurateurs or taxi drivers change their manner most radically and disturbingly the moment a problem arises about whether a customer can or will pay a bill for services received. The abrupt shift from affability and friendliness to unpleasantness and hostility, occasioned, for example, by a restaurateur's finding a customer's credit card is not accepted by his machine, can be truly daunting. What is reflected here is insecurity, distrust, lack of confidence in others' honesty, consistency, and predictability of behaviour.

But the rationalization of social and economic life in the North does not come without immense cost to human beings, as Max Weber and Sigmund Freud both understood, and explored in their very different ways. Weber's notion of 'disenchantment', Marcuse's ideas about 'one-dimensionality', Hans Magnus Enzensburger's 'industrialization of the soul'; each aim to grasp the massive repression involved in the northern societies, in their domination over human spontaneity, their suppression of eroticism, sensuality, the aesthetic spirit, and spiritual love. For although advanced consumer capitalism apparently places both hedonism and romantic dreaming on pedestals, these take on forms of fraudulent idolotry. Deep joy, happiness, love, sexual ecstasy, and appreciation of beauty are repressed, as they are inherently incompatible with, and subversive of, the advanced capitalist system of society. It is in rebellion against such repressions that Western societies constantly witness great upsurges of counter-culture that reject the machine-like society. Such were the Romantic Movement, Da-da, the Surrealist Movement, and the counter-cultures of the 1960s, just to pin-point a few. The desperate and furious energies of these movements' drive towards Eros and the Aesthetic Dimension could never be felt so strongly in South America, because quite simply, people do not bang their heads against brick walls when either none exist, or when they only exist to a small extent.

The early twentieth-century avant-garde in South America was not part of a general civilization crisis as it was in Europe. It had more to do with national and ethnic identities and cultural self-definitions than it did with ecstatic chaos and experiential rebellion. The oppressions, social problems, and human sufferings in South America are of quite a different nature from those that these movements reacted against in the West. As Gwen Kirkpatrick put it in an essay on the avant-garde in Latin America:

“(An) awareness of a different past, and of heterogeneous cultural elements, often glaringly unassimilated in official culture..... makes (up) the vanguardist movements in Latin America.....The adoption of regional or nationalistic themes, or of pre-Columbian imagery and symbols, mixed with experimental artistic forms and revolutionary social movements in startling ways. Part of the vanguard's radical project was to bring submerged or disappearing elements of the American tradition to public consciousness - in this case not just repressed sexualities but also repressed populations, symbolic systems and languages. Perhaps the most visible traces can be found in the *indigenista* or *negritud* movements, but social and artistic radicalism is not limited to a focus on these groups.”

It is a lack of the Protestant sense of practical effectiveness and standardizing consistency that allows in South America, alongside its inefficient economies and myriad human problems and

sufferings, nevertheless a greater receptivity to the Great Joy; something which the West could learn from if it wished to, though it shows little sign of wanting to at present. Morality, self-control, planning, thinking about past and future: rather than fun, smiles, living in the present, making the best of things, beauty, and sex. The West chooses the first, Latin America the second.

IV

SEXUALITY IN SOUTH AMERICA

It is often said that Latin American societies in general have a 'macho' culture. But I wonder if in many senses that is true. Many would agree that Latin American families, in one sense or another - often because there is no father present - are matriarchal in the home, but my questioning about the 'macho' epithet goes beyond that fact. Actually, in many ways women are emotionally and spiritually dominant in Latin American societies, but because the distinct roles of men and women in certain areas are held onto very strongly - due as much to the wishes of women as of men, if not more - this is often not recognized by Western Europeans or North Americans. The role distinctions themselves are too often defined as representing 'machismo,' because Western Feminism has placed such importance upon breaking them down everywhere; so the reality in Latin America is therefore not seen or understood by it at all.

Latin American women do not, on the whole, see the division between 'domestic' and 'public' life as their central concern - exceptions must be made for Western-influenced intellectual women

here. Overcoming such divisions is not a battlefield so far as they are concerned. They love to be supported financially by a man if they can find one who can and will do so, but they do not want to be subjected to his will, whether this concerns the upbringing of children, how they spend their free time, or their tastes in clothes, friends, or lifestyle. They want to be 'free', but even if that does require them earning independent money in independent paid work, that work itself is not a sacred altar for them. Nor therefore does a woman who runs a restaurant or business pose a threat to men's egos; she still likes to be paid for by a man who takes her out!

The deep-seated idea that men should pay for women, on every kind of level, does not, as Western Feminists assume, usually mean that women are subjugated by men. If a man is prepared to pay for a woman - for a meal, for sex, or to support her while living with him - this means she has great appeal, character, physical attraction, erotic allure and mystique. She will probably be the one to decide where they eat, when they make love, or where they live! Neither a wife, a lover, nor a prostitute is a slave to a man in South America. (The reader must take a statement such as this last with a degree of poetic licence, or rather perhaps, with a healthy pinch of salt!)

The woman usually dictates the mood and pace of life; again, the Western Feminist cannot know this, as she or he never experiences what we are talking about here. Sexual mores are such that women are not humiliated because they 'please' men; neither as prostitutes nor as sexy girlfriends or wives. Sensuality is admired, not despised as it is in northern Protestant cultures. Women are beautiful, men are pleased by their beauty; both women and men understand this as one of the deepest facts of life, and they love and accept it. Due to this, dancing is fun, parties are wild, night-life is exciting as it never is in the North: for both men and women.

Because the mystique in a man-woman relationship in Latin America is of a rather 'beauty and the beast' kind, it is not felt as unnatural for a woman to be with a man much older than her. A beautiful girl of twenty will happily be with a man of fifty-five. He has money, experience, and wherewithal in life; she has beauty, youth, and the essence of life itself. It is not only older women, but young men who have the roughest time!

In South America there exists a mystique, a sense of excitement and of fun in pure physical sexuality of a kind that has been more or less abolished in most sectors of Northern European and Neo-European societies. As in most areas of human physicality and animality, South American societies have a much higher threshold above which sexuality is regarded as crude or improper, than do Western societies. In the language of the social theorist Norbert Elias, they have lower 'thresholds of shame.' Just as you can see, in the foyer of a luxury hotel in Bogotá, a fountain which includes a statue of a boy peeing from a long penis in a completely jokey mood, so in an erotic bar anywhere in South America not an eyelid is blinked at the sight of completely naked girls, sitting at tables drinking, smoking, and talking.

In the representation of women in typical popular arts, such as paintings or photographs on corridor walls of hotels, in calendars, advertisements, or on playful post-cards, there are poses, moods, and styles that would be quite inconceivable, in analogous kinds of genre (i.e. excluding pornography, whether 'hard' or 'soft'), in Britain at any rate, today. They would fall foul of a largely unconscious, internalized mixture of conservative puritanical prudishness and modern

'feministic' 'political correctness', which would render them in bad taste.

Certainly there are some media and genres within Western popular culture, such as 'pop' videos, in which representation of women is often highly erotic. But in this genre a woman is usually shown as being in control of her actions, as a thinking, feeling person, not just an animal or a 'crazy girl'. Even if in whorish mode, a woman must be seen to be expressing her sexuality for herself, for her own conscious pleasure, on her own terms and sometimes quite narcissistically. Above all, when 'ideologically sound' or 'politically correct,' there must be no suspicion that she is purely at the service of men's pleasure, even if what she is doing is clearly a form of erotic entertainment, such as stripping or dancing sexily.

In its early phases, 'second-wave' modern Western Feminism (emerging in the early Seventies - not the Sixties: counter-cultural Sixties' Women's (joyful) Liberation was very different from Seventies Feminism), was prudish and anti-erotic, but some of its activists/advocates have come now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to change their perspective and accept, or even embrace, women as erotic and sensual/sexual. But this sexuality is *rationalized*, in the senses of this word as developed within Western thought from Immanuel Kant to Max Weber.

It is actually quite clear, especially in 'Anglo-Saxon' countries like Britain, that modern (especially 'radical') Feminism flows seamlessly, though in mutual transformation, combination, and synthesis, through and from priggish, prudish, anti-erotic Victorian Morality. One can see this to be the case, not merely by examining the ideas, values, and attitudes involved, but by looking at the intellectuals who knock the ideas into shape in print. Feminist journalists, authors, art historians and film critics were and are usually from the upper middle-class intelligentsia, who a few decades earlier were the progenitors of Victorian Morality.

One aspect of femininity that Western Feminism remains implacably against, is the assumed closeness of women to children and animals: that is, a sense that women are more 'childish' or 'childlike' and more 'creature-like' than men (with the exception of *artistic* men). Whether due to nature or socialization, Western Feminists reject this; but I doubt if even 'feministic' South American women do. The play called *Monólogos de la Vagina* (Monologues of/from the Vagina) was showing in Bogotá in 2003. A leaflet publicizing it had a sensual close-up photograph of a woman's mouth on the front and, pushed through people's letter-boxes, this was evidently not seen as vulgar, pornographic, nor in any kind of public 'bad taste'. A photograph of the women actresses featured in the play showed them without irony as vivacious, attractive, and not in any way resentful or angry, as the publicity for a play of this kind dealing with 'women's issues' would tend to be in Britain. Yet the play was presented as something serious and thoughtful, as well as humorous; touching on profound matters in women's lives.

My feelings about this leaflet, and reactions to it on the part of women that I knew in Bogotá, indicated precisely some of the points made here: sex and sexual organs, female or male, are not objects of shame, derision, sleazy humour or embarrassment in South America; matters concerning the emancipation, happiness, and well-being of women in South America are not loaded with bitterness, resentment, generalizing anti-maleness, anti-erotic Puritanism or anger in the way they are in Western Feminism.

A woman for Western Feminism must always be seen as a thinking being, never as merely physical; a certain naive, innocent, unthinking sexiness must be eliminated, in a classic process of Weberian *disenchantment*, and in a raising of what Norbert Elias called the 'threshold of shame'.

In South America however, women are not in the slightest bit disturbed by pictures of other women naked, nor do they feel in the least bit humiliated at dancing for a man's pleasure in deliberately sexy ways, either in public or in private. When it comes to the erotic sphere, neither mental nor ideological rules seem to apply, though this does not mean there are no norms of politeness, respect, or mutual consideration between the sexes in operation. Indeed, were these last not quite strongly active, above all among *men*, strip-clubs and sexy bars etc. would very quickly turn riotous, which actually very rarely occurs.

In this argument I am presenting, which inevitably involves vast generalizations, I do not wish to suggest that sexy women in South America are not thoughtful or intelligent, nor that they do not enjoy what they do for their own satisfaction, nor that they are insensitive to humiliation or exploitation; nor that they do not desire freedom, independence, and equality with men. That is not the situation at all, for women have very strong personalities and are extremely strong-willed in South America. If this were not the case, you simply would not see so many women, alone or in groups, out at all hours of the night in cities and towns; so that at most bars, restaurants, or clubs there are normally at least as many women as men present. It is rather that the emancipated South American woman does not require to 'escape' from the sexual, animalistic, or childish realms of femininity in order to be free and equal.

For women to be the child-bearing half of humankind is not for South American women something to be loathed, but loved; not resented, but welcomed, for all the difficulties and hardships it brings them. But in this connection it must be noted that children are very differently understood and treated in South America than in the North, though mercifully things are changing now in the latter concerning 'strictures' involved in the upbringing of children. In a wonderful sentence, Jan Rocha writes in her book *Brazil In Focus*: "Brazilians believe that children should be seen and heard, even in restaurants late at night." This much greater indulgence in, and tolerance of children and childishness, contributes to making adult Brazilian culture much 'softer' than in the more Spartan North, and since it applies to both boys and girls, women in adulthood are not accustomed to keeping silent or suppressing their thoughts and feelings. They speak, shout, sing, and express themselves. The whole dynamic between men, women, and children is quite different in Latin America than in the West.

Except for a small minority of intellectual women, the modern Western Feminist conception (which is, I believe, largely an Anglo-American outlook) of Woman's Liberation is not the one chosen by South American women. There is a feeling, which the Western Feministic mind seems unable to experience or countenance, that living is *most free* if the animalistic and the erotic are *not* lost as human beings grow in ethical, intellectual, and aesthetic stature and liberate themselves from all *really* enslaving chains. One might describe this state of existence as a roundly balanced mutual containment or 'fraternal union' of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as understood by Friedrich Nietzsche in his profoundest philosophizings about art.

I hope it is clear in this essay that my critique of what I call (essentially Anglo-Saxon) Western Feminism, is undertaken from a position that is in profound sympathy and agreement with the genuine struggles of women for equality with men, for freedom, for justice, and for genuine emancipation in all spheres. I mean this as a critique from *inside* these struggles, as when Rosa Luxembourge criticized Leninism from *within* the cause of Revolutionary Socialism as it was understood in that period of history. I do not mean my comments in a reactionary, 'back to the good old days' sense. I profoundly believe that the puritanical, authoritarian streak to be found in some versions of Western Feministic ideology and practice is anti-libertarian, anti-human, anti-Lawrentian, and finally in deep antagonism with the possibility of fulfilment in a healthy, happy, free, loving, sensual, and imaginatively inspired, creative culture. The implicit suggestion that, for example, treating women as 'sex objects', in the sense of men enjoying (or 'gazing' at) their sexiness and beauty, is *intrinsically* connected with the exploitation of and violence against women, is for me very mistaken. The commercial exploitation of women in images used to sell commodities, lifestyles, and conformity to selfish, greedy, callous Consumer Capitalism, is something quite different from a life-affirming Eros. It is part and parcel of the way commercial capitalism uses *any* and *all* aspects of culture, humanity, or nature in its ruthless exploitation and cynical manipulation of human beings. As for violence: can it really be maintained that where sexual mores are looser and more liberal, where human nakedness is not utterly taboo, that here there is more likelihood of domestic violence and rape than in repressed, John Knox/Ayatollah Khomeini/Moral Majoritarian or Radical Feminist kinds of milieu?

Although views such as those I express here frequently draw out the direst contempt, derision and anger towards me in Britain (by no means only from women - Western Feminism is a very generalized belief-system here now), I usually find that Latin American women hold opinions similar to me.

V

ON VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION IN SOUTH AMERICA

In an interesting book called *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, Miguel Angel Centano has argued that wars between states in South America have been much less frequent than on other continents, especially Europe, over the last 200 years. There is no point in repeating or summarising his arguments here, for my intention is to convey, as from a European individual's experience in South America, how his analysis tallies with my feeling that, in spite of the intense stereotyping of the continent as violent, the contrary is really the case.

One of the points Centano makes is that organized inter-state wars require the organization and militarization of civil society, as well as the massive development of the state's capacity to

dominate and control all spheres of society, both of which have not generally happened in South America. Rather, there have been many civil wars, revolutions, violent contestations over state power, insurrections, coups, and every possible kind of violent intra-state disturbance, massacre, repression, and conflict in South American countries; but these, however bloody and savage, are not the same as 'international wars', either in their intrinsic character nor their consequences. Violence in South America has been more anarchic than organized on the whole, and this fact is reflected in many aspects of South American culture and society. This anarchism is intolerable to the European mind: massive organized wars are 'civilized', but not revolutions, civil wars, or skirmishes between rebels or guerrillas and the State!

Yet organized wars turn human beings into efficient killing machines far more effectively than do domestic forms of violent conflict, certainly in the long run. The engineering of every citizen into a potential soldier is much more a fact of European than of Latin American history, and this is indicated very clearly in everyday life. When there is a bar-brawl in North America or Northern Europe, men punch each other, including in the head. In South America they push, shout, gesture, flail; far less often do they kick or punch in such a way as to leave scars, black-eyes, or broken bones. I have been robbed aggressively in New Orleans, but in South America on the few occasions I have met an attempt to 'mug' me, I have been able to yell, boo, shift about, and beat off menacing attacks, without any appearance of a knife or gun. Men only go *so far* in my experience, including in Bogotá which is described as very dangerous in all the guide books I have read.

Of course I am generalizing here, as does Centeno in the above mentioned book. But I believe there is validity in these generalizations.

The difference between the Northern, Occidental pattern and that of Latin America in respect of aggression, is part of a wider mental-emotional-behavioural difference, which includes the differences between the continents in terms of sexuality, and of rationalized efficiency, which I have discussed in other essays. Dreadful though South American 'machismo' can be, it is not like that of Northern, cold patriarchal domination. The disorganized approach to economic activity in South America never attains the desiccated, 'disenchanted', soulless rationalism of Northern Europe or the United States.

This difference was at the heart of the tragedy of the Falklands/ Malvinas war. The invasion of the islands undertaken by the ghastly Argentinian *junta* under General Galtieri, was not intended to start a war. The idiot dictator actually believed Britain wanted to get rid of the islands, and only needed a shove. All South America was horrified to see Britain actually send a 'Task Force' to fight a war on Goose Green; surely everyone could just argue, shout, and 'jaw-jaw': but really to have hundreds of young men killed because of this stupidity? Not for a cigarettes-cum-*chiclé* vendor I talked to once on the streets of Lima, nor a psychologist I know in Rio de Janeiro! It was shocking to them what Britain did, though neither held any brief for the Argentinian *junta*.

As part of the ineffectiveness of the State in most South American countries, their anarchism and thoroughly unintegrated social totalities, is a gentleness, an easy-going fatalism, a sense of the pointlessness of hatred and violence, even in the most miserable conditions. Even in the slums of *pueblos jóvenes*, *favelas*, etc. etc., cooperation and neighbourliness are far more striking than

the inevitable violence that exists. Connected with this it always seems to me, is a deep patriotism among all classes and groups in South American countries, but not nationalism. Nationalism is for the ideologues, politicians, the army etc. etc. 'Ordinary people' feel a love for their country and its people: from Amazonian 'natives' in eastern Peru, to call-girls in Brazil, to doctors or lawyers everywhere. "Ah, my poor country," one hears so often: and people mean it, though they know not the answers to the problems.

In South American countries citizenship is 'loose', rather than 'tight', as in Europe or the United States. This does not mean people fail to identify with their countries - witness their support for their national football teams in the World Cup! But, at least at the present time, the majority eschew organized demonstrations of support for their states and governments, and are on the whole sceptical if not cynical about all politics.

VI

THE AMAZON AS THE HEART OF A CONTINENT

The idea that the Amazon Basin constitutes the 'heart' of South America, is more than a sentimental cliché. Geographically it is obviously situated centrally, and in the upper half of the continent. It is also the largest single environmental region on the continent after the Andes, constituting a huge proportion of its total area.

The majority of South American nations - the only exceptions being Chile, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay - have immense proportions of their territories in the tropical Amazonian rainforest,

in some cases more than half. The Amazon region is a crucial determinant of continental South America's climatic, hydrological, and bio-diversity systems, as indeed it is also for the whole world.

In an historical sense the Amazon is the heart, or epicentre, of South America as well. It was in this region that crucial battles and rivalries between colonial Spanish and Portuguese America took place, defining over time the division of much of the continent between the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns. Here also have occurred - and still do occur - important tensions and pressures which have come to shape the frontiers between Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, the Guyanas, and Brazil.

In recent decades, one of the most important and fateful political and economic projects initiated on the continent, has been the Brazilian effort to open up, 'develop', and 'modernize', the Amazon region of Brazil. The military dictatorship's attempts in the 1970s to 'flood the Amazon with civilization', and to strengthen the geo-military frontiers of Brazilian influence and control on the continent, not only unleashed one of the greatest environmental disasters in human history, but also, paradoxically and happily, gave stimulus to one of the most positive and world-educating movements ever in planetary ecological awareness. In similarly contradictory manner, they precipitated genocidal and ethnocidal misery for many Amazonian Indian groups, at the same time as generating world-wide support for the rights of indigenous Amazonian peoples.

The Brazilian military dictatorship triggered similarly catastrophic and murderous nationalistic experiments in other South American countries - since as Nixon, the American President at the time put it, "Where Brazil goes, there goes the rest of the hemisphere." From the effects of these ghastly happenings, much of the continent is only just now beginning to recover.

In the longer historical, or rather pre-historical sense, the Amazon jungle has also represented a cultural 'core' for the South American continent. Apart from the tremendously rich and varied cultures that have themselves existed and still do exist in this vast region, the Amazonian rainforest and its human cultures gave the civilizations of the Andean region some of their most central and important plants, animals, symbols, spiritual ideas, and aesthetic principles. Among these were, probably, coca and cotton, and certainly *ayahuasca*, parrots and parrot feathers, the jaguar and the feline fantasy. Also emanating from Amazonian cultures and psyches were the concepts of geometric design and hallucinatory vision into the supernatural world, and the central shamanistic cosmology wherein people join in with the sun's fertilization of the earth, to conceive new life in plants, animals, people and children.

VI1

THE PANTANAL

In early May, northern Paraguay begins to reduce in heat, and sometimes the nights are even quite cold, while certain days can be dull and overcast. It is the sort of weather that confuses a traveller, who never knows whether he is too hot or too cold, so changeable it is, and it seems at times that he both sweats and shivers.

I was in Concepción, a town on the River Paraguay, almost exactly in the centre of Paraguay the country, waiting for a boat that would take me to Bahía Negra, a village near the border with Brazil, from where I could get another boat to Corumbá, in the Pantanal region of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil.

I was staying in a hotel that seemed lost in the past, a huge house that must once have been the home of an estancia -owning family, crumbling yet extraordinarily beautiful, painted white with huge stone staircases, walls with mock battlements, and stone mosaic floors; I looked at some women kneeling on a stone floor, washing clothes while chatting and laughing, their long black hair tumbling down as they rocked with the motions of their work.

I went to the port each morning for several days, trying to find out if and when a boat might be leaving for Bahía Negra. Around the boats were horse-drawn carts, loading up with fruit and vegetables, but I could never ascertain exactly when the next boat was due to leave. Once a boat was supposed to go, but at the last minute I learned that all the cabins were taken, and since the journey to Bahía Negra lasted three days and three nights, and without a cabin one would have to sleep on any space that could be found on deck, and these boats were always jam-packed with passengers who got on and off at every port, with crates of vegetables, dried meat, bottles of beer and coca-cola, it seemed unwise to take a boat without having a cabin.

Not that the cabins were luxurious. In each there were four berths, wooden affairs each with a louse-ridden, hard mattress. Cockroaches desported themselves on the graffiti-covered walls, and there were no more than two feet above each bunk before one cracked one's head on the ceiling or the bunk above. Two portholes about nine inches in radius adorned the outer wall; not enough really to see out of comfortably, but sufficiently wide to let in the torrential rain when it came, night or day.

When I finally found myself on a boat that actually moved one Friday morning, and I really had a cabin, my heart leapt up in joy to feel the cool breeze, the glorious sun, the movement of trees along the river banks; with friendly fellow-passengers who were evidently quite as relieved as I was that we were at last on our way.

Soon we were droning by forested banks on which sat herons and storks, and where white and black swifts winged their ways, and bright toucans flapped past with their huge beaks poking into the future. At night the stars shimmered like tossed particles of silver thrown into the celestial spheres; crickets clicked and cicadas made up a glorious night-time orchestra.

As you sail up the River Paraguay, just before entering the region known as the Pantanal, you see cement works in the stretch around Villa Mi heaving dust from a limestone cliff into the water, and factories producing tannin from *quebracho* bark, spewing thick stinking smoke into the air. Water, sky, and forest are polluted for miles around, all for the sake of how much economic production of useful product, and for the production of how much economic value?

Not much I suspect, but for sure the value of the birds, fish, and trees killed or poisoned must be very much greater, even if evaluated only in terms of the potential economic gain that could be achieved through their sustainable harvesting, or from ecotourism - not that the latter is free from

destructive potential: it is merely that, dollar for dollar, ecotourism is normally likely to be less destructive than non-sustainable resource extraction. And of course this limited kind of evaluation completely ignores the human and biological values of organisms, ecosystems and biodiversity, or the intrinsic aesthetic and spiritual values of nature.

Of course there are vast stretches in between the blemishes I have described, in which the sky and water smile with rarefied blueness in the daytime, as the boat glides past islands of floating vegetation that fold and undulate in the boat's turbulence, and where birds flap with extraordinary colours as they squawk, and caiman splosh in the water around you; and where at night if the sky is clear you gaze at a magical celestial dome of infinite shimmering stars, Orion's Belt and The Plough leaping out at you in their miraculous brightness; this to the accompaniment of the night forest's symphonies of cicadas and crickets stridulating and clicking, and of toads issuing their hard, deep croakings.

One of the worst ideas human beings have ever had must be that of the Hidrovia Project, according to which plan Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, in whose territories the Pantanal lies, would cooperate in dredging and straightening the Upper River Paraguay, for the purpose of allowing even huger barges of cargo to pass along it than do now. Already the immense monsters taking iron or soya beans from Corumbá down the river to the Plate estuary seem excessive in both size and numbers, but to lose all the values of the vast Pantanal flood-system - economic, ecological, and aesthetic, for one single benefit, that of faster and more efficient transportation of iron and soya beans, seems the height of stupidity and absurdity. For such actions would change irrevocably the hydrology and ecology of the Pantanal, with utterly unpredictable consequences, except inasmuch as we know they would be disastrous for these unique ecosystems and biodiversities.

What a sad irony that soya beans, which many well-meaning vegetarians-cum-environmentalists some decades ago thought could be a major part of the solution to environmental problems, should now be so much part of the problem of environmental destruction here. Many thought that the high protein yield per acre from soya production indicated the general folly of meat consumption from the point of view of wise land-use. But here we see in the proposed Hidrovia Project, a most extreme example of irresponsible environmental destruction, wished for by a group of capitalist land-owners and food-producers who narrowly calculate how their profits from the production of soya beans might be increased.

The Pantanal provides a graphic example of how natural environments are built up and develop over long periods of time, which put the history of the human race into relatively minute proportions, let alone that of civilizations; but which can be ruined in little more than a blink of planetary time. For the geological and hydrological features that underlie the enormous flood-system of the Pantanal, covering a region almost the size of Britain, though based on a very moderately-sized river, the River Paraguay, were created millions of years ago. But it was only a few thousand years ago that climate changes brought into being a climatic regime that allowed the emergence of the particular, immensely complex and rich set of ecosystems that make up the present Pantanal.

This shows not only the complexity of global environmental evolution, and the perilous nature of

the temptation for human society to intervene in it with great technological force but little subtlety of understanding; it also shows that environments are never static: 'wise-use', 'preservation', 'sustainable development', are terms which cannot mean 'keeping things the same.' Nothing does stay the same, as Heraclitus knew so well; and clearly the Pantanal forests are not in any case climax systems. It is a question of comprehending change, moving with change, in ways that avoid massive chaos or destruction, and permit, as knowledge best allows, that the most fecund future possible for nature and the most satisfactory future for humanity are ensured. This is a very dicey, complex dance, as if on a moving pin-head, with little certainty and no dogmatism allowed. That is not to deny however the need for passionate involvement, and urgent changes, from the present direction of human activities. It is a question of acting upon cautious judgements made on the basis of the maximum amount of knowledge and experience possible.

One thing glares at one who travels through the Paraguayan part of the Pantanal, up the river Paraguay. By contrast with the way the 'whites', the ordinary Paraguayans, organize their lives and livelihoods along this river, how much more 'sustainable', 'appropriate', and sensible appear the communities of Chamacoco Indians! They build their houses from wood, rather than bricks and cement; which are far cooler in hot weather and far warmer in cold weather. If harvested in wise and sustainable ways, wood avoids the diabolical pollution generated in the kind of cement production described earlier. And how much more attractive are Indian settlements than most of the concrete messes created by the non-indigenous communities. In spite of their having been pushed off their traditional lands in the interior of the Chaco into a few restricted settlements along the banks of the River Paraguay, without sufficient land to grow agricultural produce to sell, let alone to continue their traditional life-ways which included hunting and gathering; nevertheless the Chamacoco community at Bahía Negra, just before the border with Brazil, puts the environmental eyesore of Villa Mi to shame.

In stunned surprise, one discovers that this indigenous community has a solar-powered electricity generator provided by British aid. The mestizo community by contrast trundles along with electricity produced by an oil generator. Perhaps Ms Clare Short feels that this good idea somehow washes her hands of the blood and guilt of her complicity in the bombing of Afghanistan in 2001, as all the perfumes of Arabia could not do for poor Lady MacBeth; at any rate, this project was apparently started in 1999/2000, at which time Ms Short was in charge of British foreign aid.

As a further point in the reckoning of indigenous versus non-indigenous existence in this area, the Indians in Bahía Negra, as everywhere else in Paraguay, produce art; called *artesanía*, this is sculpture fashioned in wood of armadillo, deer, peccary, jaguar, parrots, or crocodiles, in a kind of 'primitive', 'crude', direct and intuitive form that seems very close to what many early twentieth century avant-garde European artists of genius struggled to discover.

I would not like however to be thought of as deprecatory towards all aspects of mestizo civilization along the banks of the River Paraguay. The evils mentioned above are of a world-capitalist-modern-machine-mind kind; the ordinary *mestizo* people in their communities along the river in and just outside the Pantanal in Paraguay are warm and fascinating. One can sit in a wooden *ranchito* with a stove that looks seventy years old; the grandmother serves soup on a table covered with an old lace table-cloth, her grandsons looking like real cowboys, taking off their

cowboy hats to eat her soup; she reminisces about her mother and father who were born, and died, here in Bahía Negra; when they were born the Chamacoco still lived in the Chaco. The old wooden chairs, hats hanging on the rough walls, the odd bits of non-functioning machinery around, the dog that sneaks into the food cupboard the moment grandmother leaves the room; all is very much of an unhurting culture, a slow old-time world, that the television - which can only receive one station - does not fracture. As with the daguerrotype that arrives in the mythical village of Gabriel García Márquez' novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the TV is quickly mastered, but it is absorbed into the village's dream-state. It really makes little difference to people's everyday lives.

And if *rancheros* get drunk late at night, long after the electricity generator has stopped and the strip neon lights no longer pour out their dim light, they may start to sing plaintive songs in drunken, intensely emotional voices, strumming old guitars under the moon and stars.

As everywhere in South America, the non-indigenous, *mestizo*, or 'white' people do not understand the Indians, even when they live right next to them and like them, even marrying them from time to time. They consider the Indians are lucky now to have been 'civilized', that is, to have been settled onto so little land they cannot continue with their traditional forms of economy, but are obliged to take on low-waged work or survive from selling artesanía. To have had their traditional clothes, rites, rituals, and religions suppressed, and replaced by Christian dogma whether Catholic or Protestant Evangelical - the latter in the case of the Chamacoco - the *mestizos* consider to be great progress. Now the Indians can read and write, though few actually do so very much, any more than do the *mestizos*; but of course they go to Church. All this is good the *mestizos* generally think, and are astonished that anyone from outside could be interested in traditional Indian cultures. Before, did the Indians not merely wander around, searching for food, unclothed, ignorant of all 'civilized' blessings? And the Indians themselves, if sufficiently well indoctrinated, think the same.

Shamanism, they have been taught to think, is un-Christian. Now they follow Jesus Christ and True Religion. They must not consume hallucinogenic drugs in order to enter the visionary spirit-world, for these, like alcohol, are forbidden by Jesus Christ. Thus, although they feel a strong attachment to their identity, and believe they must preserve some of their traditions, they embrace a collective amnesia concerning their real histories and past cultures. One can only hope that, though buried, these will re-emerge in time and flourish anew, although they will inevitably be in forms different from before.

VIII

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DARWIN ON TIERRA DEL FUEGO

"While entering (the Bay of Good Success) we were saluted in a manner becoming the

inhabitants of this savage land. A group of Fuegians partly concealed by the entangled forest, were perched on a wild point overhanging the sea; and as we passed by, they sprang up, and waving their tattered cloaks sent forth a loud and sonorous shout. The savages followed the ship, and just before dark we saw their fire, and again heard their wild cry."

Charles Darwin, *Voyage Of The Beagle*.

This is how Darwin described his first encounter with the Haush, or Selk'nam, a hunter-gathering people of eastern Tierra del Fuego, on December 17th 1832, in his *Journal Of Researches Into The Geology And Natural History Of The Various Countries Visited By H.M.S. Beagle, Under The Command Of Captain Fitzroy, R.N. From 1832 To 1836*, the book which subsequently became known as *Voyage Of The Beagle*.

David Wilson, in his book *Indigenous South Americans of the Past and Present*, writes thus of Darwin's account of meeting Fuegian peoples:

".....upon encountering the (Fuegian) people, this nineteenth-century European gentleman could scarcely believe that such 'wretched savages' belonged to the human race. Nevertheless, the scientist in him was able to rise above narrower nineteenth-century English prejudices, permitting him to see that these people, so different from any indigenous peoples to the north (i.e. in the Andes and Brazil), must have come down from the north at some remote time in the past to adapt, and thus endure, in the Fuegian climate."

Of course, one must understand Darwin's observations in the light of his social and historical context: as a member of the English upper classes of the 1830s, but also as a 'member' of the fraternity of European scientist-travellers of that period who visited and reported on their observations in South America. Nevertheless, his perceptions are striking, partly because of the precise and exact prose he used in his accounts of the native peoples he met, which is quite as limpid and superb as are his geological and biological descriptions. Darwin's attitudes can surprise today's readers perhaps, because it was not inevitable that a European gentleman-scientist of his period should think in his way. Humboldt for example, in his writings about his experiences in Colombia and Venezuela some thirty or so years earlier, stressed a universalistic humanism which united peoples of the Old and New Worlds; and although convinced of the cultural inferiority of South American 'natives' in certain respects in comparison with Europeans, he adopted a different tone from Darwin, and constantly affirmed his belief that slavery was the greatest evil in the world. He put his Kantian ethics where his mouth was so to speak. And H.W. Bates, Darwin's contemporary and fellow countryman, in his book *The Naturalist On The River Amazons*, speaks of Amazonian Indians and what would today be called *caboclos* in much more sympathetic and respectful terms, noting particularly how beautiful the women of the region were! (See the NOTE at the end of this essay.)

Let us follow Darwin's account further:

"In the morning, the Captain sent a party to communicate with the Fuegians. When we came

within hail, one of the four natives who were present advanced to receive us, and began to shout most vehemently, wishing to direct us where to land. When we were on shore the party looked rather alarmed, but continued talking and making gestures with great rapidity. It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I had ever beheld. I could not have believed how wide was the difference, between savage and civilized man. It is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, in as much as in man there is a greater power of improvement."

The extraordinary thing about this passage is not really the snobbery of comparing a 'savage' with a wild animal, in comparison with a 'civilized' man who is compared with a domesticated animal. It is rather that, as Darwin would later show in *On the Origin of Species*, in the course of man's domestication of animals and plants from wild precursors, their original 'natures' are lost, and replaced by artificial races that can no longer survive in nature. The latter owe their existence entirely to the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*; they are wholly dependent upon man, having been manipulated through breeding to yield what man wants, and to be tame, obedient, and subservient to man. In a sense of course, they are no more nor less 'natural' or 'artificial' than wild species, and no less 'free' or 'unfree'. The only relevant criterion within the theory of evolution is survival. Nevertheless, it is strange that this man, Charles Darwin, should prefer being similar to a domesticated animal than to a 'wild', 'authentic', 'natural' one, especially when it is he who will unlock the great secret of biology, the theory of evolution, as driven by 'natural selection'. That human 'improvement' within 'civilization' should seem analogous to being shaped into an obsequious and dependent condition by others purely for their exploitative convenience, might in fact be a very apt insight into the condition of the vast majority of people in civilizations based on social classes and hierarchical domination; yet for the fearless, rebellious scientist who was to enter with his mind into the wildest truths of organic nature, in an era still largely dominated by religious dogmas and unquestioned traditions, it cannot but appear amazing.

Darwin continues:

"The chief spokesman was old, and appeared to be the head of the family; the three others were powerful young men, about 6 feet high. The women and children had been sent away. These Fuegians are a very different race from the stunted miserable wretches further to the westward, They are much superior in person, and seem closely allied to the famous Patagonians of the Strait of Magellan. Their only garment consists of a mantle made of guanaco skin, with the wool outside; this they wear just thrown over their shoulders, as often leaving their persons exposed as covered. Their skin is of a dirty coppery red colour."

Darwin's observations become contradictory here: though these people are according to him 'superior' to the 'stunted miserable wretches further to the westward' (in fact the first group must have been Haush or Selk'nam, the second Yámana), they (the Haush) are described as being of a 'dirty' colour. (No doubt Darwin thought the Yámana were still dirtier.) Yet at the same time Darwin creates a picture of dignified people, 'powerful', and 'six feet high'. These people were adapted to a tough climate and geography, and made effective use of the only large mammal available, the guanaco, from which they obtained their food and their clothing. Yet the latter is described disdainfully by Darwin, as representing 'their only garment'.

"The old man had a fillet of white feathers tied round his head, which partly confined his black, course, and entangled hair. His face was crossed by two broad transverse bars; one painted bright red from ear to ear, and included the upper lip; the other, white like chalk, extended parallel and above the first, so that even his eyelids were thus coloured. Some of the other men were ornamented by streaks of black powder, made of charcoal. The party altogether closely resembled the devils which come on stage in such plays as *Der Freischutz*."

Strangely paradoxical is this passage. The old man is wonderfully depicted, though to use the word 'course' to describe his hair rather than perhaps 'thick' seems a little contemptuous. But the picture of his and the other Haush men's painted faces is brilliant, and would suggest that Darwin, like any intelligent observer, realizes how difficult it must be to enhance facial features with access only to substances available in the immediate environment, and how strongly this fact testifies to a powerful aesthetic and imaginative urge, no less strong than that witnessed in 'Civilization.' With respect to these men being compared with the devils in *Der Freischutz*, one wonders whether for Darwin this is a compliment or a condemnation! For are not these 'devils' the product of a great Romantic European imagination? To find their archetypes at the other end of the earth might have been as exciting to Darwin as his discovery that Lyell's theories of geology, derived from the latter's studies in Europe, applied admirably to the mountain ranges of South America.

"Their very attitudes were abject, and the expression of their countenances distrustful, surprised, and startled. After we had presented them with some scarlet cloth, which they immediately tied around their necks, they became good friends. This was shown by the old man patting our breasts, and making a chuckling kind of noise, as people do when feeding chickens. I walked with the old man, and this demonstration of friendship was repeated several times; it was concluded by three hard slaps, which were given me on the breast and back at the same time. He then bared his bosom for me to return the compliment, which being done, he seemed highly pleased. The language of these people, according to our notions, scarcely deserves to be called articulate. Captain Cook has compared it to a man clearing his throat, but certainly no European ever cleared his throat with so many hoarse, guttural, and clicking sounds."

These people, faced with the unexpected appearance of a shipful of Europeans on their land, were friendly, communicative, and eager to display and share their customs with Darwin and his colleagues. Certainly, they might be 'surprised', 'startled', and indeed 'distrustful', unsurprisingly. Yet they were courageous and welcoming enough to 'advance' and 'receive' the strangers. One wonders how Darwin and the crew of the *Beagle* would have reacted if they had been walking one day in the hills on the coast of North Devon, when a shipload of men from Tierra del Fuego suddenly arrived from the sea and disembarked before their eyes. Darwin's description of 'their very attitudes' as 'abject' seems indeed an unsympathetic and unimaginative one.

But it is at the point where Darwin describes their language as 'inarticulate' that he displays pure bigotry, even though he qualifies his words with the phrase 'according to our notions.' 'No European ever cleared his throat with so many hoarse, guttural, and clicking sounds.' Now would the man who discovered the theory of evolution compare the wings of one species of finch on the Galapagos Islands with another in the way he here compares a Fuegian language with a European one? He would surely not compare the morphological adaptations of two different

finch species in a way that was derogatory to one and praising of the other, inasmuch as they differed. He would not take one as a desirable norm, the other as deficient in some way.

"They are excellent mimics: as often as we coughed or yawned, or made any odd motion, they immediately imitated us. Some of our party began to squint and look awry; but one of the young Fuegians (whose whole face was painted black, excepting a white band across his eyes) succeeded in making far more hideous grimaces. They could repeat with perfect correctness, each word in any sentence we addressed them, and they remembered such words for some time. Yet we Europeans all know how difficult it is to distinguish apart the sounds in a foreign language. Which of us, for instance, could follow an American Indian through a sentence of more than three words? All savages appear to possess, to an uncommon degree, this power of mimicry. I was told almost in the same words, of the same ludicrous habits among the Caffres: the Australians, likewise, have long been notorious for being able to imitate and describe the gait of any man, so that he may be recognized. How can this faculty be explained? Is it a consequence of the more practised habits of perception and keener senses, common to all men in a savage state, as compared to those long civilized?"

Darwin here admires the ability of these Haush to mimic his and his companions' gestures, sounds, and words. He admits they are better at this than 'we Europeans', and even commences, for a moment, to enter into a scientific speculation into the reasons for this. Yet he describes this facility as a 'ludicrous habit.'

"When a song was struck up by our party, I thought the Fuegians would have fallen down with astonishment. With equal surprise they viewed our dancing; but one of the young men, when asked, had no objection to a little waltzing. Little accustomed to Europeans as they appeared to be, yet they knew, and dreaded our fire-arms; nothing would tempt them to take a gun in their hands. They begged for knives, calling them by the Spanish word 'cuchilla'. They explained also what they wanted, by acting as if they had a piece of blubber in their mouth, and then pretending to cut instead of tear it."

Here again, Darwin observes and apparently admires these Indians' interest in, and openness to entering into his and his colleagues' way of dancing. He observes their sensible reluctance to play around with fire-arms. And he shows how well they know which piece of European technology they want, the knife, and how they can communicate very well both their desire for this and the use to which they will put it.

"It was interesting to watch the conduct of these people towards Jeremy Button (one of the Fuegians who had been taken, during the former voyage, to England. Captain Fitzroy has given a history of these people. Four were taken to England; one died there, and the three others - two men and one woman - were now brought back and settled in their own country): they immediately perceived the difference between him and the rest, and held much conversation between themselves on the subject. The old man addressed a long harangue to Jemmy, which it seems was to invite him to stay with them. But Jemmy understood very little of their language, and was, moreover, thoroughly ashamed of his countrymen. When York Minster (another of these men) came on shore, they noticed him in the same way, and told him he ought to shave; yet he had not twenty dwarf hairs on his face, whilst we all wore our untrimmed beards. They

examined the colour of his skin, and compared it with ours. One of our arms being bared, they expressed the liveliest surprise and admiration at its whiteness. We thought that they mistook two or three of the officers, who were rather shorter and fairer (though adorned with large beards), for the ladies of our party. The tallest amongst the Fuegians was evidently much pleased at his height being noticed. When placed back to back with the tallest of the boat's crew, he tried his best to edge on higher ground, and to stand on tiptoe. He opened his mouth to show his teeth, and turned his face for a side view; and all this was done with such alacrity, that I dare say he thought himself the handsomest man in Tierra del Fuego. After the first feeling on our part of grave astonishment was over, nothing could be more ludicrous or interesting than the odd mixture of surprise and imitation which these savages every moment exhibited."

To us today, these observations must evoke some sadness, now that these peoples have been exterminated or wholly assimilated, by a combination of genocide and ethnocide. It is not clear with whom Darwin's sympathies lie in this fatefully significant and tragic encounter between the minimally acculturated Haush and the three Yámana who had previously been wrenched from their land and culture and dragged over to England. Darwin had come to know these 'Europeanized' Yámana on the voyage from England, before reaching Tierra del Fuego where he met their 'savage countrymen.'

Darwin says that the old Haush man 'addressed a long harangue to Jemmy (a Yámana) which it seems was to invite him to stay,' indicating that he disapproves of these Fuegians being taken away to become 'Europeanized.' He and the other Haush tell York Minster that he ought to shave, rather than grow a beard like Englishmen. The Haush wonder whether, having been some time with the Englishmen in their country, York Minster's skin has changed colour, to become like theirs. This passage of Darwin's is full of most pertinent observations, though it is peppered with prejudices: the Haush men's surprise is once again described as 'ludicrous', whilst their examination of an Englishman's skin is assumed to express 'admiration at its whiteness.' But perhaps the saddest remark of all that Darwin makes, and let us assume he is correct in his assessment, is that Jemmy was 'thoroughly ashamed of his countrymen.' The observation is made in a ruthlessly cold, 'objective' manner, though Darwin seems unconscious of this.

Let us emphasise again that Jemmy and York Minster were Yámana, whilst the Fuegians they met here with Darwin were Haush, or Selk'man. It is significant that Darwin considers the Yámana living in Tierra del Fuego to be more degraded than the Haush living there, although Jemmy Button, the captured Yámana that had been taken to England, he sees as loftier than the Haush.

The account given by Darwin so far, has all been from his journal entry for December 17th 1832. Let us now move on to that of December 25th, when he encountered some Yámana Indians further to the west of the island:

"This part of Tierra del Fuego (called Kater's Peak) may be considered as the extremity of the submerged chain of mountains already alluded to. The cove takes its name of 'Wigwam' from some of the Fuegian habitations; but every bay in the neighbourhood might be so called with equal propriety. The inhabitants living chiefly upon shellfish, are obliged constantly to change their place of residence; but they return at intervals to the same spots, as is evident from the pile

of old shells, which must often amount to some tons in weight. These heaps can be distinguished at a long distance by the green colour of certain plants, which invariably grow on them. Among these may be enumerated the wild celery and scurvy grass, two very serviceable plants, the use of which has not been discovered by the natives.

"The Fuegian wigwam resembles, in size and dimensions, a haystack. It merely consists of a few broken branches stuck in the ground, and very imperfectly thatched on one side with a few tufts of grass and rushes. The whole cannot be so much as the work of an hour, and it is only used for a few days. At Goeree Roads I saw a place where one of these naked men had slept, which absolutely offered no more cover than the form of a hare. The man was evidently living by himself, and York Minster said he was 'very bad man', and that probably he had stolen something. On the west coast, however, the wigwams are rather better, for they are covered with seal-skins."

Darwin provides a good description here of the Yámana mode of life. It is strange though, that the 'wigwam' he observed is described as 'merely consisting of a few broken branches', and as 'very imperfectly thatched.' No doubt these houses sufficed; they would have represented a bad adaptation to a hard environment if more labour time than was necessary were expended on their construction. In a case like this, a direct comparison might reasonably and legitimately be made between adaptations to the environment developed by human beings on the one hand and by other animals on the other.

These people were nomadic hunter-gatherers, spending 'only a few days' in any particular 'wigwam'; if 'on the west coast the wigwams are rather better, for they are covered with seal-skins,' presumably this is either because seals are more available on the west coast than at Kater's Peak, or because the weather on the west coast is that much more inclement, making it worthwhile or necessary to undertake the effort of protecting homes with seal-skins.

It is unreasonable perhaps to dispute the validity of Darwin's observations of Yámana houses. Nevertheless, when one looks at the replicas of typical Yámana houses outside the *Museo Del Fin Del Mundo* in Ushuaia, or at old photographs of real ones, one can only say that they appear extremely well-built, sturdy, functional, and attractive. Just as the bows and arrows, harpoons, baskets and other utensils on display in the museums at Ushuaia are very beautifully made; exemplary instances of objects made both for use and in accordance with aesthetic principles, as William Morris believed is true of all authentic art and craft.

The comment made by York Minster that Darwin records, indicates that the former's English acculturation has turned him into something of a snob, as well as encouraging him apparently to accuse a man of a crime without evidence or proof.

It is striking that amidst the close and accurate account that Darwin gives of the Yámana lifestyle, he describes their evidently effective solution to the challenges of their environment as obliging them 'constantly to change their place of residence.' This mode of expressing it implies it is undesirable and abnormal so to live; to stay in one place indefinitely is desirable and normal. Is it not odd that Charles Darwin, the man who discovered who and what humanity really is, should consider the mode of life that predominated over the vast majority of its existence - the

mode moreover that undoubtedly represents a direct continuity from our 'natural' and animal past - as undesirable and abnormal?

"At a subsequent period the Beagle anchored for a couple of days under Wollaston Island, which is a short way to the northward. While going on shore we pulled alongside a canoe with six Fuegians. These were the most abject and miserable creatures I any where beheld. I believe, in this extreme part of South America, man exists in a lower state of improvement than in any other part of the world. The South Sea islander of either race is comparatively civilized. The Esquimaux, in his subterranean hut, enjoys some of the comforts of life, and in his canoe, when fully equipped, manifests much skill. Some of the tribes of Southern Africa, prowling about in search of roots, and living concealed on the wild and arid planes, are sufficiently wretched. But the Australian, in the simplicity of the arts of life, comes nearest the Fuegian. He can, however, boast of his boomerang, his spear and throwing-stick, his method of climbing trees, tracking animals, and scheme of hunting. Although thus superior in acquirements, it by no means follows that he should likewise be so in capabilities. Indeed, from what we saw of the Fuegians, who were taken to England, I should think the case was the reverse."

One feels like asking Darwin, why are people who live in, and are adapted to, a tough environment, in which they have very likely survived for millenia, to be considered 'abject' and 'miserable'? No doubt, if seen canoeing on a cold, stormy day, elemental wear and tear would be expressed on people's faces; but would not this be equally true for Cornish fishermen in a storm, or for Lancashire workmen walking to the cotton-mill on a cold, rainy morning? In his comparisons of the Fuegians with South Sea Islanders, Eskimos, and peoples from Southern Africa and Australia, he is scientific again (except in his use of the word 'wretched'). Interestingly though, in his statement that native Australians are 'superior in acquirements' to the Fuegians, he also suggests that Fuegians are superior to Australians in 'capabilities.' This judgement apparently rests on Darwin's assessment of how well the Fuegians who had been taken to England 'improved.' Here he seems to be in a real confusion. If it was the entry into civilized English culture and society that ensured these Fuegians' 'improvement', then he does not assume their deficiencies are intrinsic to their 'race', that is, as a biological given. But on the other hand, in suggesting that the Australians, in spite of their 'superiority in acquirements,' are intrinsically inferior in 'capabilites,' he implies in their case the opposite.

Of course Darwin can hardly be blamed for not having resolved the nature/nurture, biology/culture dilemma in the understanding of human societies: that issue remains far from resolved to this day. But it is striking that his observations of different forms of human adaptation to different natural, ecological environments should be so filled with pejorative value judgements and unscientific preconceptions; again, in a fashion so different from his mode of analysing and comparing geological and biological phenomena. The fact is, as David Wilson has shown in the book cited above, that different societies become adapted to different natural environments in more or less effective ways. Terms such as 'simplicity' or 'complexity' of adaptation, where they refer to population sizes typical of human groups, their technologies, or their forms of shelter and so on, should be used absolutely neutrally, for they do not register or imply any cultural, ethical, or aesthetic inferiority or superiority at all. A small-scale, technologically 'simple' society that is well-adapted to existence in its environment is no more nor less culturally 'complex' than any other: in scientific terms it is merely successful at

surviving in its natural environment.

Clearly however, Darwin's implicit view of humanity, though contradictory, rests on one conspicuous presupposition. Whether it is a cultural or biological process, humanity engages in, or can engage in, a process of 'improvement' of a kind which Darwin will not build into his theory of the biological evolution of non-human living organisms. It seems worth noting therefore, that a presupposition of human history involving a kind of 'linear progress', an ideology that many have taken to result from the uncritical translation of the fully developed Darwinian theory of organic evolution onto human society - by such late nineteenth-century thinkers as Herbert Spenser for example - was evidently in Darwin's mind well before he had made the scientific breakthrough into his theory of biological evolution.

"On the east coast the natives, as we have seen, have guanaco cloaks, and on the west, they possess seal-skins. Amongst these central tribes the men generally possess an otter-skin, or some small scrap about as large as a pocket-handkerchief, which is barely sufficient to cover their backs as low as their loins. It is laced across the breast by strings, and according as the wind blows, it is shifted from side to side. But these Fuegians in the canoe were quite naked, and even one full-grown woman was absolutely so. It was raining heavily, and the fresh water, together with the spray, trickled down her body. In another harbour not far distant, a woman, who was suckling a recently-born child, came one day alongside the vessel, and remained there whilst the sleet fell and thawed on her naked bosom, and on the skin of her naked child. These poor wretches were stunted in their growth, their hideous faces bedaubed with white paint, their skins filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, their gestures violent and without dignity. Viewing such men, one can hardly make oneself believe they are fellow-creatures, and inhabitants of the same world. It is a common subject of conjecture what pleasure in life some of the less gifted animals can enjoy: how much more reasonably the same question may be asked with respect to these barbarians. At night, five or six human beings, naked and scarcely protected from the wind and rain of this tempestuous climate, sleep on the wet ground coiled up like animals. Whenever it is low water, they must rise to pick shell-fish from the rocks; and the women, winter and summer, either dive to collect sea eggs, or sit patiently in their canoes, and, with a baited hair-line, jerk out small fish. If a seal is killed, or the floating carcass of a putrid whale discovered, it is a feast: such miserable food is assisted by a few tasteless berries and fungi. Nor are they exempt from famine, and, as a consequence, cannibalism accompanied by parricide."

Darwin seems to imply here that the 'small scrap' the men wear is insufficient, just as he assumes that the nakedness of other men and women is lamentable. His own morality and preconceptions prevent him from asking whether these are not once again effective adaptations to the environment. Attitudes like these of Darwin are perfectly borne out in photographs of Yámana taken by missionaries later in the nineteenth century, in which both men and women have been coerced humiliatingly into hiding their genital regions with their hands.

Yet in a climate where rain is frequent, the Yámana found that not wearing clothes, but instead applying oil or grease to their skins, was a better form of protection. Clothes can often remain permanently wet when one is exposed to such an environment, whereas water 'trickles down' a body covered in grease.

Why Darwin thinks 'these wretches were stunted in their growth', rather than having adapted their average height to the physical exigencies and pressures of their existence, is also strange. But his finding their faces 'hideous' is merely prejudice, whilst his observation that their skins are 'greasy', which should answer his bewilderment that they go naked, means to him that they are merely 'filthy', all of which is in accord with his judgement that their hair is 'entangled', 'their voices discordant', 'their gestures violent and without dignity.' The passage that follows these remarks is rhetorical, and perhaps it is more a poetry of (unnecessary) pity and sympathy than of arrogance, as the prejudice and sense of superiority appear to be unconscious and gentle: 'Viewing such men, one can hardly make oneself believe they are fellow-creatures.....' But then comes the suggestion that people often wonder what pleasure in life 'some of the less gifted animals can enjoy.'

Do people so wonder, or did they really in Darwin's time? There seems to be something false in the rhetoric here: according to the religious view, all animals are created to fulfil their particular, humble purposes, as part of God's larger, transcendent plan. This is true of Man as well, but since he alone among living things has Free Will, his situation is distinct from that of the other animals. The question posed here by Darwin could have no meaning for animals; indeed it might even be blasphemous in terms of traditional Christian theology.

Now, according to Darwin's theory of evolution, which at the time of his voyage on the Beagle he had not yet arrived at, the question must be even more meaningless. Animals, except for Man, have no consciousness, self-awareness, sense of purpose, ethical principles, moral, aesthetic, or sensual ambitions, nor criteria for comparisons over such values or pleasures. They are driven by a blind, non-conscious will to survive, in order to reproduce biologically. In Man alone, because of the emergence through evolution of intelligence, mind, and consciousness, can issues of pleasure or purpose arise. Precisely how Darwin understood these issues in 1832 is not clear, but the movement of his thoughts from 'the less gifted animals' to 'these barbarians,' is hardly a 'reasonable' one, on the basis of any consistent system of thinking available in his time. But when Darwin's account moves once again onto the naked Fuegians sleeping unprotected from the elements (although he has already shown that they are *not* wholly unprotected, due to the grease they apply to their bodies), 'coiled up like animals', comparison between animal and savage, savage and animal ('how much more reasonably the same question may be asked with respect to these barbarians') is turned around again, in such a way that, given we are considering the thought processes of one of the greatest geniuses in recorded human history, we are moved to conclude that he is sacrificing intelligence here to some kind of spiteful contempt, or at least, to a deep human insensitivity.

"Whenever it is low water, they *must* rise to pick shellfish," Darwin says (emphasis added). One might equally say that at every dawn, every maid and servant in every house in England that has maids and servants, *must* perforce rise to work for their masters and mistresses. Or that on those days when a University lecturer has morning lectures, he or she *must* rise to deliver those lectures. And animals *must* go to feed when opportunity arises. What is Darwin's point? Perhaps he, as a Victorian gentleman from a wealthy background with a large unearned income, was one of the very few organisms of any species who did not need to work or make any effort in order to eat, and one is not sure which fact is more extraordinary: that the scientist who would

later make one of the most important discoveries of the modern age could be so intellectually limited in his choice of words here, or that this very scientist should have nevertheless come from the particular class of human beings that he did come from.

Darwin is appalled, and contemptuous, that people should make a feast out of a 'putrid whale,' but surely since time immemorial human beings have had to eat the meat of animals that have been dead for a greater or lesser period of time. Refrigeration is a relatively new phenomenon, whilst the arts of meat preservation have been very gradual in their historical development. And perhaps taste is in the mouth of the eater: certainly, even in 1832 Darwin must have been aware that taste in food is culturally extremely relative, as it is in other things. To put it simply, the Yámana may not have found their berries and fungi 'tasteless.'

At the end of this passage, Darwin makes reference to issues of food shortage and cannibalism. The ethnographical literature does not record cannibalism (nor 'parricide') as being practiced by Fuegian peoples at any known time. There is some debate within the literature concerning whether infanticide was practiced at any time as a form of population control and/or as a response to food shortage. The following conclusions arrived at by David Wilson (*op. cit.*) concerning the Yámana might be worth quoting here:

“.....overall Yahgan (Yámana) population densities were low and probably always had been so, since the environment and their subsistence adaptation would not permit any higher numbers of people. We may thus hypothesize that over the hundreds and thousands of years of their presence in the archipelago the Yahgan must have had to practice one or another form of population regulation.....(but also) children between the ages of two and ten years old were especially at risk in this difficult setting. In light of this, prior to the arrival of the European diseases in pre-Contact times high infant mortality may have been a major factor in the regulation of population numbers. In other words, the rigorous environment itself may have been regulatory in keeping Yahgan numbers adjusted to the carrying capacity of the subsistence-settlement system.”

Let us continue with Darwin's account:

“The tribes have no government or head, yet each is surrounded by other hostile ones, speaking different dialects; and the cause of their warfare would appear to be the means of subsistence. Their country is a broken mass of wild rock, lofty hills, and useless forests: and these are viewed through mists and endless storms. The habitable land is reduced to the stones which form the beach; in search of food they are compelled to wander from spot to spot, and so steep is the coast, that they can only move about in their wretched canoes. They cannot know the feeling of having a home, and still less that of domestic affection; unless indeed the treatment of a master to a laborious slave can be considered as such. How little can the higher powers of the mind be brought into play! What is there for imagination to picture, for reason to compare, for judgement to decide upon? to knock a limpet from the rock does not even require cunning, that lowest power of the mind. Their skill in some respects may be compared to the instinct of animals; for it is not improved by experience: the canoe, their most ingenious work, poor as it is, has remained the same, for the last 250 years.”

The beginning of this passage invites no controversy, until we arrive at the word ‘useless,’ which comes before the word ‘forests.’ Surely, even a gentleman from domesticated England in 1832 would be aware that forests have many resources, and that numerous nomadic peoples had inhabited them, and still did in 1832. The Yámana extracted among other things wood and tree bark from the forests, from which they fashioned many items including buckets, and the ‘wretched’ canoes that Darwin denigrates. The Argentinian archaeologist Luis Albert Borrero has written of the Yámana (in an article called *The Origins of Ethnographic Subsistence Patterns in Fuego-Patagonia*), that:

“Canoes were the mainstay of their maritime adaptation. They were not only an indispensable means of transportation, but also formed the focus of family life. Families moved everywhere by canoe, some even carrying fires burning inside them almost permanently, and they have been observed consuming mussels on board.”

The territory of the Yámana was limited to areas where maritime and forest environments were close by, as they depended crucially on both. Habitable land was not only to be found among the stones on the beach; though why Darwin should think such a location beneath contempt is anyway extraordinary.

Now there may have been a particular aspect of the European mind-set which influenced Darwin in his choice of the word ‘useless’ to describe the forests. We know that a dominant perception of forests throughout the European Middle Ages was that they were dangerous, Satanic, wicked places. In the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine includes mountains, rivers, and oceans in the category of nature’s fallen matter, admiration of whose sights was capable of distracting a Christian from the proper contemplation of God and one’s own soul. One can easily imagine forests could have joined the list, if he had extended it further. As a realm of material nature, standing over and against the spiritual realm and that of civilization, forests for centuries symbolized both sinful temptation and a chaotic, unproductive world that must be tamed and brought under control by hard work and godliness, that is, under human control - meaning also human self-control. In the modern era, up to the emergence of the (first) Romantic Movement and its associated Romantic sensibility, much of this way of thinking persisted, and was indeed intensified by the new imperatives of capitalism, science, technology, urbanism, and modernizing agriculture. Francis Bacon, the first major philosopher of modern science, considered that Nature should be interrogated like a harlot to yield up Her secrets. Descartes considered that for the rational scientific mind, inorganic and organic nature must be regarded as machine-like, and they would yield up infinite resources if treated in that way.

But from about 1770 some of these attitudes began to change, especially in Germany and Britain, under the influence especially of the Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, William Blake, Byron Shelley, Shelley, and Keats; and of artists like Constable and Turner. In Germany, analogous sentiments are to be found in much of Goethe’s poetry, and in the art Caspar David Friedrich, but especially in the great German and Austrian composers, Beethoven and Schubert. All these people were dead or old by 1832; had Darwin not been influenced by them at all? His view of the vast, stupendous forests of Tierra del Fuego is closer to the aesthetic attitude to nature of Dr. Samuel Johnson as expressed in his account of travels in 1773 to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*, than to that expressed in the

numerous Guides to the English Lake District that were available by the 1830s, let alone to the poetic imagination of William Wordsworth, who was a student at Cambridge University, like Darwin, though roughly fifty years earlier. To the Romantic mind forests, like all 'wild' nature, offered excitement, adventure, and challenge to the over-ordered, one-sidedly rational character of modern man: they mirrored the strange and unfathomable depths of the human mind and soul, as otherwise only art, poetry or music could, or the emotions of love, or the realm of dreams. 'Wild', 'chaotic', 'raw' nature was something awesome and sublime, as Emanuel Kant had it, because it was 'infinite' and beyond any narrow usefulness. It displayed 'final form' as art did, precisely through its apparent chaos. To use Ehrenzweig's phrase, 'untamed' nature expressed 'the higher order of chaos.'

Once again, we are amazed that the young Darwin, who would later give the world the Theory of Evolution, thought thus in 1832. For Evolution was to provide a most powerful impetus to the second great wave of Romanticism in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, and in the Twentieth Century up until the First World War. Friedrich Nietzsche, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont are among those who were thrilled and enthralled by the subversiveness, the struggle and challenge forced upon the human mind by Darwin; the complete decentering of man that his theory entailed - far more even than the Galilean-Newtonian revolution had done; and the final defeat of theology that it appeared to them to represent.

As for the influence of these last upon subsequent artists, poets, composers, and philosophers the list would be almost impossible to complete. Among them Otto Dix, Scriabin, Mahler, Richard Strauss, and the Surrealists stand out. But influence of Nietzsche especially on art and culture was and is immeasurable.

These remarks pertain to the worlds of literature, art, and philosophy: how equally much did Evolution transform all science itself, and none less than the human sciences. In his influence upon, and the admiration he induced in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and in the emergence of Sociology and Anthropology as disciplines, Darwin was the Copernicus of the modern mind.

But of course, the whole nature of the Beagle's voyage must be borne in mind, as this is well summarized here by Gillian Beer (in an essay called *Travelling The Other Way*):

“(Such) voyages.....were those whose prize was represented as knowledge rather than treasure. The categories are, however, not altogether separate. Although the nineteenth-century journeys that set out from Britain to survey the sea and coasts around the world were not piratical, not part of that unconcerned predation that earlier centuries justified as exploration or discovery, they were nevertheless an expression of the will to control, categorise, occupy and bring home the prize of samples and of strategic information. Natural history and national future were closely interlocked. And natural history was usually a sub-genre in the programme of the enterprize, subordinate to the search for sea-passages or the mapping of feasible routes and harbours.”

Indeed, in their historical study *Tierra del Fuego*, Luiz and Schillat show that the Beagle voyages under Captain Fitzroy's command were largely concerned with garnering information for the British Admiralty, as part of a widely-embracing concern in regard of strategies for British conquest, colonization, and control of trade in the Southern Atlantic.

But to return again to Darwin's account. The assertion that the nomadic Yámana "cannot know the feeling of having a home" needs no further comment in the light of the above; but that they know "still less that of domestic affection" enters the bizarre once again. Affections are dependent on staying indefinitely in one place? But in any case the touching accounts in the ethnographic literature about how Selk'nam and Yámana men would set about looking for a wife, and how a woman indicated 'yes' or 'no' to a man's proposition (to be found in Wilson, *op. cit.*), suggest Darwin was wrong in assuming a lack of romantic affection among Fuegians. But his following phrase, "unless indeed the treatment of a master to a laborious slave can be considered as such", I confess baffles me entirely. Who is the master and who the slave in the egalitarian societies of Tierra del Fuego? Perhaps Darwin means the people are like slaves before their natural environment, but in that case they are at least equal in their servitude, unlike in the England of 1832, where the majority of people were slaves towards both Nature and their human rulers.

Gillian Beer (*op. cit*) sees these aspects of Darwin's reactions in a rather different way from me. She considers that:

".....one of the most pressing issues raised by travels and their narratives in the nineteenth century (was).....what are the boundaries of natural history? Are human beings within its scope? Are they one species or several? Are they separate from all other species because created as souls by God? And do all, all savages, have souls? Or are they - here danger lies - a kind of animal? (If they, then we?)

"Over and over again the narratives of voyages demonstrate how the borders of natural history were blurred by human encounter and how evolutionary theory profited from that growing uncertainty about the status of the human in knowledge and in nature".

She thus sees Darwin's prejudices in relation to the scientific revolution he would later undertake:

"Darwin's encounters with Fuegians in their native place gave him a way of closing the gap between the human and other primates, a move necessary to the theories he was in the process of reaching."

Elsewhere she suggests:

"Darwin's much later *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) may owe much to his puzzling experiences on the *Beagle* and be in part a final attempt to regulate the irregularities he had there encountered."

But, though it may be that on some unconscious level Darwin's scientific mind was fomenting the utterly novel worldview he would eventually promulgate, his account of Fuegian peoples in *Voyage of the Beagle* involves merely tedious and prejudiced ideas about primitive people being inferior and degraded. The terms he deals in are ethical, and assume 'civilization' represents an indisputable improvement upon 'primitiveness', which implicitly justifies arrogant and

dictatorial behaviours, such as snatching people and taking them to England, or missionary activity intended to convert 'savages' to Christianity and Western ways of behaving. The fact is that Darwin, neither in 1832 nor later when he formulated the theory of Evolution, had any clear idea of the relationship between *biological evolution*, which had brought into being Man from animal antecedents, and *human history*, the development of different cultures and civilizations within the general framework of the human species. And though it may be necessary now, in the context of neo- or post-Darwinism, to understand that *biological evolution* can continue in interwoven relationship with the cultural and historical development of humanity, generally Darwinism has in the past failed, and still does fail now, fail to distinguish between the two processes. From Darwin himself to Herbert Spencer, through to many Darwinian biologists who today attempt analyses of human history and society, the confusions are deep, and persist, as many writers have attempted to show. Darwin's 'swerving', his 'disturbance' (to use Beer's words), in his meditations on the Fuegians, and their imagined similarity or difference from animals, is conducted in a confused, moralistic, and derogatory mode of thinking which as is common today as it was in Darwin's own. It absolutely fails to see that different human societies have different cultures, different behaviours and different ethical systems and attitudes: conditioned greatly by natural and environmental factors and processes, in ways that are extremely complex, but again, *not* in ways that mirror the environmental determinism of other animals' physiology or behaviour.

Human societies can only be judged one against another according to the taste of he who judges or according to ethical principles which should be made absolutely explicit in the course of making such judgements, and according to which certain Western cultures, vis-a-vis the morality of killing other human beings for example, would rank very low in any pan-human table of ethical comparison. Human beings are animals, yes, but as members of one animal species, *Homo sapiens*. Yet it is remarkable how often European or Neo-European individuals and nations that want to justify and rationalize their nastiest kinds of behaviour (ethically speaking), draw upon the fact that human beings are, after all animals.

Major differences between human beings are either individual, or culturally based, though it is true that the roles of biology and genetics in understanding these differences are only just beginning to be understood.

A NOTE ON H.W. BATES

Two quotations from H.W. Bates' science-cum-travelogue book *The Naturalist On The River Amazons* may suffice to indicate some of the differences between Bates' and Darwin's approaches to the human dimensions of their experiences in South America. Bates certainly has some stereotypical European prejudices, and his perceptions are often constructed through characteristic nineteenth-century tropes, themes, vistas, and metaphors belonging to a British colonial view of 'tropicality,' with his readership at home always in mind. But, like Alfred Russel Wallace, who also displayed "a somewhat baffling mixture of the conventional and the unconventional..... (in an attitude of) unsettled ambivalence" (as explained in Nancy Stepan's book *Picturing Tropical Nature*), he has at the same time a spontaneous sympathy and empathy with people, and a more admiring attitude towards the people he meets, than Darwin evinces:

(I) "On the morning of the 28th of May we arrived at our destination (Belém de Pará). The appearance of the city at sunrise was pleasing in the highest degree. It is built on a low tract of land, having only one small rocky elevation at its southern extremity; it therefore affords no amphitheatral view from the river; but the white buildings roofed with red tiles, the numerous towers and cupolas of churches and convents, the crowds of palm trees reared above the buildings, all sharply defined against the clear blue sky, give an appearance of lightness and cheerfulness which is most exhilarating. The perpetual forest hems the city in on all sides landwards; and towards the suburbs, picturesque country houses are seen scattered about, half buried in luxuriant foliage. The port was full of native canoes and other vessels, large and small; and the ringing of bells and firing of rockets, announcing the dawn of some Roman Catholic festival day, showed that the population was astir at that early hour.

"The impressions received during our first walk, on the evening of the day of our arrival, can never wholly fade from my mind. After traversing the few streets of tall, gloomy, convent-looking buildings near the port, inhabited chiefly by merchants and shopkeepers; along which idle soldiers, dressed in shabby uniforms, carrying their muskets carelessly over their arms, priests, negresses with red water-jars on their heads, sad-looking Indian women carrying their naked children astride on their hips, and other samples of the motley life of the place, were seen; we passed down a long narrow street leading to the suburbs. Beyond this, our road lay across a

grassy common into picturesque lane leading to the virgin forest. The long street was inhabited by the poorer class of the population. The houses were of one story only, and had an irregular and mean appearance. The windows were without glass, having, instead, projecting lattice casements. The street was unpaved, and inches deep in loose sand. Groups of people were cooling themselves outside their doors - people of all shades in colour of skin, European, Negro and Indian, but chiefly an uncertain mixture of the three. Amongst them were several handsome women, dressed in a slovenly manner, barefoot or shod in loose slippers; but wearing richly decorated ear-rings, and around their necks strings of very large gold beads. They had dark expressive eyes, and remarkably rich heads of hair. It was a mere fancy, but I thought the mingled squalor, luxuriance and beauty of these women were pointedly in harmony with the rest of the scene; so striking, in the view, was the mixture of natural riches and human poverty. The houses were mostly in a dilapidated condition, and signs of indolence and neglect were everywhere visible. The wooden palings which surrounded the weed-grown gardens were strewn about, broken; and hogs, goats, and ill-fed poultry wandered in and out through the gaps. But amidst all, and compensating every defect, rose the overpowering beauty of the vegetation. The massive dark crowns of shady mangoes were seen everywhere amongst the dwellings, amidst fragrant blossoming orange, lemon, and many other tropical fruit trees; some in flower, others in fruit, at various stages of ripeness. Here and there, shooting above the more dome-like and sombre trees, were the smooth columnar stems of palms, bearing aloft their magnificent crowns of finely-cut fronds. Amongst the latter the slim assai-palm was especially noticeable, growing in groups of four and five; its smooth, gently-curving stem, twenty to thirty feet high, terminating in a head of feathery foliage, inexpressibly light and elegant in outline.”

(II) “I suffered most inconvenience from the difficulty of getting news from the civilized world down river, from the irregularity of receipt of letters, parcels of books and periodicals, and towards the latter part of my residence from ill health arising from bad and insufficient food. The want of intellectual society, and of the varied excitement of European life, was also felt most acutely, and this, instead of becoming deadened by time, increased until it became almost insupportable. I was obliged, at last, to come to the conclusion that the contemplation of Nature alone is not sufficient to fill the human heart and mind. I got on pretty well when I received a parcel from England by the steamer once in two or four months. I used to be very economical with my stock of reading, lest it should be finished before the next arrival, and leave me utterly destitute.....

“During so long a residence I witnessed, of course, many changes in the place (the village of Ega, modern Tefé). Some of the good friends who made me welcome on my first arrival died, and I followed their remains to their last resting-place in the little rustic cemetery on the borders of the surrounding forest. I lived there long enough, from first to last, to see the young people grow up, attended their weddings, and the christenings of their children, and before I left, saw them old married folks with numerous families.....

“The people became more ‘civilized’, that is, they began to dress according to the latest Parisian fashions, instead of going about in stockingless feet, wooden clogs, and shirt sleeves; acquired a

taste for money-getting and office-holding; became divided into parties, and lost part of their former simplicity of manners.....

“Many of the Ega Indians, including all the domestic servants, are savages who have been brought from the neighbouring rivers; the Japurá, the Issá, and the Solimoens..... most of whom had been bought, when children, of the native chiefs. This species of slave dealing, although forbidden by the laws of Brazil, is winked at by the authorities, because without it there would be no means of obtaining servants..... But the boys generally run away and embark on the canoes of traders; and the girls are often badly treated by their mistresses.....”

There is a marvellous illustration in Bates' *The Naturalist On The River Amazons* called *Masked Dance And Wedding-Feast Of Tucuna Indians*. Bates is pictured inside a Tucuna *maloca*, graciously and gratefully accepting something to eat from a handsomely depicted naked Indian woman with long black hair, which he seems to find delicious. He seems wholly at ease in the huge interior of the *maloca*, in which is taking place, without reference to him, a masked dance in costumes very like those one can see today in ethnographic museums in Manaus or Leticia. The whole scene is certainly idealized and shaped into a European stylized 'interior,' but it is also authentic in its depiction of someone in a hammock, and others up on a typical kind of structure made of wooden poles, from which also hang animal skins and on which a parrot perches. The whole scene is warm and convivial, suggesting that Bates' hosts enjoy his presence as much as he enjoys their hospitality. And though it is slightly sentimentalized, the scene somehow resembles very much the indoor life of Amazonian Indians even today.

IX

RUMINATIONS ON THE PRE-HISPANIC ARTS OF PRESENT-DAY COLOMBIA

“Entonces vi las cosas que habían sido traídas de la Nueva Tierra del Oro para el Rey..... maravillas de todas clases..... objetos esplendorosos para el uso del hombre, más bellos que cualquier cuento de hadas. En todos los días de mi vida nunca había visto cosa alguna que llenara tanto de gozo mi corazón como estas cosas. Porque entre ellas vi tesoros de arte extraño, exquisitamente trabajados, y me maravillé del genio sutil de estos hombres de tierras distantes. No tengo suficientes palabras para describir las cosas que vi ante mis ojos.”

Albrecht Dürer (1520)

Karen Olsen Bruhn in her book *Ancient South America* provides an excellent characterization of the visual arts in pre-Columbian Andean civilizations. Her book gives an overview of these as a whole, and for the region of present-day Colombia in particular. It is obvious that the *visual* arts (textiles, metalwork, pottery, and sculpture) come through in time most strongly from the pre-Conquest periods, due to their physical durability. But of course these civilizations had powerful literature as well, but because it was oral, it can only come through to us in the form of religious and mythological traditions, with which it would have been inseparable. The ‘literature’ of pre-Colombian societies, as in contemporary unassimilated indigenous societies, would to a large extent have been associated with the inspired narrations, chants, incantations and pronouncements of the shamans, very often in states of drug-induced, hallucinogenic trance; that is, as visionary-ecstatic oracle. As Efraín Sánchez puts it:

“Fueron sociedades sin rueda, sin caballo y, más significativo aún, sin escritura. Si tuvieron un Homero que cantara la epopeya de sus dioses, héroes y hombres, no nos es dado saberlo. Ciertamente no hubo ningún Vitrubio que dejara un volumen sobre sus artes. Los cronistas de la conquista no se tomaron la molestia de dejar consignado en sus escritos el valor o el significado que los indios que hallaron en el territorio daban a sus

artes. Lo único cierto y, literalmente, sólido, que tenemos son las piezas.”

Similarly music must have been just as important to ancient Colombian civilizations as their oral literatures and visual arts, but like the literature their music is more intangible and difficult to take hold of now, though in a book like *Music Of El Dorado* by Dale Olsen its supernatural potency begins to take on a real imaginable form. The following words from a Tumaco song give a very good sense of the meaning of music to pre-hispanic peoples:

“Escucha el canto,
escucha el canto que enseña la tradición.
Entra al baile,
Siente el abrazo de la comunidad.
Toca el instrumento,
Libera su enseñanza,
Deja que cante su historia,
Deja que vuele ese pensamiento.

Después de que el padre y la madre
Se abrazaron y crearon la vida,
Se convirtieron en instrumentos.
Por eso hay instrumentos macho y hembra.
Por eso, nuestra música es como la vida.

Cantamos para vivir,
Para que el río se apacigüe,
Para que la enfermedad se vaya,
Para que el animal se aleje y no haga daño.
....Bailamos para no morir.

Lleva por dentro las semillas,
Lleva la esencia y el origen.
Por eso el curandero toca la maraca,
Para que lo escuche el espíritu de la vida.”

(in *La Musica De La Vida Instrumentos Rituales*, Banco de la Republica.)

Let us not forget however how tenuous is the link we do have with the realities of prehispanic Colombian art: how nearly broken was the thread linking us to that past, living reality.

During most of the colonial period all the gold carving and statuary that was found was melted down into ingots, both for the convenience of commerce and because the carved gold works were regarded as pagan idolatry, so that the philistinism involved in melting them down could be justified as part of a general campaign known as the ‘extirpation of idolatry’. Works like those admired by Albrecht Dürer most likely only seldom survived. The majority of the presently existing art works in gold from prehispanic Colombia were only discovered, mostly in graves, either by looters, collectors or archeologists, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Some works may have survived from the ‘cabinets of curiosities’ maintained by individual enthusiasts, usually noblemen of the eighteenth century. But it is worth remembering how the above-mentioned link was almost lost even on the level of physical survival and continuity.

Equally important however, is the fact that an interest in, a wish to understand, and still more an aesthetic response to the beauty of these works of art, had to await many centuries to pass after the Spanish Conquest, before they could take on deep roots.

Efraín Sánchez stresses the extent to which even the great Humboldt, magnificent though he was, could only see pre-Colombian art through Goethian classical eyes. If it did not answer to the wonderful norms of ancient Greek aesthetics it was merely backward or primitive. Humboldt’s excitement at the monuments of pre-Hispanic architecture was certainly an advance upon the merely hostile, sanctimonious, destructive, ignorant and arrogant attitude of the Spanish Colonialists (for all the wonderful and beautiful art and architecture they themselves created in the country). But it only allowed the artifacts of these civilizations to enter European museums as ethnographic phenomena.

European aestheticism in the late nineteenth century, such as that expressed in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*; and the avant-gardism of the twentieth century, Efraín Sánchez argues, at last allowed certain Europeans to see these works as art. Artists like Picasso, Joan Miro, Orozco and Diego Rivera opened a door to understanding non-Western forms of art as potentially great and thus as possible influences on the modern artist, in ways comparable to those in which European Antiquity and other past epochs of European art could influence modern art. As Efraín Sánchez puts it:

“Los hombres del neoclasicismo creían saber que el germen de las bellas artes se había desarrollado solamente en Grecia y Roma. Los del siglo XX no pueden estar tan seguros, han aceptado como nadie antes que ellos que la creación y la apreciación artísticas son un misterio que aflora en todas partes. Como nadie antes que ellos, excepto por antiguos creadores de belleza como alberto Durero, de quien son estas palabras que utilizó para describir las piezas de orfebrería prehispanica que le maravillaron, parecen pronunciadas por un pintor de nuestro tiempo: Was aber die Schonheit sei, das veis ich nicht, pero no sé que es la belleza.”

This does indeed seem right, but I think ultimately that the works from prehispanic civilizations should be understood in as many ways as possible, simultaneously. For the pure ‘aesthetic object’ of European Civilization during the last few centuries of its existence, is itself very new and exceptional for humanity seen in terms of its entire history. The idea that art should be something distinct from objects used in religious worship, as incumbents of magical power, or as expressions of fear; as other than agents of spiritual yearning and learning, of prophecy, prayer and supplication; as other than vehicles of instruction concerning rules for living, incontrovertial statements of cultural norms, beliefs, and commands; is historically new and extraordinary.

Better that art should be understood thus than held down in out of date, no longer meaningful institutions and rules, certainly. And in Western, utilitarian, technocratic society the very ‘uselessness’ of art, its autonomy from other institutions, rules, norms etc. has itself allowed it emancipatory, ludic, spiritual, erotic, and rebellious roles, in the senses Herbert Marcuse speaks

of in his writings on the Aesthetic Dimension. But let us never forget that art always was, ultimately still is and always will be, about human existence; about nature; about the spirit of how to feel and be; it is about how to experience the Bright Light, in order to seek its illumination concerning how to live.

But to say this, is not to disagree at all with Sánchez when he writes:

“Esto supone, en primer lugar, abandonar la idea de que su valor se agota en su subordinación a la cosmología, mitología y rituales de los pueblos, o en su carácter de testimonio de la marcha de la civilización. Los pectorales y orejeras prehispánicas no fueron un simple aditamento decorativo al ritual y a las creencias católicas. Supone, en segundo lugar, y más importante aún, aceptar que entre los pueblos prehispánicos de Colombia hubo un “mundo del arte”.

“El arte tiene su propio mundo, relativamente independiente de otros ámbitos de la realidad. Aún en el caso de las sociedades prehispánicas, no es imposible suponer que debió existir autonomía entre los conocimientos y actividades, por ejemplo, del chamán o del jefe, y de aquellos que tenían a su cargo la elaboración de piezas de orfebrería o de cerámica. Construir explicaciones del mundo, o sistemas de gobierno, o inventar leyendas, o elaborar mitos, o dirigir rituales, no es lo mismo que manufacturar láminas de oro, o hacer figuras de este metal. La idea del vuelo extático del chamán, que va por los aires en su trance alucinatorio entre los tukano del noreste amazónico de hoy, es el mismo que la figura humana alada de oro fundido y martillado del Tolima Temprano, que se supone tiene relación con el vuelo chamánico. Existió entre las sociedades prehispánicas, como ha existido y existe en todas las sociedades, un “mundo del arte” con carácter propio, protagonistas propios y, en verdad, realidad propia.

“El foco de ese mundo no son los mitos, ni la cosmología, ni siquiera los rituales en los que se presume que las piezas de orfebrería jugaban papel preponderante. El foco del mundo del arte son las obras del arte, centro de interés de quien las contempla y, desde luego, del artista que las crea y elabora. El chamán pronunciaba el ensalmo, lo adaptaba a las circunstancias, lo transmitía. El artista diseñaba la figura, martillaba la hoja de metal, le daba forma a su idea. El Chamán pensaba en el mito; el artista también, pero su gran preocupación era la figura de oro o de cerámica. Cuando el chamán veía la figura terminada, pensaba en el mito, pero sus ojos estaban fijos en el objeto, en su brillo, en su forma.

“Toda obra de arte tiene valores que le son inherentes. Son valores visuales fijados por la imagen. Son formas, colores, texturas, relaciones espaciales internas, relaciones visuales con la realidad percibida. Muchos de estos valores existen en la sociedad a la que pertenece el artista, es decir que son valores colectivos. Los muiscas de la cordillera oriental tenían, como parte del acervo de conocimientos de su sociedad, una concepción específica sobre la forma, el color y la textura de un tunjo. Los artistas la adoptaban, y de ahí que los tunjos se parezcan. Pero le daban su interpretación personal, de donde resulta que no hay tunjo idéntico a otro. Aún en el caso de los tunjos, las imperfecciones que muestran son parte de su lenguaje plástico. Los valores visuales, por supuesto, variaban de una sociedad a otra y de un tiempo a otro. De ahí que las representaciones de la figura humana entre los muiscas sean tan distintas de las representaciones de la figura humana en, por ejemplo, el Quimbaya Temprano. Los estilos son el resultado de la tensión entre valores colectivos e interpretación individual.

“El proceso de creación de una obra de arte es a la vez intelectual y operativo. El artista interioriza los valores visuales de sus sociedad, o de otras, según el grado de contacto que exista entre ellas, y un conjunto de valores ajenos al arte que usualmente se asocian con el “significado” de las obras. El artista quimbaya debía conocer la forma y el color usuales, o prescritos, de los poporos, y debía tenía una idea, pobre o avanzada, de lo que significaban y de sus implicaciones rituales. Posiblemente el chamán, o alguien distinto, le daba instrucciones más o menos precisas sobre lo que se deseaba. Por medio de operaciones intelectuales, el artista se forjaba una idea de lo que quería o debía obtener.”

Through increasing social complexity ‘primitive’ shamanism developed into shamanistic art in what David Wilson classifies as chiefdoms, *pace* Reichel Dolmatoff. According to the latter, Shamanism pervades the entire religious aesthetic spiritual culture of ‘advanced’ pre-Hispanic Colombian cultures. Warwick Bray however, takes issue with Reichel-Dolmatoff on this view:

“Archaeologists have always been concerned with style, most often as a tool for classification, but if we look instead at subject matter (at what is being represented, rather than how it is depicted), a different kind of picture comes into focus. What begins to show up is a basic repertoire of shared themes throughout most of the study area. From approximately A.D. 600 (or soon afterwards) the metalwork of Caribbean Colombia and the Isthmus has a very characteristic range of subjects, including all sorts of spread-wing birds (the ‘aguilas’ of hispanic documents), frogs and toads, jaguars, saurians of various kinds, human figures, and a range of chimeras made up from parts of several different creatures. These main figures often have secondary figures attached to them, or have zoomorphic appendages. North and south of our region, these images are absent or uncommon.

“Since an image as basic as, say, a jaguar or a frog may mean different things in different cultures, before making comparisons we should take one further step, and move from the icons themselves to a consideration of their symbolic values. To test the idea of a pan-Chibcha belief-system, we ideally need to know the ‘meanings’ behind the images, and their significance to the people who wore the jewellery. For prehistoric cultures this hope is unrealistic. We still lack good data on the mythologies and non-material cultures of many of the Chibcha-speaking groups, and in practice the traditional ‘look and guess’ approach to interpretation has proved to be a dead end.

“Existing studies merely emphasize the lack of consensus. In Colombia Reichel-Dolmatoff interprets almost every icon in terms of shamanic flights and transformations, though it is not clear how he distinguishes between an everyday creature and a ‘shamanic’ one, nor does he explain why so many people would want to wear shamanic emblems. There are similar problems in the Isthmus, where modern ethnography has been called in to interpret the pre-hispanic past. The Chibcha-speaking Bribri people of Costa Rica, for example, are organized into a system of twelve clans, each named after, and symbolized by, a particular animal. The Bribri recall that in past times they had three warrior classes (the jaguars, the red monkeys, and the ‘two-headed ones’), and that their chiefs were chosen from the jaguar and monkey clans. Monkeys, jaguars and two-headed humans are all represented in the prehispanic metalwork of Costa Rica, but perhaps we should not jump to simplistic conclusions. To the historic Bribri the jaguar was a ‘hunter, killer, warrior, clansman, uncle, brother-in-law, a symbol of power and the

equivalent of the eagles above and the crocodiles in the water'. Does a jaguar pendent express just one of these meanings, or all of them simultaneously? Do the subsidiary figures and motifs that sometimes accompany the jaguar act as qualifiers, indicating which personification of the jaguar is intended? We simply do not know.

“The ‘aguilas’ exemplify the same problem. The principal deity of the Bribri was called Sibü, or Sibö. He was the creator of all things; he brought the seeds from which the first human beings sprouted; he taught the people to dance, selected the clans from which shamans were drawn, and he distributed all the different kinds of jobs. And he took the form of a large-beaked bird. In the words of a Bribri song:

Sibü came in the form of a buzzard
dressed as a man,
collar on his neck
The collar reflected.
He came with the collar.

“So, do the bird-men and collared aguilas of the Veraguas-Gran Chiriquí style represent Sibü, or are they transformed shamans, or clan badges, or symbols of rank - or are they something entirely different and completely unpredictable?”

Regardless of where one stands on this issue, it needs to be said that ‘primitive’ shamanism is no less sophisticated than ‘later’ shamanistic forms, simply because socio-economic organization and technology are structurally simpler in ‘primitive’ societies than in ‘complex’ ones. The former kinds of society are not primitive in the sense of lacking subtlety: they are merely less complex organizationally and technologically, smaller in terms of territorial and population size, and less differentiated in terms of classes, institutions, and functions. Development in these latter senses allows therefore an increasing sophistication in the artistic techniques and forms of expression that can be employed to express the shamanistic spirit world, in the chiefdom civilizations of prehispanic Colombia. Dale Olsen provides an example of this in the context of Sinú flute music:

“.....the phallic shapes of the tubular ceramic Sinú flutes themselves could have been symbolic of fertility.

“Peter Roe, citing Jules Henry, explains the fertility symbolism of the cayman: “The cayman’s ‘principal occupation is to seduce women when they come to fetch water’ as it was for the anaconda and the dolphin.” Donald Lathrap, however, describes the cayman iconography among the Chavín, a very early culture from northern Peru: “a cayman, the tropical crocodilian of the Amazon and Orinoco Basins,.....was originally worshipped as the master of fish. This prime entity, who was in a real sense the whole universe, was transformed into a sky deity and a deity of the water and underworld. The Sky Cayman became the basic rain god and the Water and Underworld Cayman the source of fecundity. Both were celebrated as donors of the major cultivated plants and of these gifts the most important was manioc.” Roe and Lathrap describe two aspects of the cayman as a fertility symbol: human fertility and vegetable fertility. Combined with Lathrap’s interpretation of the relationship between cayman and fish, both

animals are powerful fertility symbols.

“The other possibility that the ceramic duct flutes of the Sinú were symbols of power for male sexual aggression versus female sexual invitation is based on the Tukano’s sound symbolism metaphor for whistling. Among them, whistling sounds.....symbolize female sexual invitation, which, when joined with buzzing sounds (such as those of a bamboo trumpet), together represent “a synthesis of opposites,.....an act of creation in which male and female energy have united” (Reichel-Dolmatoff). By way of ethnographic analogy with this Tukano interpretation of sound symbolism, I combine the whistling sound of the Sinú ceramic duct flute with the flute’s phallic shape to represent that act of creation. The combination of the two ideas may also be symbolic of male sexual aggression (the phallic shape of the flute shape plus the male symbolism of the superimposed animals) versus female sexual invitation (the whistling sound of the instrument). The aural and physical fertility symbolism of the Sinú flutes, combined with the fertility symbolism of the animals superimposed on the flutes, perhaps assured the people of the Sinú River basin long life, large families, fertile crops, or a place in the hereafter, according to their belief system.”

Efraín Sánchez explains very clearly how the essentially ancient and primordial shamanistic nature of prehispanic metalwork in *tumbaga*, an alloy of gold and copper, and silverwork, is enmeshed in an inegalitarian social structure, in which role differentiations and class formations are well evolved:

“El saber del orfebre en técnicas tan exigentes como la aleación de metales, el repujado, el ensamblaje, la soldadura por fusión, la fundición a la cera perdida, la elaboración de matrices o el dorado superficial, no pudo haber estado al alcance de todos, particularmente tratándose de un metal sagrado, tal vez relacionado con el origen del género humano. De esto mismo se deduce que el orfebre pudo haber tenido una posición social distinta a la del agricultor o el tejedor, pues tenía acceso a conocimientos elevados, propios del chamán. como anota Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, el orfebre es un transformador, tal como el chamán, pues hace pasar la materia del estado profano al estado sagrado. Es un mago, como el chamán. A través de sus manos tiene lugar la magia de que una minúscula pepita, por la técnica del martillado, se convierta en gran hoja del espesor de un papel finísimo. Y éste es su truco más sencillo.

“El otro actor principal del mundo del arte es el receptor y recreador - y a veces promotor - de las obras, llámese sacerdote, jefe, gobernante, patrón, mecenas, público. Es un actor con su propias experiencia y conocimientos, especializados en distintas esferas, incluso en el mundo del arte; con su propia biografía, que cobra pleno sentido dentro de la estructura social, y su propio plan de vida. Es un hecho demostrado por la arqueología, que las piezas de oro no eran para todos los miembros de las sociedades perhispanicas. No cabe suponer que todo el mundo llevara collares, diademas o colgantes de oro, o asegurara sus mantas de algodón con alfileres de este metal. Tampoco era general el tener fuera de las casas, colgando de los árboles, placas o discos de oro para que produjeran hermosos destellos. Para esos estaban las calabazas, baratas, resistentes y muy adecuadas a la función. En ningún caso se enterraba a todos los muertos con ricos ajueres funerarios. Las sociedades prehispanicas de Colombia produjeron objetos de orfebrería no eran sociedades igualitarias. El oro era un metal escaso, y los objetos elaborados con él tenían asociaciones sagradas, asociaciones de prestigio o de poder. Muchas piezas de oro

formaban parte de una gran variedad de rituales, y ésta pudo haber sido la oportunidad para que las piezas de mostrar quedaran a la vista de sectores más amplios. Pero aún así, es muy posible que el disfrute estético de la orfebrería estuviera considerablemente restringido. Quizás la visión de algunos o muchos objetos estuviera vedada a las mujeres, o a los niños, o a todo el mundo, excepto a los iniciados. Las crónicas del siglo XVI, la arqueología y la etnología, permiten concluir que en muchos casos los receptores finales del arte de la orfebrería eran los dioses, o los dueños de animales, o los dueños de las aguas, u otros seres-espíritus. Quizás muchas piezas iban directamente de las manos del artífice al fondo de una laguna sagrada, o a las profundidades de cuevas inaccesibles, o sepultaban en las tumbas - los hallazgos se han verificado en todos estos lugares -, sin ser vistas por nadie, excepto por un agente intermediario entre el hombre y los espíritus, el chamán. El chamán pudo haber sido el principal y en muchos casos tal vez el único, agente receptivo-recreador de las piezas de orfebrería. Esto supone que entre el chamán y el orfebre debió existir una relación estrecha, y que aquel tenía ascendencia más o menos fuerte en el proceso creativo.”

The study of prehispanic art is faced with a particularly sensitive requirement to apply “reconceptualizations of aesthetics and of art history in order to grasp both its universal and its pluralistic character,” as Efraín Sánchez puts it. That is, it must grasp the universal characteristics of human artistic creation, which cannot be approached through a pre-conceived, prejudiced Eurocentrism; at the same time it has to grasp the sociological relativism involved in all artistic creation.

As Sánchez says:

“(El artista prehispanico) sabe qué quiere, o qué se le ha solicitado hacer; sabe cómo hacerlo y con qué materiales, pero no sabe cuál va a ser el resultado hasta que la obra está terminada. En este aspecto, el artista quimbaya estaba en la misma situación que los artistas de todo el mundo y de todos los tiempos. Ni siquiera el rígido formulismo del arte egipcio en el Imperio Antiguo, paradigma de la supresión de la libertad del artista, podía determinar con exactitud la apariencia final de la escultura de un faraón o del relieve policromo para una mastaba. Había que esperar a que el artista diera por concluida su labor para determinar si su obra cumplía las reglas del arte. Esto lo que otorga a cada obra su individualidad inajenable.”

In his book *La Música Precolombiana*, Luis Antonio Escobar writes something similar concerning pre-Columbian instrument making:

“It is well known that the pre-Columbian artisan “created” a new work with each of his instruments insofar as he put together different figures, or at least different lines, incisions, or new colours.” (Translated and quoted in Dale A. Olsen, *Music of el Dorado*.)

In an example taken from Tairona art, Dale Olsen shows how there subsists an imaginative individuality within a structure of definite, collective meanings:

“About these (Tairona sculptures of animals) and their symbolism Gregory Mason writes, “I am convinced that these representations are not the haphazard result of the free play of Indian whim. Indians never give free play to their imaginations. Every stroke in an Indian drawing, every

geometric line incised on Indian pottery, means something. The meaning, for the South American Indians, is more often concerned with magic than with anything else. Totemism is founded deeply in magic.....That is why I suggest that (1) the animal figures found in Tairona art are the eponymous symbols of matrilineal exogamic clans.....and that (2) the curious pig-like creature, the.....'visor-god,' is nothing more than.....a pig, a wild pig, a peccary, and a totem of a clan.”

“I agree (writes Dale Olsen) with Gregory Mason when he argues that totemism is the reason for the Tairona animal figures. The musical effigy figurines especially (because of the added dimension of sound) must have had some supernatural use, perhaps as a part of shamanism, totemism, or magical protection. As for Mason’s statement that “Indians never give free play to their imaginations” and his inference that they did everything for a purpose, however, I disagree. Based on the musical instruments of the Tairona I studied, I found there was no standardization of pitch among them, suggesting that their pitches were haphazardly determined. Indeed, even graphic and geometric designs may not have meaning or supernatural use, in spite of what Mason writes, as suggested by Gebhart-Sayer for the Shipibo-Conibo of the Peruvian Amazon: “My prime informant insisted that once materialized on textiles, ceramics, or other media, a design loses its spirit.....and thus its potency.” This type of emic information is very important simply because it suggests evidence to possibly counteract commonly held etic opinions that are not often based on fact, such as that of Gregory Mason cited above.....

“My analyses indicate that there is *no* connection between animal type and intervals employed.....”

These arguments indicate that individual variations between instruments, with respect to zoomorphic iconography in relation to the musical and tonometric characteristics of particular instruments, do not display a strictly standardised correlation. Elsewhere Olsen repeats, in relation to some Tairona tubular flutes upon which he undertook research:

“My analyses, therefore, have revealed that pitch combinations (tone systems or scales) of Tairona ceramic tubular and globular flutes are haphazard.....They have also revealed that the musical instruments were *not* made in a manner that systematically related exterior motif with tone system structure. Thus, while I originally hypothesized that all the bird ocarinas had similar pitch relationships or scales, all the bats had their own scales, all the humans had theirs, and so forth, this is not the case.....What the ceramic musical instruments of the ancient Tairona *can* tell us is that the Tairona had a great concern for exterior detail of their musical effigy figurines, and that while pitch variation was a concern because it existed, recurring pitch relationships (as conceived of in modern Western terms) between instruments of similar design were apparently not of concern to them.”

In conclusion, Olsen demonstrates precisely the points made by Sánchez, concerning the need to understand prehispanic Colombian artworks as unique products of individually distinct artists, working however within specific, collectively constructed aesthetic, iconographic, mythical, religious, spiritual, and cultural norms:

“Hasta aquí llega el ámbito específico del arte. Es aquí donde el contemplador encuentra que un

sol de oro o una luna de plata, sin importar su proveniencia, sin importar su significado, pueden ser más bellos que cualquier cuento de hadas.

“Pero al mismo tiempo, toda obra de arte incorpora valores extraños a su propio universo. Son valores pertenecientes a ámbitos de realidad diversos: el mundo de la religión, el mundo de la mitología, el mundo de la magia, el mundo onírico, el mundo lúdico, el mundo de la fantasía, el mundo de la ciencia y el pensamiento filosófico, el mundo de la vida cotidiana. La obra de arte les da realidad dentro de la esfera artística, es decir, visual, y esto es lo que permite hablar de “significado”, con signos y símbolos, como supone todo proceso de comunicación. Una obra totalmente carente de significado es una obra totalmente ininteligible. Estos significados nunca son inmediatos ni obvios. Puede acontecer que el artista mismo los desconozca o no sea consciente de ellos. De todos modos, en el arte siempre se dan en el plano de la imaginación, y por esa razón la obra de arte nunca es una transposición mecánica de significados intelectuales. En esto radica la principal debilidad de los estudios iconográficos. Una rana puede significar la oposición entre el aire y el agua, entre la luz y la obscuridad, entre la sequedad y la humedad. Pero esto nos habla de las ranas en general, y dice muy poco sobre la rana del Tairona Tardío fundida en tumbaga dorada que se usaba como colgante y que hoy tenemos ante nuestros ojos. Para interpretarla, el principal problema es que es una obra individual. En su elaboración intervinieron muchos niveles de la mentalidad del artista. El nivel filosófico, al que pertenece el concepto de oposición dualista en la naturaleza, es sólo uno de ellos. Esto supone que sea imposible desentrañar el significado del arte, especialmente el de sociedades desaparecidas. Supone que toda interpretación iconográfica es una aproximación cuyo valor depende del conocimiento que se tenga de las sociedades en cuestión.”

And so the golden Tairona frog, produced by a Tairona artist or artists or craftsman or craftsmen (or women) between 600 - 1600 A.D. to which Sánchez refers, is like a painting on an archaic Greek pot, of Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship, hearing the sirens singing. Such a painting contains within it the interrelated worlds of ancient Greek religion, mythology, magic, dream, playfulness, fantasy, science, and philosophical thought, as well as those of everyday life in ancient Greece. But it is also a unique artistic visual experience, created by one or more distinct artists. It conveys the sense of an individual person, Odysseus, exploring a reality of dangerous knowledge, of beauty and desire, and is a unique rendering of that idea or experience, as created by a particular artist.

Sánchez continúe:

“La asociación del arte con los ámbitos de realidad ajenos a él tiene muchas veces implicaciones de funcionalidad. Se asigna a la obra de arte un papel, sea religioso, político, económico o de cualquier otro orden. No hay, necesariamente, contradicción entre arte y función, como lo demostró en la tercera década del siglo XX la Bauhaus. Desde luego, infinidad de obras, durante toda la historia del arte, han tenido una función, y en el arte prehispánico este hecho se aplica a un elevado porcentaje de piezas, quizás a todas. Las simples denominaciones de máscaras, pectorales, collares, poporos, alfileres, colgantes, orejeras, narigueras, pinzas, figuras votivas, anuncian destinos específicos. Y sorprendente cómo la función no fue limitante para la forma. Casi podría afirmarse que existen tantas formas de pectorales como el número de pectorales que se conservan. La funcionalidad, además puede fijar las obras a un contexto, como sucede con los

cuadros y figuras de bulto de una iglesia o con la ornamentación arquitectónica. En este último caso, una parte considerable del valor de la obra depende de su permanencia dentro de su contexto. La orfebrería prehispánica es esencialmente móvil. Aparte de los ídolos cubiertos con lámina de oro de que hablan las crónicas del siglo XVI y los objetos votivos, el fin de las piezas era ser llevadas de un lado a otro, como ornamentación de guerreros o de dignatarios, para que resplandecieran con el sol tropical.”

And this returns us to the point made earlier, that all art is ‘functional’ in that it is inseparable from the lives, feelings, actions, hopes and dreams of the people among whom it is produced and with whom it communicates. Sánchez continues:

“Toda obra de arte es un punto de convergencia de actores y relaciones sociales. Por una parte está el artista, que actúa dentro de un ordenamiento espacial, temporal y social, con una biografía articulada dentro de la estructura social, un plan de vida, valores, su propia experiencia y conocimiento del mundo y de la vida, rasgos psicológicos, y un conjunto de conocimientos especializados que lo definen como artista. Esta es el área más oscura del mundo del arte en las sociedades prehispánicas de Colombia. No solamente no sabemos nada sobre ningún artista individual de ninguna de aquellas sociedades, sino que ni siquiera tenemos conocimiento alguno sobre el artista como actor social. Es imposible imaginar el arte de la orfebrería prehispánica sin una estructura social donde hubiera un sector de especialistas, quizás con dedicación exclusiva y con sistema de transmisión de conocimientos, con maestros y aprendices.”

This general description of the arts can be applied to any socio-historical context including that of an artist, composer, or poet in a modern society; though the terms ‘biography’, ‘forms of life’, ‘values’, ‘experience’, ‘knowledge of the world and of life’, ‘psychological characteristics’ and ‘consciousness’ will take on in the latter very different kinds of implication.

For many of the pre-hispanic peoples who lived in the territory of present day Colombia the sea represented the mystical origins of all life. From its darkness the primordial Mother gave birth to children who came onto land to people it with the ancestors of the Tairona, the Muisca, and others.

These myths and legends may actually reflect the fact that the first settled agricultural communities of Colombia lived on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, so that the fundamentally sacred importance of sea-shells for all these peoples was and is a legacy from this reality.

Sacred lakes in the interior of Colombia maintained continuity with these sacred myths of origin, so that in particular the mother goddess Bachue was believed to have originated, according to one myth, in lake Guatavita, and with her husband to have populated the surrounding regions with the Muisca peoples. According to another myth, Bachue arose with her son from Lake Iguaque; after creating the human race they returned to the lake in the form of serpents.

Life, fertility, continuity, and equilibrium flowed from sacred lakes. The male, fertilizing principle was the sun, which was connected to gold. A sacred figurine of Bachue therefor, made out of gold or *tumbaga*, represents this very union of male and female supernatural divinities in the creation myths of the Muisca peoples. Sacred rites in which such gold artworks were thrown

into the lake can easily therefore be understood as essential to the maintenance of life, continuity, and cosmic equilibrium.

More particular myths and legends of El Dorado, the Golden Man, the *cacique* (chief) at Guatavita who according to legend threw golden figurines and other objects into the lake annually according to one version at his irrestiture according to another represent perhaps more local adumbrations upon the primordial theme the famous legend of the cacique who humiliated his wife after he discovered her adultery, so that she ran to lake Guatavita and disappeared in it, is an example of this the remorseful cacique would sail to the centre of the sacred lake every year on a raft and offer gold to his wife.

Much of ancient Greek art can be understood in a similar way. Very basic, primitive rites of puberty and fertility developed in time into forms of drama, in which more complex myths and legends such as those of Prometheus or Agammemnon would be explored by the Athenian tragedians for their metaphysical, psychological, social, and political significances in both the Greek and Muisca examples, layers of myth and legend are embedded within one another in deeply complex artistic structures.

Robert Drennan, in his book *Prehispanic Societies Of The Upper Magdalena*, makes some extremely percipient observations about the remarkable archeological remains from the classical culture of San Agustín:

“La humedad y la acidez de los suelos de la región son enemigos de la conservación de los restos óseos, como resultado carecemos casi totalmente de la información biológica que tales restos podrían proporcionarnos. No sabemos ni los sexos ni las edades de los ocupantes de las tumbas descritas. Sin embargo, el rango de la elaboración de los rasgos funerarios del Alto Magdalena refleja gran variedad en el tratamiento dado a los difuntos. Mientras que la gran mayoría de los entierros son muy sencillos, parece que una parte muy restringida de la población merecía un enterramiento en una tumba mucho más elaborada que permanecía después como monumento.

“La elaboración arquitectónica y escultórica de estas tumbas monumentales requiere de una inversión de recursos humanos fuera del alcance de la gran mayoría de la población. En este sentido es interesante comparar estas inversiones, como obras públicas, con los monumentos de algunas sociedades de otras regiones que también podrían clasificarse en sentido muy general como cacicazgos. Tomando el montículo Occidental de la Mesita A como ejemplo, podemos estimar muy aproximadamente la inversión de recursos humanos que representa. Un montículo ovalado de 20 por 30 m a una altura máxima de unos 3 m, tiene un volumen aproximado de 900 m³. La tierra de los montículos parece haber sido acumulada mediante excavaciones muy locales, proceso durante el cual sin duda se realizó la nivelación de las áreas planas alrededor de los montículos. Si cada m³ de relleno representa dos horas de trabajo, y si un día de trabajo es de ocho horas, un grupo de 15 trabajadores puede haber construido el Montículo Occidental de la Mesita A en unos 15 días.

“No se sabe con precisión la procedencia de la piedra en la que se tallaron las estatuas del Alto Magdalena, pero grandes cantidades de roca muy semejante están disponibles en las inmediaciones de los sitios. Hoy en día artesanos del municipio de San Agustín fabrican réplicas

muy simpáticas de las estatuas prehispánicas utilizando una tecnología muy sencilla, aprovechando la piedra de la Quebrada Quebradón a pocos cientos de metros del Alto de Lavapatas. Un artesano, trabajando solo, puede tallar una estatua en unos 15 días. Utilizan herramientas de piedra y de metal. Sólo con implementos de piedra para dos artesanos, esculpir una estatua puede ser cuestión de 15 días de trabajo. Trasladar las estatuas al sitio es un trabajo duro - digamos un día para 10 trabajadores - pero no es una tarea que requiere de conocimientos avanzados de ingeniería. A este ritmo, uno puede imaginar que 12 artesanos elaboraron una media docena de estatuas en unos 15 días y la situaron en la Mesita A, junto con las lajas de la tumba principal del montículo en otros 15 días.

“En fin, y reiteramos, muy aproximadamente, la construcción del Montículo occidental de la Mesita A con su tumba principal y varias estatuas asociadas posiblemente ocupó los esfuerzos de unos 15 trabajadores durante un mes y medio. Definitivamente no tenemos que pensar en la organización de un cuerpo de cientos de hombres durante varios años - simplemente no es una obra pública de tal escala.

“Podríamos comparar estos monumentos con los henges de Wessex, Inglaterra, del período entre 3000 y 1400 a.C (Neolítico Tardío y Edad de Bronce Temprana). El ejemplo más impresionante y famosos de estos monumentos es Stonehenge. Para cada uno de los 25 henges pequeños que se conocen, se ha estimado una inversión de trabajo casi el doble de tiempo del que aproximamos para el Montículo Occidental de la Mesita A. Así, en términos generales los henges pequeños no representan obras públicas de magnitud tan diferente a la de los montículos funerarios del Alto Magdalena. Sin embargo, durante el mismo período en Wessex, se encuentran seis henges más grandes, cada uno de los cuales representa aproximadamente 100 veces la inversión de trabajo requirió de 400 veces la inversión del Montículo Occidental y Silbury Hill, un gran montículo artificial, costó el doble que Stonehenge.

“Durante el Formativo mesoamericano se desarrollaron en varias regiones, sociedades que han sido clasificadas como cacicazgos. En el centro olmeca de la Venta, se construyó hacia el 800 a.C. un montículo artificial cuyo volumen es aproximadamente 40 veces el del Montículo Occidental de la mesita A. Este montículo fue parte de un complejo simétrico de plataformas artificiales de más de 450 m de largo que incluyó, entre muchas otras cosas, escultura monumental y “ofrendas masivas” consistentes de tal vez 4,500,000 Kg de bloques de serpentina traídas de canteras ubicadas a una distancia de unos 200 Km. Al mismo tiempo los cacicazgos del Vakke de Oaxaca y de la Cuenca de México, en las tierras altas mesoamericanas, no emprendían construcciones fáciles de clasificar como obras públicas para comparar con los montículos funerarios del Alto Magdalena.

“Las obras públicas más obvias de los cacicazgos del Mississippian en el suroriente de los Estados Unidos son montículos asociados con entierros como los del Alto Magdalena. El sitio de Moundville consiste en un conjunto de unos treinta montículos de tamaños muy variados, construidos entre 1250 y 1550 d.C. El montículo más grande tiene más de 17 m de altura y consiste en un relleno con un volumen casi 100 veces más grande que el del Montículo Occidental de la Mesita A, pero no incluye construcciones de lajas ni está asociado con estatuaria, aunque el conjunto tiene obras defensivas masivas. A grandes rasgos, un centro como Moundville parece representar un esfuerzo de construcción más o menos comparable al del

conjunto principal de sitios monumentales del Alto Magdalena, consistiendo en las Mesitas A, B, y C junto con el Alto de Lavapatás.

“Las sociedades de Hawaii han influido mucho en las discusiones acerca de los cacicazgos, pero sus monumentos no han sido muy enfatizados. No obstante, los caciques construyeron templos para rituales públicos. Un ejemplo es el *heiau* de Kane’aki, cuya construcción cubrió un total de 1010 m² con muros de contención y relleno artificial de una profundidad variable para crear tres patios nivelados y una plataforma pequeña. La construcción se dividió en seis etapas, y Kirch considera la última como evidencia de la presencia de un cacique muy poderoso. En términos de escala de organización del esfuerzo humano, este *heiau* no es muy diferente al Montículo Occidental de la Mesita A.

“Para comparar el Alto Magdalena con otros casos más cercanos, tenemos una buena documentación etnohistórica para los cacicazgos de algunas regiones colombianas, en donde las construcciones monumentales brillan principalmente por su ausencia, como, por ejemplo, el Valle del Reio Cauca y la Sabana de Bogotá.

“El objetivo aquí no es una comparación exhaustiva de los monumentos de todos los cacicazgos del mundo (ni de Colombia), sino situar las construcciones monumentales del Alto Magdalena en un contexto comparativo. En este contexto vemos que la escala de organización del esfuerzo humano dedicado a la construcción de monumentos públicos en las sociedades del Clásico Regional en el Alto Magdalena es semejante a la que encontramos en algunos otros ejemplos de cacicazgos, pero el rango de variación es grande. Existen monumentos de sociedades que, por sus otros atributos han sido caracterizadas como cacicazgos, que representan una inversión de muchísimo más esfuerzo humano que las del Alto Magdalena. Los montículos de Moundville, por ejemplo, son mucho más grandes, y el conjunto es más extenso, aún teniendo en cuenta que la Mesita A, es solo una parte del conjunto de Mesitas. Las construcciones de la Venta, también son de escala muy grande, y el Complejo C es solamente uno de varios complejos de monumentos. Aunque las piedras erigidas en Stonehenge son muy grandes, el monumento, en su totalidad, no es enorme; y el *heiau* de Kaneaki es muy pequeño, a pesar del desarrollo de los cacicazgos de Hawaii, según las fuentes etnográficas.

“Esta misma comparación nos lleva a otra observación interesante acerca del carácter de los monumentos en las diferentes sociedades mencionadas. Algunos de estos monumentos, como los del Alto Magdalena o de los centros del Mississippian, están asociados con los entierros de ciertos personajes, mientras que otros, como los henges de Wessex o los *heiau* de Hawaii carecen de esta asociación. En el caso de la Venta aunque existen tumbas impresionantes integradas a la arquitectura pública y ceremonial, la monumentalidad no parece haber estado tan enfocada en ciertos personajes como en el caso del Alto Magdalena.

“Estas diferencias no necesariamente representan características permanentes de las culturas de sus respectivas regiones, pues durante la Edad de Bronce Tardía (1400-700 a.C), que sucede al período de los henges en Wessex, se construyó una serie de montículos dedicados a los entierros de individuos. Estos round barrows se asemejan más o menos a los montículos funerarios del Alto Magdalena, excepto en cantidad, pues existen por lo menos 8,000 en Wessex (Earle 1991:91). Teniendo en cuenta este cambio en la naturaleza de los monumentos, Renfrew (1974)

sugirió un cambio en la organización social en Wessex alrededor de 1400 a.C., con cacicazgos al comienzo orientados más hacia el grupo comunitario, y posteriormente más hacia personajes importantes. Si consideramos únicamente esta característica, los cacicazgos del Alto Magdalena se parecen más a los de Wessex durante la Edad de Bronce Tardía que a los de períodos anteriores.

“Otra característica de las tumbas del Clásico Regional en el Alto Magdalena no ha sido muy enfatizada en la literatura arqueológica, pero puede ser importante. Cuando estas tumbas se comparan con los entierros conocidos de personajes de importancia en los cacicazgos de otras regiones, se nota que, a pesar de la elaboración arquitectónica y escultórica de los montículos del Alto Magdalena, el ajuar funerario enterrado con el difunto no es muy rico. Entre los hechos reportados por Santa Gertrudis (1970, tomo 2:97) después de su visita a San Agustín en 1758, se encuentran las quejas del sacerdote de la pequeña aldea de que los seis guaqueros profesionales que contrató en Popayán abrieron 19 tumbas y no encontraron un pedazo de oro y tumbaga en el Alto Magdalena en cantidades suficientes para definir un estilo regional, el material es muchísimo más abundante en otras regiones del país.

“Un gran número de las tumbas más impresionantes del Alto Magdalena fueron tan destruidas por la gUAQUERÍA que no nos queda ninguna indicación de su contenido. En otros casos tenemos por lo menos unas pistas. Por ejemplo en el Montículo 1 del Alto de los Idolos, las excavaciones sistemáticas (después de las de los guaqueros) pudieron recuperar algunas pequeñas y delgadas láminas de oro, perforadas aparentemente para ser usadas como adornos sobre la ropa. Además se hallaron cuentas tubulares y tiestos posiblemente de vasijas enterradas con el difunto. Sin embargo, en el “corredor” entre la tumba y la estatua principal que no había sido excavado antes, no se halló ninguna ofrenda. En la tumba profunda que se ve en el corte, también descubierta por primera vez en excavaciones controladas, las únicas ofrendas consistieron en cuatro pequeñísimas cuentas de oro y dos de piedra. El inventario del ajuar funerario en una tumba muy “rica” del Clásico Regional en el Alto Magdalena puede incluir unas vasijas de cerámica (es muy raro encontrar más de tres o cuatro), unas hachas de piedra, cuentas de collar, y de vez en cuando adornos pequeños de oro. Algunas tumbas del mismo tamaño que las de los montículos más elaborados que han sido excavados científicamente no contenían ningún artefacto.

“Cieza de León describe la riqueza de los caciques del sur de Colombia en el siglo XVI y los bienes generalmente enterrados con ellos cuando se murieron: “... tienen sus mortuorios y sepulturas al uso de su patria, hechas de una bóveda, muy hondas, la boca al oriente. En las cuales, muerto algún principal o señor, lo meten dentro con muchos llantos, echando con él todas sus armas y ropa y el oro que tiene, y comida”. Parece una descripción consistente con los hallazgos de la arqueología (y de la gUAQUERÍA) y en las zonas de Calima o Quimbaya o Tolima o en el sitio de Malagana y muchos otros. No mucho más lejos, en Panamea, los entierros de Sitio Conte incluyeron las hachas de piedra, herramientas de hueso, puntas de proyectil, dientes de tiburón, esmeraldas, y toda clase de objetos imaginables de oro y de tumbaga. El número de piezas cerámicas en un solo entierro llegó hasta 100. No obstante, ninguno de estos entierros dotados con ajuares tan ricos tiene la monumentalidad de las tumbas del Alto Magdalena.”

There are a great variety of social forms that can be termed chiefdoms, and they demonstrate great variation in the quantities of human labour that are available to them. They also exhibit

great diversity in different times and places in terms of where they put their human effort in respect of religious and artistic activities.

One chiefdom society may invest a huge amount of labour in the construction of religious monuments, but without constructing imposing graves; another invests in both monuments and graves but relatively less in rich offerings to put into the graves. Yet another does not put so much store by monuments yet their graves are richly filled, and so on. Such differences are the product, obviously, of different cultural histories, interacting with different ecological, climatic, and geographical environments.

It appears that the classical culture of San Agustín (c. 400 - 900 A.D), for whatever complex of dialectically interacting causes and reasons, was strongly disposed towards stone statuary, producing some of the most extraordinary statues the world has ever seen.

In San Agustín both labour-time and artistic creativity were directed more into stone statuary than into metalwork, or into the construction of huge monuments, or public religious works taking up very large areas. It was in stone statuary of modest size that the San Agustín people expressed and worked through their thoughts and feelings about the supernatural, and about death. Their tombs were guarded, protected, or accompanied by stone gods, demons, and spirit representations of shamans, which not only registered their preoccupations about life after death, particularly for individuals regarded as important chiefs or shamans and such like, but also acted as sites of spiritual power to influence life among those still living. The area around San Agustín was not merely a cemetery or necropolis.

Archeological excavations show that the area was densely populated, and that crops were cultivated in terraces and fields with sophisticated drainage systems. The huge numbers of stone statues located in these sites constituted a powerhouse of spiritual forces that influenced and ensured plentiful rain and sun, natural and human fertility, and human wellbeing generally.

It is surely of great interest that this particular society should have emphasised medium-sized stone sculpture as its preferred medium for spiritual-aesthetic symbolic expression and communication, and should have organized and directed its artisanal potential so crucially within this medium. It is in this respect pretty well unique among South American pre-Hispanic cultures.

Considering this issue is rather like viewing Austria between 1750 and 1930, or England between 1600 and 1820, and wondering why the first produced such great music and the second such great poetry.

Another good summary statement of the meaning of the statuary at San Agustín, which can allow us to bring this discussion to a close, is provided by Cesar Augusto Velandia, in his book *San Agustín. Arte, Estructura y Archeología*:

“Las formas de la cultura arqueológica de San Agustín, constituyen la articulación de un sistema estructurado de significantes no lingüísticos y, por ende, un lenguaje en imágenes visuales, táctiles, sensibles, o sea, un lenguaje icónico. Este se debe entender como la articulación en

imágenes de la representación estética, al considerar que no todas las formas o expresiones artísticas de una cultura suponen su inserción en un sistema signico explícito. Dicho lenguaje icónico subyace un discurso metafórico, analógico, que, como cuerpo simbólico coherente, “aloja” el contexto de representación de unos modos de la consciencia social, entendidos como la elaboración de un cierto nivel ideológico.....

“Un discurso en el cual la aprehensión de la realidad tiene la manera y estructura de una reconstrucción o explicación mitopoética de las relaciones de unos hombres, históricamente concretos, con sus entornos natural y social.”

X

TWO TIKUNA LEGENDS

A Tikuna man, named Domingo Jiménez Gomez, who lived in a Tikuna village called San Martin in the Colombian state of Amazonas, told Nidia Castaño and me the following stories on the 17th July 2004 . He described himself as “medio mundo chaman, con historias”, or “a half world chaman, who tells stories.” The first one was called

La Leyenda De Santo Metare Del Cerro Muruapo. It went like this:

“A shaman once lived in San Martin, who one day met up with some other shamans. Together they went to Muruapo, a hill near the town of Tarapacá. There the shaman turned into Santo Metare, the first ever, original, Tikuna shaman. He danced with the other shamans, and they drank a large amount of *Ayahuasca*, playing drums insistently all the time, until they fell to the ground. At length the soul of the shaman, now become Santo Metare, flew into the sky, leaving his body on the ground as if it were dead.”

The second story that Domingo told us was called

Yare, and it went like this:

“There was a man called Napoleon, who arrived at the frontier between Colombia and Peru at the time of the war between the two countries. He heard people crying, because the small son of one of the men there had died. Napoleon began to drink *tocomo*, which is made from tobacco stewed in water, with the father of the dead boy. With the help of the god Yare the boy came back to life, and then Napoleon flew up to the sky and met Saint Peter. When he later returned to the earth, the grateful father rewarded Napoleon by offering his daughter to him as a wife. However, because Napoleon made love to his new wife, which was a sin, he lost his shamanistic powers, and became afterwards a mere ordinary man.”

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XI

EXPLORING/IMAGINING REICHEL-DOLMATOFF

PREFACE

This essay came into being through an *exploration* of some of the writings of Reichel-Dolmatoff, as the first part of its title indicates. In the process of writing it, I found myself extending, filling out, or *imagining* the implications of Reichel-Dolmatoff's profound and far-reaching ideas, as the second part of the essay's title suggests. I hope the reader will forgive, or much better, relish the inclusion of long quotations from Reichel-Dolmatoff's writings, as an essential means through which his ideas can be both *explored* and *imagined*. I feel this essay is rather like a journey through the music of a great composer; such an enterprise is hardly possible without hearing long passages of his or her music.

.....

“De acuerdo con los datos que proporciona la arqueología hoy, se presume que los primeros pobladores del territorio que hoy conforma nuestro país debieron haberse instalado en las tierras costeras y selváticas hace al menos veinticinco mil años. Si se compara este tiempo con la duración de un día es sorprendente descubrir que la conquista europea habría ocurrido alrededor de los últimos 25 minutos de ese día, mientras que el resto del día habría correspondido a esa historia desconocida anterior a la conquista europea. Esa inmensa etapa de la historia de Colombia, durante la cual se forjó la diversidad cultural del país, es el tema apasionante de este libro.

“Hasta hace muy poco, los textos de historia de Colombia se iniciaban con una exposición acerca de las características de Europa a finales del siglo XV y de las condiciones particulares que llevaron a la realización de los viajes que culminaron con la inclusión de América dentro del influjo del mundo europeo. Para los historiadores, Colombia debía su presente a una serie de acontecimientos que se desencadenaban a raíz de la llegada del conjunto de ideas y valores de los europeos. Aún a mediados del presente siglo había proyectos políticos basados sobre la idea de que el “desarrollo” del país no sería posible si no se erradicaba de tajo todo lo que tuviera relación con lo indígena y lo ancestral. Desde esta perspectiva, la historia anterior al contacto con Europa no era considerada como historia y se presentaba como un inmenso espacio oscuro, donde no se podían identificar diferencias. Ese período de oscuridad se catalogaba como pre-historia, como una laguna gigantesca, lejana, en el azar de la historia de Colombia.

“Los indígenas que habían encontrado los europeos a su llegada al territorio que conforma este país eran vistos como retrasados mentales, incapaces e ineptos. En el mejor de los casos eran considerados como “niños” que requerían de la ayuda plena de la sociedad criolla y europea para lograr “avanzar” hacia formas éticas, políticas y morales que parecían ser las únicas válidas en el universo.

“Algunos intelectuales formados en Europa durante el siglo pasado describieron las “curiosidades” indígenas en extensos tomos llenos de adjetivos que oscilaban entre el desprecio por las sociedades indígenas y su admiración por la hermosura y el cuidado de sus obras de arte, a las que muchas veces se les atribuyó un origen lejano, en el Egipto faraónico o en las migraciones europeas más tempranas. Estos intelectuales hicieron las primeras clasificaciones de objetos y documentos pertenecientes a los territorios que conforman el país, dividiendo la geografía nacional en áreas culturales diferenciadas, dentro de las cuales no se había producido ninguna historia, es decir,

donde todo había permanecido incólume al paso del tiempo hasta la llegada de los europeos. Así se establecieron las áreas tairona, muisca, calima, quimbaya o Nariño, limitadas por las fronteras sociopolíticas actuales y definidas a partir de sus objetos representativos.

“Cualquier objeto procedente de cada una de estas regiones se clasificaba como perteneciente a esta única cultura regional: una vasija procedente de Caldas era asignada ala “Cultura Quimbaya” mientras una procedente del Valle del Cauca se clasificaba como “Calima”, y una del altiplano de Boyacá y Cundinamarca era considerada como “Chibcha”.

“Se suponía que en cada una de estas áreas había tenido lugar la vida apacible o salvaje (dependiendo del punto de vista) de una cultura única cuyos miembros habían dedicado su existencia a la brujería, a los cultos extraños basados en sacrificios humanos y en la muerte de niños que se arrancaba de los brazos de sus madres para ofrendarlos en rituales atroces. Desde la otra orilla, se presentaba la perspectiva de una vida almibarada, desarrollada en medio de la abundancia y el derroche. Estas imágenes extremas, contradictorias y repletas de la ideología de entonces muy cercana a la que guió los actos de la conquista, llevaron a dibujar esa historia antigua de Colombia y a instalar en las mentes de los colombianos un pasado de vergüenza del que había que tomar distancia. Los primeros habitantes de Colombia sólo podían haber sido dóciles imbéciles o guerreros sanguinarios. Era tal la fuerza de estas ideas que el movimiento cultural colombiano más importante de comienzos de este siglo, conocido como el Grupo Bachué, fue condenado por tomar como bandera lo indígena, e interpretarlo como una fuente de inspiración artística y de creación de un “lenguaje nacional auténtico”.

“En este escenario surgió la antropología en Colombia en el año de 1941. La primera generación de antropólogos profesionales formada por Paúl Rivet se dio a la tarea de reconstruir la historia prehispánica de Colombia y presentarla de otro manera, más cercana a la realidad histórica. Su trabajo fue exitoso en muchos sentidos, hasta el punto de que hoy Colombia cuenta con un número muy grande de arqueólogos profesionales, varios de ellos con títulos de maestría doctorado. A pesar de lo importante de todas esas producciones, el lenguaje utilizado, el estilo de presentación y la clase de discusiones que atrapan la atención de los intelectuales han puesto sus ideas y publicaciones por fuera del alcance del público general restándole a los resultados de su trabajo su mayor impacto social.

“Ahí, precisamente, es donde el aporte de Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff ha sido más influyente, porque él ha sido el único antropólogo que ha intentado presentar una versión coherente y completa de la historia prehispánica de Colombia. Desde luego que esta es su versión, construida desde la óptica de su propio trabajo, que ha sido el más impresionante realizado por investigador alguno en la antropología Colombiana”.

Prologue by Gerardo Ardila to (CI) pp. 23, 27, & 28

In these few paragraphs, Gerardo Ardila recreates marvellously the historical and intellectual climate within which Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff began his life-work, and describes very well the worldview which Reichel-Dolmatoff was to challenge absolutely, and transform.

Ardila is poignantly compelling in the way he relates the defunct ideology through which Amerindian culture used to be understood, directly to the long historical process of European Conquest. The indigenous peoples of present-day Colombia once represented to the European mind either barbarity or exotic curiosity; either the wild, bloody savage, or the noble, serene savage, depending on which aspect or facet of the European rape of Amerindia was being expressed in abstract ideas.

Reichel-Dolmatoff was passionate but also coolly objective in his approach to indigenous Colombian cultures. In particular he insisted on the fact that they possessed, and still possess, philosophical and scientific views, as well as practical forms of living, which were and are extremely sophisticated as well as subtly adapted to their natural environments. Typical are the following remarks he makes about the Kogi, a people who live in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia:

“¿Cuál sera el porvenir de los Kogi? Al escribir la palabra *integración* me lleno de profunda amargura. Creo que al defender el derecho de los Kogi a vivir y gozar su propia cultura, defendemos también *nuestro* derecho de vivir la nuestra y desafiar aquellas niveladoras del espíritu con que nos amenazan las grandes potencias del mundo moderno. Nosotros mismos, ciertamente, no queremos que nos “integren”. ¿Qué derecho se trata entonces de “integrar” a los Kogi? ¿Qué beneficio obtendrían ellos de una tal integración? ¿Qué podemos enseñarles? Entre los Kogi no hay criminalidad ni delincuencia, en nuestro sentido; no hay abuso de drogas, ni violencia política. No hay prostitución ni usura ni incertidumbre económica. Su religión es profundamente consoladora; su filosofía de la vida es positiva, afirmativa del desafío constituido por la existencia. ¿Qué pretendemos enseñarles?”

(K1) p.18

In *Chamanes de la Selva Pluviales*, Reichel-Dolmatoff pondered the very difficult question as to whether a Tukano shaman is ‘consciously’ ecological in a modern ‘scientific’ sense. He asks how the shaman’s ‘traditional’ and ‘magical’ worldview relates to ‘modern’, ‘rational’ forms of understanding and practice:

“El hecho de que la mayoría de las actividades económicas se acompañen con rituales no significa, por cierto, que el chamán simplemente pida a las fuerzas sobrenaturales que dispensen abundancia, suficiencia, o el máximo de lo que el ambiente pueda producir, sino más bien que concedan la oportunidad de inventariar, de sopesar costos y beneficios y de redistribuir los recursos, En tales situaciones la contabilidad del chamán muestra el input y output del sistema general. En realidad, la mayoría de las actividades chamanística, entre otras los ritos de curación el hacer

llover, la reafirmación periódica de alianzas o de intercambio de alimentos entre grupos exogámicos, pueden considerarse como ritos vinculados con la administración de recursos y el equilibrio ecológico. Este hecho ha sido a veces tergiversado por la tendencia a ver a los chamanes indígenas como simples brujos o fanáticos religiosos.”

(CSP) p.18

In the following passage, Reichel-Dolmatoff considers the practical and ‘scientific’ value of traditional Tukano eschatology:

“Los Tukano, como muchas otras “tribus” de Colombia, creen que el universo se esta deteriorando lentamente. Así consideran que en el pasado la gente era más sana, fuerte e inteligente que en el presente, que los animales y grutas eran más grandes y abundantes. Señalan trechos de selva, ríos y lagunas, diciendo que en épocas anteriores la vida en ellos era abundante. En verdad, actualmente se justifica en parte tal sensación de inminencia del fin, en muchos lugares, el mundo de los indios de la selva pluvial efectivamente está declinando. Pero el sentido de entropía entre los indios, su convicción de la tendencia hacia el desorden y el caos, no parece provenir de su actual situación, más bien representa una angustia existencial que forma parte de la filosofía cosmología indígenas, y que se fundamente en la diaria e íntima observación de los ciclos biológicos de crecimiento y declinación. El aspecto importante en este punto es que la idea del desorden creciente está siempre seguida de la resolución institucionalizada de re-crear el mundo y restablecer su orden y propósito como consta en la tradición cosmológica. El continuo ciclo de creación, destrucción o re-creación rituales se encuentra en muchas sociedades de la selva tropical y es en verdad un mecanismo importante de supervivencia cultural biológica.”

(CSP) p.19

The following passages express his profound belief that indigenous life-forms and indigenous philosophies, both those that existed in the past and those that still exist, held and still hold much of relevance and importance to other cultures including ‘our own’, i.e. ‘occidental culture’:

“La imagen cultural de las “tribus” indígenas del trópico americano, hasta hace relativamente poco, era la de un grupo de gentes más bien primitivas y hostiles, cuya contribución al pensamiento humano había sido insignificante y cuyo nivel de complejidad social había quedado muy por debajo del de la mayoría de las sociedades aborígenes del Viejo Mundo. En efecto, sólo a las altas civilizaciones de América – los antiguos mexicanos, mayas y peruanos- se les reconocía ocasionalmente el haber creado instituciones sociales, políticas y religiosas de cierta complejidad, pero aun en el caso de dichas civilizaciones, rara vez se han discutido de modo explícito los sistemas filosóficos indígenas, o aquello que se aproxime a una visión integral del mundo. A veces se llegaba a pensar que los indios de la selva tropical eran sociedades fósiles; sociedades en cierto modo incompletas, que no habían evolucionado y no tenían enseñanza alguna que ofrecernos. Sociedades que permanecían “por fuera de la corriente principal” según algunos, y por consiguiente quienes habíamos hecho de

estas sociedades nuestro objeto de estudio, luchábamos contra el estigma de estar hasta cierto punto “por fuera de la corriente principal”.

“.....Los viejos estereotipos, al parecer, comienzan por fin a abandonarse y en su reemplazo surge una imagen nueva: la del Indio, no sólo como pensador altamente pragmático y con un sólido sentido de realidad, sino también como filósofo abstracto, artífice de intrincados modelos cósmicos y planificador de vastos esquemas morales. Al mismo tiempo, en vista del actual interés por los recursos naturales, muchos científicos y tecnólogos que han orientado su atención hacia las selvas pluviales tropicales del mundo, se han interesado por los numerosos problemas de adaptación ecológica que las sociedades tradicionales han tenido que afrontar en dichos ambientes. El caso de la cuenca del Amazonas exige una organización social sana y activa para soportar las rigurosas condiciones climáticas y hacer frente al manejo adecuado de recursos naturales que se agotan con facilidad una sociedad capaz de desarrollar, para su supervivencia, no sólo una serie de normas eficaces de conducta altamente adaptativas, estructuradas dentro de cuerpos institucionales eficaces, sino todavía más importante, un sistema coherente de creencias fundado sobre la base de valores verdaderamente motivadores, que hagan tolerables los problemas de la existencia humana en un mundo impredecible.”

(CS) pp.7-8

Rather wonderfully it seems to me, Reichel-Dolmatoff then describes the fundamental ‘philosophy’, or ‘cosmology’, of the Tukano, a people who inhabit the river Vaupés region of the Amazonian rainforest in south-eastern Colombia:

“El creador es el Padre Sol, dios antropomorfo que concibió un cosmos de tres niveles compuesto de un disco terrestre plano, una bóveda celeste y una región paradisíaca situada bajo la tierra.

“Pobló luego la tierra y creó los animales y plantas, dando a cada especie un conjunto de normas de conducta de acuerdo con las cuales habrían de vivir y multiplicarse. Pero el Padre Sol sólo creó los animales y las plantas, dando a cada especie un conjunto de normas de conducta de acuerdo con las cuales habrían de vivir y multiplicarse. Pero el Padre Sol sólo creó un número limitado de animales y plantas, y puso estas dos categorías bajo el cuidado constante de ciertos seres sobrenaturales que habrían de resguardarlas y protegerlas contra eventuales abusos. Más aún, asignó a su creación una extensión limitada de tierra, más o menos circular, demarcada por todos lados por determinados rasgos topográficos permanentes. En otras palabras, la creación del universo Tukano no se concibió como un sistema expansivo que lo abarcara todo sino como una proposición limitada, claramente circunscrita, con recursos finitos y restringidos. Tampoco la creación se llevó a cabo en un acto único y definido del tiempo; aún continúa sin interrupción, pues desde el principio el Padre Sol ejerce sobre ella una acción fertilizadora. Es la energía del Sol, concebida por los Tukano como luz y calor seminales, la que hace que las plantas crezcan, los frutos maduren y los hombres y animales, se reproduzcan, energía creativa no sólo en el sentido germinal, biológico, sino también en el sentido de la iluminación espiritual y

la adquisición de sabiduría arcana. La esencia de esta fuerza se imagina como un poder masculino que fertiliza a un elemento femenino, que es el mundo. En el pensamiento Tukano la biosfera tiene los dos aspectos masculino y femenino, pero, vista como un todo, su carácter esencial es femenino, y sobre él ejerce su poder el Sol.

“La energía seminal del Sol, según creencia Tukano, constituye un vasto circuito en que participa todo el cosmos. Dicho circuito se imagina tener una cantidad limitada de energía procreadora que fluye continuamente entre hombre y animal, entre sociedad y naturaleza. Puesto que la cantidad de energía es restringida, el hombre sólo puede tomar lo que necesita bajo ciertas condiciones, y debe convertir su quantum de energía “prestada” en una esencia que pueda reincorporarse al circuito. Por ejemplo, cuando se mata un animal o se recoge una cosecha, se presume que la energía de la flora y la fauna local disminuye, sin embargo, tan pronto como la presa o el fruto se convierten en alimento, la energía queda conservada, ahora en el nivel de la sociedad, por cuanto los consumidores de comida han adquirido la fuerza reproductiva vital que previamente pertenecía a un animal o una planta”.

(CS) p.10

This cosmology of course, represents the fundamental worldview of indigenous Amazonian shamanism, the study of which lies at the heart of Reichel-Dolmatoff's life-work. In the following paragraphs from *Orfebrería y Chamanismo*, Reichel-Dolmatoff gives another brief definition of shamanism:

“El chamanismo es un sistema coherente de creencias y prácticas religiosas, que tratan de organizar y explicar las interrelaciones entre el cosmos, la naturaleza y el hombre. Estas explicaciones sobre el lugar que el hombre ocupa en la naturaleza, en parte se fundamentan en experiencias visionarias que, por tener una común base neurofisiológica, son muy convincentes. A continuación trataremos de una serie de rasgos culturales y psicológicos que podemos considerar como característicos, tanto del sistema chamanístico universal, como del de muchas tribus colombianas actuales.

“Una constante es la idea de que el cosmos está estratificado y de que consiste en una secuencia de mundos superpuestos, lo que implica una gradación. En una imagen simplificada el cosmos es tripartito y está formado por nuestro mundo terrestre, por un mundo subterráneo y otro superior celeste. Los chamacos, subdividen estos tres grandes estratos en un número mayor de dimensiones y hablan de una cadena, cada vez más remota, de otros mundos. Por cierto, son precisamente dichas dimensiones las que los chamanes y otros visionarios dicen poder visitar durante sus trances. Es además frecuente la creencia de que, en épocas míticas, haya existido la posibilidad para toda la gente, de comunicarse con estos mundos por medio de una escalera, un bejuco, un puente o un camino secreto, pero que esta comunicación fue interrumpida por varias causas.

“.....Entre los Tukano del Vaupés, el viaje chamánico a otras dimensiones cósmicas, es un tema mítico muy frecuente. Hay muchas imágenes diferentes de esta

hazaña chamánica: la visita a la Casa del Trueno, el descenso a la Casa de las Aguas, el vuelo al “País resplandeciente” la llegada a la “Casa de las plumas multicolores”, y otras. La comunicación se establece trepando por una columna a de humo de tabaco o por un bejuco que baja del cielo, en ambos casos se alude a narcóticos, es decir a trabajo y a yajé. En muchos mitos el chamán es levantado en el aire y transportado a otras dimensiones, por ciertos pájaros, tales como águilas arpías, tijeretas, patos o gallinazos. Otra forma de comunicación está constituida simbólicamente por la cumbre principal de la maloca (gumú), que se identifica con el chamán principal (kumu), ambos se conciben como una “escalera” que comunica con el mundo superior.

“El carácter fálico del chamán se expresa generalmente en las actividades rituales relacionadas con la siembra, la caza, la pesca, la recolección de grutas silvestres, es decir en los ritos que puntualizan los principales hechos en los ciclos biológicos. Las semillas de las plantas o la freza de los peces se equiparan con el semen humano y el acto de una cosecha se compara con un parto. Sobre el nivel alucinatorio-simbólico, el chamán amazónico se presenta a veces directamente como procreador de la fauna.”

(OC) pp.23,27, &28

At the centre of Reichel-Dolmatoff’s archaeology and anthropology of *Colombia Indígena*, both ancient and contemporary, lies the importance of shamanism for indigenous survival: in material economy, in culture, in art, and in consciousness. As he writes in *Orfebrería y Chamanismo*:

“Mi ensayo de interpretación del oro precolombino tendrá pues como tema central la institución del chamanismo, visto como parte esencial de los fundamentos ideológicos de las culturas indígenas de Colombia.”

(OC) p.16

The following passage is a typical example of the way Reichel-Dolmatoff integrates past and present, as well as art and science, into his explanation of the importance of shamanism to gold-work, and of gold-work to shamanism, in ancient and contemporary Colombian indigenous cultures:

“Volviendo al resplandor del oro precolombino, cabe una observación final. Muchísimas piezas están adornadas con pequeñas placas colgantes y móviles, a veces cuadradas pero generalmente circulares o algo ovaladas, en ocasiones se trata de canutillos, de pequeños tubos o de listones. El objeto tiene entonces una o varias argollas soldadas sobre la superficie anterior y de ellas, articuladas con otra argolla, están suspendidas las placas móviles. Esto colgantes se encuentran en zarcillos, pectorales, diademas y en varias clases de pequeñas figuras humanas o de animales. La distribución de estos colgantes cubre prácticamente todas las regiones de Colombia. Al tomar una pieza así adornada y, desde luego, al llevarla puesta, el continuó movimiento de estas plaquitas da mucha vida a la joya, pero adicionalmente quisiera anotar que literalmente al “atraer la vista” el brillo vacilante y cambiante ejerce una acción así hipnótica sobre el observador. Este efecto es bien conocido a los chamanes (y a los neurólogos) quienes saben que, bajo ciertas condiciones, la

percepción de luces vacilantes puede inducir visiones de carácter alucinatorio o puede causar un estado prehipnótico.

“He observado en varias ocasiones que los chamanes, después de ingerir una bebida alucinógena, fijan su mirada en las brazas de un fogón o en la luz de una tea. En el río Caimán Nuevo, en el Golfo de Urabá, pude anotar que unos de los instrumentos más importantes de transformación y curación que poseía un chamán de los indios Cuna, eran unas varas gruesas de unos 50 centímetros de largo, cuyas superficies estaban cubiertas de una multitud de espejos minúsculos incrustados en una base de brea. Otros chamanes colombianos fijan su vista en los reflejos multicolores de un cristal de roca, para inducir ciertos estados psíquicos.

“El resplandor del oro es pues más que un mero reflejo, más que un fenómeno que se percibe óptimamente, según los indígenas, contiene una energía la cual se transmite a los seres humanos y que, en toda su esencia, es fertilizadora. En la cadena de asociaciones simbólicas el oro es luz, color, semen y poder.”

(OC) pp.21-22

Reichel-Dolmatoff is careful to point out however that not all pre-Hispanic chiefdoms in which shamanism was important, were necessarily also centres of gold-work:

“Así, aunque parece que todos los orfebres trabajaban dentro del contexto de cacicazgos, no todos los cacicazgos eran centros de orfebrería, ni tampoco enterraban objetos de oro o tumbaga con sus muertos.”

(OC) p.34

He provides an excellent summary of the role of the shaman in the following passage:

“Debo referirme ahora en más detalle a la persona del chamán. Por lo general este oficio es de hombres pero en varias culturas las mujeres también son chamanes. Contrario al estereotipo popular, los llamados “brujos” o “hechiceros” de los indios son, por lo general, individuos muy inteligentes que desempeñan múltiples funciones importantes dentro de sus sociedades. Son curanderos, rezanderos y dirigen pos rituales del ciclo vital del individuo; son especialistas en genealogías, en recitaciones mitológicas, en bailes y cantos y, por lo general, reúnen en sus personas a varias de estas funciones aunque puede haber especialistas.”

(OC) p.24

It is interesting to note that Reichel-Dolmatoff's understanding of the shaman does not eliminate the individual personality of any particular shaman. Certainly, Man is not the centre of the Universe within the shamanistic worldview, and nor are the individual's subjective emotions. The shamanistic interpretation of reality is strongly bound into a particular cultural tradition with its distinct interpretation of the cosmos:

“Aquellos mundos escalonados, según la tribu en cuestión, son imaginados de distintas formas. Para algunas tribus amazónicas cada mundo es como una enorme

casa, una maloca, con el interior preciosamente adornado con pinturas o con plumas multicolores. Para otras tribus de la misma región del país, los diferentes mundos son como grandes platos de barro, llamados budares, sobre los cuales se tuestan las tortas de cazabe, preparadas de harina de yuca amarga. Los indios de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta imaginan los mundos como grandes volantes de huso que se ensartan, el uno sobre el otro, en un inmenso huso que constituye un eje central, un axis mundi.

“Hay pues infinidad de imágenes, pero la invariante es un modelo del cosmos claramente estratificado diferenciándose cada estrato del otro por ciertas características únicas sean personificaciones sobrenaturales benévolas o malévolas, el País de los Muertos, los animales, plantas medicinales, música celeste, soles y lunas propias, más un gran número de otros aspectos.

“Según las creencias chamanísticas de algunas tribus, aquellos mundos escalonados que yacen fuera de esta tierra, corresponden a un microcosmos que consiste en una secuencia de dimensiones del propio mundo interior del individuo, es decir, representan una escala interna de “mundos” de la conciencia humana. Dicen los chamanes que, en sus alucinaciones, penetran los diferentes estratos del cosmos como si fuera por estrechas puertas u que, a la inversa pueden y deben explorar las dimensiones de su propio ser.

“Este modelo cósmico se repite luego en una escala cada vez menor: las montañas y los cerros los imaginan como “mundos” estratificados; detalles arquitectónicos de templos y aún de viviendas, simbolizan la estructura del cosmos, el cuerpo humano se interpreta en términos de segmentos horizontales, y el mismo principio se puede aplicar a artefactos tales como una olla o un instrumento musical.

“Entre las sociedades indígenas colombianas con comunes estas creencias acerca de la estructura básica del cosmos así como de la posibilidad de moverse una persona dentro de este modelo escalonado.

“Ideas muy parecidas se encuentran en muchas otras partes del continente americano y también en el Viejo Mundo; es posible suponer que se trate de una forma de pensamiento arcaico que se remonte a lejanas épocas prehistóricas.”

(OC) pp.23-24

Yet, in spite of the relatively constrained role available to an individual shaman in his or her interpretation of, and communication with, the supernatural and natural worlds, his individual role as an interpreter and as one who experiences, is not denied. It is relevant in this context to consider the way in which Western Modernist artists, who can be seen as ‘modern shamans’ in a certain sense, have frequently reacted against what they see as the extreme emotional and interpretative subjectivity inherent in Western conceptions of art and the individual artist. As Susana Friedmann has written:

“Ambos sin embargo, compartían la idea que el arte no es ni tan importante ni tan interesante como lo es del quehacer cotidiano. Para ellos, la religión del arte, con su

agonía y éxtasis que tanto seguimiento ha suscitado, es una pretensión absurda. Lo que han tratado de hacer es romper la barrera que existe entre la vida cotidiana y el arte, en contra del concepto del arte por el arte.

“También han mostrado un irrespeto similar al concepto del artista como aquel que da significado o interpreta la realidad, imponiendo sobre ella su ordenamiento imaginativo propio. Cada uno ha tratado a su manera, de despojar todo rastro de su dominio personal y de su expresión subjetiva a través de su obra, con el convencimiento que las emociones del artista y sus prejuicios también son precisamente las barreras que más obstaculizan el panorama. Así, Cage decía de su música experimental que era un intento para dejar que los sonidos fueran ellos mismos.

“El azar, lo aleatorio, el sustituto más obvio para el control subjetivo, ha sido la base de los experimentos de Cage y sus sucesiones y ha surgido también en la obra de Duchamp. Tanto el uno como el otro ha mostrado una predilección por los objetos mundanos de la sociedad moderna, en el caso de Cage, corchos de botellas, pedazos de chatarra, y los sonidos descubiertos del ambiente urbano y electrónico y en el caso de Duchamp, una simple butaca y la rueda de una bicicleta, por nombrar tan solo un ejemplo.

“¿Por qué preocuparse por el arte, si lo que importa es la vida? Se pregunta Cage. Por lo mismo, hay un cierto elemento de herejía en su obra, un humor que a veces es más que negro, malicioso.

“Hace rato que algunos artistas en varios países se han desplazado del concepto de un arte interpretativo, de expresión subjetiva. Pierre Boulez, generalmente considerado uno de los compositores más importantes en Europa y en el mundo entero, ha dicho que el motivo de su obra es “una búsqueda del anonimato.”

“La danza y el teatro hoy día también se pueden ver como una sublevación contra todo lo que es auto expresivo y significativo en el arte, concepto que heredan desde el Renacimiento. En música, el arte y las ideas, Leonard Meyer define este empiricismo radical como “una concepción del hombre y del universo que contrata totalmente con la idea que ha dominado el pensamiento occidental desde su comienzo en el sentido que se deriva de una convicción de que el hombre ya no es el centro del universo.”

Friedmann(1) pp.146-7

But the Western Modernist wish to eliminate the creative human individual in John Cage’s kind of ‘listening in’ to the Cosmos goes too far, just as the anthropocentrism which it reacts against went too far in the opposite direction. In saying this however, I do not mean to criticize Cage’s notion that the artist should free him or herself of all objects in his mind, so that he may enter into a real communion with nature. This is a kind of Zen-Taoist-Anti-Art outlook which is in accordance with much shamanistic ‘philosophy’. Thus, as Susana Friedmann puts it:

“Cage dice que “el objetivo más sublime es el de no tener un objetivo en mente”. Esta última actitud conduce a un acuerdo, a una complicidad con la naturaleza en su *modus vivendi*, en que un proceso infinito con ningún diseño aparente se conduce a fines no predecibles.

“.....En su libro Silence, Cage pregunta ¿Cuál es el objetivo de componer o de comprometerse con cualquier actividad artística? Responde señalando que se debe lograr lo lúdico. Sin embargo, lo lúdico es una afirmación de la vida no es un intento de hacer orden del caos o de sugerir mejoría en la creación, pero sencillamente de despertarnos a la vida que llevamos, que es sublime, si logramos apartar nuestra mente y nuestros deseos para dejar que tome su legítimo curso.”

Friedmann(1) pp.147 &148

The point at issue for me here is the claim of some that the artist's personality should disappear in the process of creation. To quote Friedmann again:

“El poder del arte de comunicar ideas y emociones, de organizar la vida en patrones significativos, de lograr verdades universales por medio de la individualidad auto expresiva del artista individual...”

Friedmann (1) p.148

In ancient shamanism however, which Reichel-Dolmatoff undoubtedly thought of as the original art and the original form of creative thought, the individual, creative artist-shaman is placed in his true context, as one small, but inextinguishable and unique part of humanity, nature, and the Cosmos as a whole. The above mentioned overreaction to Romantic subjectivism in some 20th Century European Modernist aesthetic and philosophical tendencies is discussed in another essay by Susana Friedmann:

“La música de Wagner provocó dos marcadas reacciones en el medio musical: o bien produjo una ciega admiración por su obra y por lo tanto una fiel adhesión a sus ideas, a sus melodías infinitas y a sus desconcertantes progresiones armónicas, o por otra parte, un rechazo total y contundente.

“Una de los compositores que primero se deslumbró con Wagner y luego se convirtió en uno de sus críticos más feroces es el francés Claude Debussy, quien pertenece a la escuela impresionista y cuya música suena fría y distante al compararla con la obra de Wagner.

“.....La escuela de dodecafónica de Viena surge como resultado de las inquietudes de un grupo de compositores que trataron de hallar alternativas a las melodías interminables, cargadas de emoción de Wagner. Si la música de Debussy les parecía distante y algo fría, estos compositores austriacos presentaron un contraste radical a la respuesta de los impresionistas. Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg y Antón Von Webern optaron por una solución racional y eminentemente cerebral como posibilidad de ampliar la escala diatónica del sistema tonal, aplicando el sistema cromático como alternativa.”

Friedmann(2) pp.58 & 62

In Reichel-Dolmatoff's thinking however, the individual shaman's experience, particularly his subjective emotions, are recognized as being unique to him. But the shaman contains none of the extreme egoistic individualism of many post-Renaissance European artists and philosophers.

For Reichel-Dolmatoff, as already indicated, the shamanistic practices that he studied in Colombia through both anthropology and archaeology, that is, both in the present and in the past, take their place as distinct instances of a 'human universal'. Shamanism, in its deepest essence, is a pan-human phenomenon, as Reichel-Dolmatoff explains in the following:

“Es cierto que muchos aspectos culturales de un grupo humano, sobre todo los socio-económicos y tecnológicos, se modifican y aún cambian rápidamente con el correr del tiempo, pero también se observa que hay ciertas constantes, ciertas prácticas y creencias que, por referirse a experiencias fundamentales en la vida humana, tienden a perdurar por largas épocas, porque son estructuras unificadores de gran importancia para la sociedad. Nacimiento y muerte, sexo, alucinación o la interpretación de fenómenos físicos cíclicos en la naturaleza, pueden eventualmente constituir los focos de tales universalidad humana, tanto culturales como biológicos, que siguen transmitiendo un conjunto de ideaciones coherentes a través del tiempo.

“En el fondo tenemos sólo dos alternativas: o aceptamos la posibilidad de una transmisión cultural histórica desde el Paleolítico del Viejo mundo hasta el Neolítico del Nuevo Mundo, o aceptamos el concepto de C.G. Jung (1975), de los arquetipos y del inconsciente colectivo.”

(OC) pp. 11-12 plus note 2

Now, as already stated, over the last few centuries in Western culture the idea of the 'artist-shaman', that is, of the visionary-creative kind of artist or philosopher, has frequently oscillated between two extremes: on the one hand the over-subjective egoist, on the other the self-denying objectivist. Reichel-Dolmatoff's work on shamanism helps very much to clear away the confusions surrounding this dichotomous thinking, for his conception of shamanism implies that it is in some senses a 'true', or at least a very basic, archetypal mode of human visionary-creative activity.

Thus it is that deep down, the 'agony and ecstasy' versus the 'empty mind' approach to visionary creativity, that is for example, the stance of Richard Wagner versus that of John Cage, represents a conflict which very much reflects the specific predicament of the artist-shaman in modern, Westernized societies. It relates to the form of personality taken on in modern society by the heirs of the ancient, traditional shaman, the figure that occupies such a central place in Reichel-Dolmatoff's worldview.

There could be no better declaration of Wagner's self-conception than the following utterance of his:

“Through all misery and anguish, let me sing for you O protective goddess of German music, faithful companion of my life.”

But to return to Reichel-Dolmatoff. The following sentence from Ardila presents the essence of Reichel-Dolmatoff’s contribution to the archaeology of Colombia:

“En 1965 ya estaba preocupado por lograr la conjugación de los datos producidos por los análisis cerámicos y las investigaciones ecológicas, para presentar una visión coherente de la historia de las “adaptaciones” de las sociedades colombianas a sus muy diversos ambientes.”

Prologue by Ardila to (OC) p.11

Thus, it is through the complex, dialectical, dynamic interactions between climate, geography, and ecology on the one hand, and human economy, society, polity and culture on the other, that for Reichel-Dolmatoff human history can best be grasped.

His interpretation of the emergence of settled village life, of the transition from the cultivation of root crops to the cultivation of maize, and of other associated cultural developments in the coastal regions of pre-Conquest Colombia, is a case in point. Let us take a lengthy quotation from the section titled *Vida Aldeana*, in the chapter called *La Etapa Formativa: de los Comienzos de la Vida Sedentaria hasta el Desarrollo de la Agricultura y de las Aldeas*, in *Colombia Indígena*:

“Al terminar el segundo milenio a. de C., se encuentran en la llanura del Caribe vestigios de una vida aldeana ya bien definida y caracterizada por un gran número de rasgos culturales propios. El sitio de Malambo, ubicado al borde de una laguna al sur de Barranquilla, cerca de la orilla occidental del río Magdalena, ejemplifica esta nueva forma de adaptación.

“En una época fechada en 1120 a. de C. aparece un Malambo una población ribereña y sedentaria. La cerámica es mucho más rica en formas que la de los períodos precedentes, y entre estos vestigios se observa gran número de fragmentos de grandes platos planos (budares) que, por lo general, se pueden considerar como indicadores de la preparación del cazabe, el pan hecho de harina de yuca. Aunque los habitantes de Malambo entonces eran todavía pescadores y se dedicaban ocasionalmente a la caza, su base de subsistencia, según parece, fue el cultivo de la yuca. ES de interés anota que la cerámica de Malambo se relaciona en cierto detalles con la de varios yacimientos de Venezuela, notablemente con el de Barrancas, lugar sobre el bajo río Orinoco que estaba poblado en una fecha similar a la de Malambo. La cerámica de Malambo, como la de Barrancas, se caracteriza por la firmeza de las anchas líneas incisas, que delimitan los contornos de los elementos modelados, y por otros rasgos que forman su estilo muy propio.

“Con Malambo se inicia una larga secuencia de formas culturales que luego se extienden sobre toda la llanura de Caribe, Viene la pauta de poblaciones establecidas en las orillas de las grandes lagunas de los río Magdalena, Sinú y algunos otros, es

decir, se trata de un alejamiento del mar y de los esteros, de una tendencia hacia una vida lacustre, con una manifiesta dependencia de los recursos de los bosque secos o de las cadenas de colinas adyacentes a las lagunas. Esta reorientación en la pauta de asentamiento no implica de ningún modo un cambio en la cantidad o en la accesibilidad de las diversas zonas micros ambientales de abastecimiento en las cuales participa la población pues se trata de zonas que ya habían conocido y para cuya explotación ya existía entonces una tecnología adecuada. Lo que sí se modifica son ciertos aspectos cualitativos de la subsistencia. En primero lugar, la fauna utilizada de ambiente marítimo y litoral (peces, grandes tortugas de mar, moluscos, crustáceos) es reemplazada ahora por una fauna de agua dulce en la cual predominan reptiles (tortugas de río y de tierra, cocodrilos y caimanes, iguanas y lagartos), mamíferos grandes como el manatí, la danta y el venado, peces de los ríos y de las lagunas, así como moluscos lacustre (ostras, almejas) y caracoles de tierra. El aprovechamiento de un nuevo recurso, por cierto muy importantes, parece que haya producido en aquella época una fuerte influencia sobre la estabilidad de las ladeas, a saber, las difracciones de las diversas especies de peces. Varias especies marinas (jurel, róbalo, corbinata y otras) buscan periódicamente las ciénagas para desovar y suben entonces por los ríos y caños, a veces largos trechos. Otras especies, en este caso ciertos pescados de río (bagre, bochachico) suben anualmente los ríos, en cantidades enormes. En segundo lugar, en los sitios de asentamiento la calidad de las tierras cambia notablemente, pues en lugar de los pares arenosos y algo desecados del litoral- por cierto muy adecuados para el cultivo de raíces. Las orillas de las lagunas y ciénagas ofrecen tierras aluviales húmedas, en buena parte auto-irrigadas por las crecientes anuales de los grandes ríos. Las condiciones básicas para que se desarrolle una agricultura más eficiente son pues aquí mucho más propicias y permiten una experimentación más amplia, sobre todo con plantas que no se reproducen vegetativamente sino por semillas.

“La lenta retirada del litoral es significativa. Los indios de la Costa Atlántica parece que nunca tuvieron una orientación manifiestamente marítima, no fueron grandes navegantes que hubieran emprendido largos viajes de exploración o de comercio, sino que más bien se limitaban a una navegación costanera y fluvial. La posterior concentración en las orillas de las lagunas y de los grandes ríos llevó entonces consigo una reorientación hacia el interior del territorio, sobre todo siguiendo los valles del Magdalena y del Cauca, y condujo así luego a un contacto con otras culturas de las selvas húmedas tropicales que, probablemente, estaban aún bastante relacionados con los desarrollos en las hoyas del Amazonas y del Orinoco.

“Ejemplos para esta etapa cultural lacustre y ribereña, en la llanura del Caribe son abundantes y se encuentran nuevamente desde el Golfo de Urabá hasta la Guajira y las hoyas de los ríos Ranchería y Cesar. Un yacimiento arqueológico de especial importancia es Momil, ubicado en la orilla nororiental de la Ciénaga Grande, en el bajo río Sinú. La densa y muy profunda acumulación de desperdicios constituidos de cerámica, piedra, hueso y concha, atestiguan un largo período de ocupación humana en el perímetro de una antigua aldea, situada en una zona plana entre el borde de la laguna y una cadena de leves colinas. El análisis de los abundantes vestigios

culturales (se excavaron más de 300.000 fragmentos de cerámica) no deja duda alguna acerca del notable nivel de eficiencia que los habitantes aborígenes habían logrado en aquella época. Durante la primera mitad de la secuencia de Momil, fechada para sus comienzos en unos 170 años a. de C., se cuenta con cantidad de fragmentos de grandes platos que indican el cultivo de la yuca; una prueba adicional al respecto consiste en la multitud de pequeñas esquirlas o astillas puntiagudas de piedra muy dura, que probablemente estaban incrustadas en tablas que servían de rallos, instrumentos que aún hoy en día se pueden observar entre muchos indígenas tribales del Guainía y Vaupés, y que son esenciales en la preparación de las raíces.

“Junto con estos indicios de agricultura se encontraron huesos de mamíferos, aves acuáticas y reptiles, notablemente miles de fragmentos del carapacho de tortugas de agua dulce, todo lo cual indica que la principal fuente de proteínas fue la laguna y sus alrededores. Durante este período se observa una cerámica muy variada en formas, motivos decorativos y técnicas de manufactura, como lo son las vasijas de silueta compuesta, los recipientes de base anular y una multitud de otras formas. Predomina la decoración incisa, y sus diferentes modos permiten gran elaboración y efectos estéticamente muy atractivos.

“La segunda y, cronológicamente, más reciente mitad de la secuencia de Momil, muestra un cambio muy significativo, ante todo en lo que se refiere a las bases de subsistencia de los antiguos habitantes del lugar. Al paso que va disminuyendo la cantidad de grandes platos del tipo de budares, abruptamente hacen su aparición los grandes metales y manos de moler, es decir, elementos indicativos del cultivo de maíz. En la primera parte de la secuencia no hay pruebas claras de cultivo de semillas, pero en la segunda parte se encuentra, además de las piedras de moler, cierta cantidad de pequeños platos de cerámica, probablemente para preparaciones a base de maíz, así como grandes tinajas que pudieran haber servido para guardar la chicha.

“Estas observaciones dan a pensar que Momil, y todo el período cultural de que forma parte, es representativo de la transición del cultivo de raíces al cultivo del maíz. Un tal paso, naturalmente no implica sople el reemplazo de un alimento básico por el otro, sino que consiste principalmente en un cambio total de procedimientos agrícolas a saber, del paso de la reproducción vegetativa, es decir la siembra de un tallo, a la reproducción pro semillas y todo aquello que simboliza en términos de conocimientos de suelos de la selección de semillas, de los ciclos de crecimiento, de su relación con la periodicidad e intensidad de las lluvias y muchos factores más. El maíz se había dicho que se domesticó inicialmente en México, donde unos 2000 a. de C, formaba ya la base de las subsistencia aldeana; pero según los datos recientes fue en el norte de América del Sur, en las regiones tropicales húmedas, donde se cree que ya alrededor del año 3000 a. de C., se logró por primera vez un alto rendimiento de este cultivo.

“La yuca, por cierto, es originaria de las tierras bajas del oriente de Suramérica y fue domesticada allá en épocas aún más antiguas, para extenderse luego a través de los Andes hacia la región noroccidental, es decir a Colombia. Como ya subrayamos en otras ocasiones, la importancia cultural de la Costa Atlántica y de los grandes valles

interandinos del país es fundamental para los desarrollos posteriores en Meso América y en el Perú, y todo parece sugerir que la llanura del Caribe fue un centro de creación y difusión de gran alcance.

“La hipótesis de una secuencia yuca/maíz en Momil se encuentra reforzada por algunas observaciones adicionales. En primer lugar, la presencia de grandes piedras de moler está acompañada por la introducción de varios rasgos nuevos que son muy sugestivos de influencias mesoamericanas, como vasijas con rebordes basales, trípodes, soportes huecos mamiformes y silbatos en forma de pequeñas aves. Parece que el maíz fue introducido como un complejo plenamente desarrollado, junto con una serie de nuevas formas cerámicas.

“En segundo lugar, en Venezuela también se han encontrado indicios que sugieren esta misma secuencia.

“Aquí cabe la pregunta de ¿Por qué el cultivo del maíz se introdujo en la Llanura del Caribe en una fecha relativamente tardía? Parece que la contestación está, en parte por lo menos en la suposición de que las necesidades nutricionales de los primitivos aldeanos se veían satisfechas por una combinación de tubérculos ricos en almidón y de proteínas, más las grasas obtenidas de la fauna de los ríos y de las lagunas; en este caso, el maíz tal vez no constituía un alimento especialmente deseable. Sin embargo, el crecimiento demográfico y la eventual disminución de las fuentes de proteínas pueden haber llevado a la aceptación de este grano. Otro motivo para admitir al parecer de súbito y en fecha tardía la introducción del cultivo del maíz, puede encontrarse en un evidente cambio climático ocurrido en las tierras bajas de la Costa Atlántica. Alrededor de 700 a. de C., el clima, hasta entonces seco y continental, se volvió más húmedo a consecuencia de un aumento de lluviosidad. Es posible que este hecho hubiera producido condiciones más favorables para la introducción de este cultivo.

“Las consecuencias sociales de un tal incremento en producción de alimentos, debido al cultivo del maíz fueron desde luego muy notables. En cierto modo, el paso de una horticultura de raíces a una de semillas constituye un punto crucial en el desarrollo de la organización social e la comunidad, pues significa nada menos que el cambio de una sociedad esencialmente igualitaria a una sociedad jerárquica. Las raíces tales como la yuca, no pueden almacenarse largo tiempo; por un lado, deben consumirse lo más pronto después de haberse sacado de la tierra, y, por otro lado, se dañan si se dejan enterradas por demasiado tiempo. El agricultor de maíz en cambio, se encuentra en una posición muy favorecida: con dos cosechas anuales y con un esfuerzo físico muy limitado puede obtener una gran cantidad de granos que son fáciles de almacenar, de preparar para su consumo y que además, constituyen un valioso artículo de comercio.

“En Momil se observan rasgos que indican cierto grado de especialización artesanal. Además, se notan diferencias de calidad en los adornos personales tales como cuentas de collar y otros pequeños artículos de lujo. Es posible pues que Momil viera, tal vez

no los comienzos, pero sí en su fase desarrollada, un muy notable incremento de una estratificación social y de un lento advenimiento de un grupo de dirigentes y de especialistas en artes y oficios.

“En Momil se encuentra una serie de actividades rituales que por primera vez permiten reconocer algunos aspectos ideológicos que posteriormente se expresan en muy diversas formas. Así a través de toda la secuencia se hallaron pequeñas figurinas de barro, generalmente femeninas, que, de ahí en adelante, comienzan a formar parte integral de muchas culturas prehistóricas del país. Es posible que estas figurinas, algunas de las cuales representan mujeres embarazadas o personas enfermas se relacionaban con ritos de fertilización o de la curación de enfermedades. Hay además un voluminoso complejo de pequeños artefactos que parecen haber sido utilizados en actividades chamanísticas, muy probablemente relacionadas con el uso de drogas narcóticas. Se trata de diminutos recipientes, de minúsculos banquitos zoomorfos delgados tubos de arcilla, cascabeles, silbatos y otros objetos.

“Hay pequeñas representaciones felinas y adornos modelados que sugieren un concepto de dualismo.

“Que la gente de Momil practicaba la antropofagia, está atestiguado por el hallazgo de algunos huesos humanos desarticulados dispersos en la basura casera. Aunque no se encontraron objetos metálicos en Momil, es muy probable que en aquella época ya se conocía la orfebrería. En un extenso sitio arqueológico en Ciénaga de Oro, donde se excavó un complejo cultural emparentado con Momil, se encontraron algunas pequeñas cuentas tubulares de laminillas de oro martilladas, y objetos similares se han hallado en varios sitios relacionados con Momil.

“Manifestaciones arqueológicas comparables con Momil existen en toda la Costa Atlántica. Entre el Golfo de Urabá y la hoya del río Sinú, es decir en las regiones de los ríos Mulatos, San Jorge y luego sobre toda la ancha región del bajo río Magdalena, se hallan estos sitios, a veces dispersos en las orillas de lagunas y caños, en ocasiones concentrados en ciertas zonas, como es el caso de las regiones de El Banco, de Zambrano o de Calamar. A veces estos complejos arqueológicos se localizan en las faldas de colinas o pequeñas serranías, fenómeno que lentamente introduce una nueva pauta de asentamiento. En efecto, la frecuencia con que, en estos sitios, se encuentran grandes piedras y manos de moler demuestra que la agricultura del maíz se está desarrollando más y más, hecho que lleva a nuevas formas de adaptación.

“Al este del río Magdalena se localizan culturas no directamente emparentadas con Momil pero sí coetáneas y relacionadas entre sí por muchos detalles estilísticos y tecnológicos. En todo el valle del río Ranchería se encuentran sitios que forman parte de una secuencia de complejos agrícolas sedentarios caracterizados por cerámica pintada, cerámica negra, figurinas antropomorfas huecas y gran variedad de formas nuevas como tetrápodos y grandes bandejas planas. De acuerdo con los sitios principales donde se determinaron estratigráficamente estas tipologías, la principal

secuencia del tío Ranchería se designa (de temprano a tardío) como el Horno/LA Loma/Portacelim, y forma otro eje, otro jalón, por decir así, que fija una serie de fases de desarrollo en estas culturas agrícolas aldeanas, cuyos nexos inmediatos se extienden luego a través de la Guajira y la Sierra de Perijá hacia el occidente de Venezuela. En dirección al sur, es decir en la hoya del río Cesar y luego subiendo hacia el Magdalena Medio, sigue observándose la influencia de estas mismas culturas, aunque con algunas modificaciones. La cerámica pintada continúa pero al lado de ella se forman vario estilos de decoración incisa o modelada que se constituyen en complejos muy característicos para gran parte de la hoya del río Magdalena.

“Mientras que en la Llanura Caribe se conocen muchos sitios arqueológicos relacionados con una serie de columnas estratigráficas establecidas para Momil, Zambrano, el río Ranchería y otras regiones de alta concentración e vestigios prehistóricos, que nos permiten seguir los procesos culturales que llevaron a la vida agrícola aldeana, hay sólo muy pocos datos sobre el interior del país. Sabemos que alrededor de 500 a. de C., existían comunidades sedentarias en la región de San Agustín, en el alto Magdalena, pero no conocemos sus características. Una cerámica toscamente incisa aparece en la Sabana de Bogotá y en algunas otras partes de los altiplanos en los últimos siglos a. de C., pero no se tienen aún suficientes datos para establecer un contexto cultural que nos permita apreciar estos desarrollos en las cordilleras y los valles interandinos.

“Es más factible entonces relacionar los complejos culturales costeños tales como Momil, con las manifestaciones coetáneas que se han descubierto en países vecinos. Así las relaciones con el Formativo Tardío de Meso y Centro América son bastante evidentes; en Meso América los parentescos de Momil se extienden hasta el sitio de Morett, en la Costa Pacífica de Colima (México) donde, entre 400 y 300 a. de C., se habían desarrollado complejos culturales muy similares que, por su lado, se relacionan con culturas coetáneas del litoral centro y suramericano, hasta el Ecuador. En Costa Rica, el complejo de El Bosque, ubicado en la vertiente atlántica, muestra estrechas afinidades con Momil. Gran número de rasgos muy característicos de Momil, como los rodillos y sellos los silbatos ornitomorfos, soportes abombados y rebordes basales, indican parentescos mesoamericanos. Por cierto, hay que tener muy en cuenta, al respecto que los orígenes de la cerámica mesoamericana son suramericanos (Colombia-Ecuador) y que los desarrollos subsiguientes de la alfarería no son unilineales, sino que en estos se entrelazan muchas tradiciones locales que, con el tiempo, se difundieron en diversas direcciones.

“Una región del país donde durante los últimos siglos a. de C. se nota una profunda influencia procedente de Mesoamérica, es el extremo sur de la Costa Pacífica donde, en la zona de Tumaco y en los cursos bajos de muchos de los ríos vecinos (río Mataje, río Mira y otros), se encuentran yacimientos arqueológicos que contienen cerámicas de tipo mesoamericano. Parece que se trata de pequeñas colonias, inicialmente establecidas por grupos migratorios navegantes, que se extendieron hacia la costa del Ecuador, donde dieron impulso al Período Jama-Coaque (500 a. de C. a 500 D.C.) Ya

que las condiciones climáticas de la Costa Pacífica colombiana no eran favorables para una tradición cultural que se había formado en un medio ambiente muy diferente, los principales vestigios de estas influencias externas se hallan en el Ecuador y sólo en ocasiones se observan en algunas regiones de la costa del departamento de Nariño. Una gran acumulación de basuras y pisos de habitación se encontró en las riberas del río Mataje, y consiste en una secuencia que abarca unos cuatrocientos años, de 400 a. de C. hasta 10 D.C; obviamente, se trata de una extensión septentrional del Período Jama Coaque.

“Aunque por lo inhóspito de la Costa Pacífica colombiana esta culturas de orden mesoamericano no florecieron y tuvieron que desplazarse más hacia el sur, donde las condiciones ecológicas eran más propicias, es muy probable que en el medio milenio antes del comienzo de nuestra era, ciertas influencias mesoamericanas procedentes de la Costa Pacífica penetraron hacia el oriente y llegaron al interior del país, tal vez subiendo por el río Patía, el Calima y otros. Por cierto, también es un hecho que en aquellos siglos se hicieron notar influencias peruanas que se extendieron hacia el norte, sea por la costa o sea por vía andina, al penetrar a Nariño y al Macizo Central.

“Al resumir este capítulo debemos destacar que el último milenio a. de C. se caracteriza ante todo por el doblamiento gradual de las faldas de los valles interandinos. El desarrollo del cultivo del maíz permitió a los pobladores – hasta entonces ribereños y dependientes de una combinación de recursos acuáticos y de sus agriculturas de raíces- retirarse de los ríos y extenderse sobre las laderas del sistema andino. Al ocupar tierras tan accidentadas, siempre en búsqueda de regiones propicias para sus cultivos, los grupos tribales que antes habían vivido en buena parte en aldeas nucleadas, se dividieron en unidades sociales más pequeñas. La penetración y colonización de las cordilleras llevó a una manifiesta descentralización y, por consiguiente, a nuevas formas de adaptación que se caracterizan por su diversidad, su notable regionalismo y su elaboración de instituciones económicas, sociales y religiosas.”

(CI) pp. 41-52

The following is a similarly exemplary piece of *ethnographic* commentary, on the Desana, a group of Tukano Indians who live in the rain forests of the Vaupés region of the Colombian Amazon. Displayed in it are some of the main characteristics of Reichel-Dolmatoff's contribution to ethnographic theory:

“The rain forest fauna of the Vaupés area is not rich either in species or in individual specimens..... Neither are fish abundant, but the rivers generally offer more food resources than the jungle. The product of the hunt can be calculated, according to our informant, in the following manner: a man who goes to hunt for two or three days per week obtains approximately three catches; for example, a small rodent, an armadillo, and a few birds. In a month he can get three or four wild guinea pigs, two cavies, and a monkey, a deer or a peccary every two months, and a tapir once a year.

“Although the Desana clearly recognize the scarcity of game animals, the hunt is for them the preferred, and fundamentally male, activity around which all other aspects of their culture revolve. The basic food supply offered by horticulture in the form of cassava and manioc flour is essential for daily life, but the eventual surplus is not used to compensate for the scarcity of meat but is generally destined instead for trade with neighbouring groups and, above all, with the rubber collectors. In exchange for the products of their *chagras*, the Desana obtain clothing, machetes, soap, salt, aluminium pots, fish hooks, and, at times, guns; that is to say, elements that acculturation has made accessible and almost obligatory, in part for prestige reasons. A slight increase in horticultural activities that can be observed in the last generations is apparently due only to the necessity of obtaining these trade articles and not to ameliorate the food situation. According to the Desana, in the past the principal function of the *chagras* was to provide the households of a *maloca* with the manioc necessary for the preparation of *chicha*, a slightly fermented beer, consumed during reunions of a ritual character. For this, one or two small *chagras* per *maloca* were sufficient; but the manufacture of flour and cassava on a larger scale for the consumption of the family and for trade seems to have developed rather recently, perhaps in the last two or three generations.

“The total lack of demographic data naturally makes it impossible to evaluate the growth of the native groups, but it is possible to suppose that the population is increasing slightly, in part due to sanitary campaigns such as that of the eradication of malaria. But a population that maintained itself at a constant level might exceed the limits of the potential of its hunting territory; considering then the sedentary character of the Desana, equilibrium must be established by a modification of their efficiency in exploiting the environment. As we will see in the course of this study, this modification is formulated in a series of mechanisms that tend to restrain the activities of the hunter without depriving him of the attraction of his task. On the contrary, hunting as a male activity is valued highly and is, as long as the hunter observes a set of rules and restrictions, in the last instance, a mechanism in defense of the jungle fauna.”

(AC) pp.13-14

The same basic tenets of Reichel-Dolmatoff's ethnography are expressed in an alternative form in the following passage taken from the *Introduction* to Reichel-Dolmatoff's *Amazonian Cosmos*:

“Traditional ethnographic studies begin, in most cases, with the description of an infrastructural level, including such aspects as settlements, dwellings, fields, communications, material culture (in the limited sense of tools and utensils), and so forth. All too often, it seems, by beginning work on this level, the true ecological perspective is overlooked. The first step, the real infrastructure consists rather in describing and analyzing the meaning of the environment, the native's *intelligence du milieu*, and this interpretation can only be accomplished by an extremely detailed study of the native's evaluation, categorization, and “use” of such aspects as geographical features, fauna and flora, meteorological phenomena, sounds, colors, movements, and so on. These and other categories are culturally coded and constitute

a means by which “reality” is handled and man is fitted into the biotope. The problem of the individual’s and society’s place in what is nature to them is of importance here. It is on this level that symbolic thought establishes stereotypes and images, clusters of significant signs at different levels of abstraction, that , from there on, continue to pervade all patterns and institutions, technology, socioeconomic systems, and value orientations.

“It is, of course, a truism to say that the study of the social structure of a given society can only be meaningful if we know how this structure is related to the particular physical environment. But this all too obvious statement acquires a new dimension if we approach the problem from the point of view we have termed *intelligence du milieu*. Let us briefly outline a case from the Northwest Amazon. The rivers of this area are often interrupted by large or small rapids or falls. When fish run yearly to their places of ovulation, certain species advance only to the limits established by certain rapids, while other species advance farther upstream. In the Indians’ mind some species of fish are intimately associated with certain categories of women, in terms of potential spouses or forbidden marriage partners. It follows then that, if certain fish should not be eaten by the people living on a stretch of the river, the reason for this prohibition is that their consumption of fish obeys exogamic rules. Moreover, the fish that run are associated with certain fruit, insects, or the smaller fish they feed upon, and these too are echeloned along the river, as are certain birds which, in their turn, feed upon fish and/or fruit. We have here then larger and smaller ecological zones upon which not only is the social structure projected but which also form an integral part of an intricate and highly meaningful web of man-animal-plant relationships, combined with certain characteristics of the river, “black” or “white” waters, rapids, currents, and so forth. To understand this system it is necessary to gain a profound knowledge of the natural environment and of the principal edible, or otherwise useful, resources it offers. The key importance of this approach is obviously not limited to the study of social organization but includes other aspects as well. Economic activities, cult and ritual, culture contact, and the diffusion of ideas or objects can all be geared to this particular use and interpretation of the natural environment and should therefore be understood in this manner. It goes without saying that these problems can be studied only *before* advanced acculturation, with its introduction of guns, new fishing techniques, new seeds, or developed agriculture, destroys or radically modifies the biotope.

“In the field of economics the following observations might serve to outline the possibilities of this approach. Cultural developments in the northwest Amazon cover a wide range, from nomadic or semi nomadic food-gatherers to more or less sedentary hunters and fishermen, food-producers, and horticulturists. But this is an oversimplification. In the first place, each of these “stages” or local adaptations shows a variety of levels of intensity and efficiency, and seasonal, or otherwise periodical, changes or modifications occur even on the same stage. In the second place, economic efficiency not only depends upon available resources, upon the environmental potential and the technological level of the local culture, but also upon many culturally conditioned attitudes. Some aboriginal groups, even if they derive their main food

intake from horticulture, have maintained hunting or fishing as their cultural focus. Even if these groups occupy the same physical environment and possess the same technological equipment, ideologically and practically there may exist a considerable difference between the hunter and the fisherman. Those whose focus is hunting are, in fact, bad fishermen, and vice versa, not for lack of game or fish, nor for lack of technical equipment, but for lack of aptitude and experience. There seems to exist a remarkable amount of specialization in tropical rain forest cultures, on the tribal and phratic levels, and in the latter case this seems to be related to the reciprocity patterns of exogamy. The social and religious incentives of subsistence adaptation and of these different models of exploitation of the environment are of prime importance here, and these ecosystems need to be investigated in great detail with particular reference to questions of causality and origin. This kind of research deserves priority in view of the rapidly changing economic system and the Indians' increasing participation in a cash economy, which inevitably leads to divorce from dependence upon their present environment."

(AC) pp.xv-xvii

The essence of Reichel-Dolmatoff's dialectical, dynamic, interactive, 'base-and-superstructure' approach to society is expressed again in the following:

".....mi interés principal es buscar conexiones existentes entre los conceptos cosmológicos de estos grupos indígenas y las realidades de su adaptación a un ambiente físico dado. Procuraré demostrar que las cosmologías estructuras míticas de los aborígenes, así como la conducta ritual derivada de ellas, representan en todo sentido un conjunto de principios ecológicos en los que se formula un sistema de normas sociales y económicas dotadas de un alto valor desde el punto de vista adaptativo, como parte del esfuerzo continuo por conservar un equilibrio viable entre los recursos del medio ambiente y las necesidades sociales."

(CS) p. 8-9

And yet again here:

"This summary of Desana culture can be generalized, for the most part, to all the tribes of the Vaupés area. As a matter of fact, the malocas, the chagras, and the majority of the basic objects of material culture are the same as well as the techniques of hunting and fishing and the implements used in the preparation of manioc and cassava. Also, the institution of the payé, costumed dances, and the gatherings at which the Creation Myth are recited form a common basis and are found in one form or another in all the Tukano groups. But these somewhat superficial similarities end there, and when we penetrate more profoundly into the culture significant differences appear. These differences are expressed primarily in the religious and symbolic systems, and have economic diversification as a basis. In part, we are concerned here with a true artisan specialization through which each group is particularly skilled in producing specific artifacts – canoes, graters, pottery; in part, it is the general economic orientation. In this "orientation," however, there is at times a

representational, emotional component that does not correspond entirely to economic reality.”

(AC) pp. 16-17

In the final sentence of the above is disclosed a fundamentally undogmatic, ultimately ‘empirical’ approach that Reichel-Dolmatoff always took: although philosophically speaking highly sophisticated ‘theoretically’, Reichel-Dolmatoff’s theories never steam-roll reality to suit their demands. The unpredictable, the strange, and the unexpected are always respected in Reichel-Dolmatoff’s writings; he had a genuinely open-minded, thoroughly curious, inquisitive approach to the objects of his researches.

In the last example, the reasons for the different orientations that exist among Vaupés tribes, which are not entirely explicable in terms of their economic bases, lie in what Reichel-Dolmatoff calls “an emphasis that is formulated almost as a “destiny””:

“As has been pointed out, the Desana live side by side with other groups throughout the basin of the Papurí River and, superficially, they are distinguished from their neighbors only by their dialect. But the main distinction that they themselves make refers to the traditional base; that is to say, they distinguish clearly between hunting, fishing, and horticultural groups. These three categories form a scale of values, with the horticulturists being assigned the lowest status and the hunters the highest. To be sure, all of the groups devote themselves to horticulture that they complement with hunting and fishing, but we are concerned here with a traditional attitude, an emphasis that is formulated almost as a “destiny.” The classification, from the point of view of the Desana, is as follows: The Desana are hunters; the Pira-Tapuyú, Uanano, Tukano, and Siriano are fishermen; The Tuyuka, Mirití-Taapuya, Karapana, and all Arawakan groups are horticulturists. It is characteristic then that among the Desana there is a marked tendency to marry women of phratries classified as fishing groups, women of the Pira-Tapuyú, Tukano, Uanano, and Siriano, while marriages between Desana and phratries classified as horticulturalists are the exceptions. Especially close relationships exist between the Desana and the Pira-Tapuyú, who are considered practically a “second Desana phratry,” almost in the sense of an exogamic moiety. This intimate relationship is said to be based primarily on the fact that the sib *boréka*, which is the principal sib of the Desana, is associated with a fish, while the Pira-Tapuyú (Fish People in Lengua Geral) are called *váimahara porá* (Sons of Fish) by the Desana.

“The Desana consider hunting a male activity or, more precisely, a male attitude and fishing a female attitude. Thus, the fishing groups, not only the women but the phratry as a whole, are considered female elements. In other words, the Desana phratry has a masculine character, and the Pira-Tapuyú has a feminine character. The Pira-Tapuyú consider the Desana a female element and themselves masculine because they marry Desana women. Whoever gives women is feminine, whoever receives them is masculine.

“The position of hunter, fisherman, or horticulturalist leads logically to a very distinct relationship between man and his environment. Hunters and fishermen tend to secularize the tasks of horticulture and all that refers to plants, in exchange for an elaborate ritualization of hunting and fishing. For the hunter, the spirits of nature have an aquatic character, while for the fisherman they are rather associated with the forest. There are variations then in the intimate quality of ecological adaptation, in the symbolic interpretation of nature, in the problems of biotic equilibrium essential for the survival of society. It is here, on this scale of categories and values, real or imagined, that marked differences are observed among the diverse groups. There is a mechanism of selectivity, of specialization, that on one hand is the consequence of necessity and on the other causes divergence in the ethos of each group.”

(AC) pp. 17-18

Elsewhere also, Reichel-Dolmatoff concedes that ecology, economy, and cultural practice exhibit no absolutely clear-cut, mechanically expectable link. Speaking of the pre-hispanic chiefdoms of the Colombian Andes, he writes:

“Aproximadamente una docena de grupos aborígenes locales practicaban en pequeña escala el uso de terrazas del riego. Era frecuente el riego de los árboles frutales. Con la posible excepción de los Tairona, estas obras no constituían un factor importante en la nucleación de la población, ni tampoco en fomentar la cohesión y el control político. La distribución geográfica del riego y de las terrazas de cultivo no muestra ninguna agrupación significativa, ni sugiere una marcada correlación cultural-fisiográfica. Los indios Tairona practicaban el riego y el uso de terrazas, tanto en las húmedas vertientes montañosas, como también en las estribaciones áridas. Los indios Guane irrigaban sus campos ubicados en los valles elevados y semi-áridos de la cordillera, y varias de las tribus del Valle del Cauca construían extensos canales de irrigación en las planicies aluviales. En las tierras bajas del Norte del país, las fértiles tierras depositadas por las inundaciones anuales eran extensamente usadas para cultivos a corto plazo, pero parece que no se conocía el uso de canales de desagüe.”

(EA) pp.27-28

In discussing the way in which the Tukano arrive at their ‘systems-like’ cosmological model, Reichel-Dolmatoff expresses the matter thus:

“Este modelo cosmológico de un sistema cuyo equilibrio exige constante reajuste por medio de *inputs* de energía recuperada por el esfuerzo individual, constituye una propuesta religiosa íntimamente ligada a la organización social y económica del grupo. De este modo, el equilibrio general del flujo de energía se convierte en un organizativo dominante. Por lo tanto, entender la estructura y funcionamiento del ecosistema es tarea vital para los Tukano. De allí se deduce que el conocimiento etnobiológico que el indio posee de su ambiente natural no es en modo alguno fortuito o asimilado por simple familiaridad gradualmente adquirida, o por repetidas experiencias sensoriales. Es un conocimiento estructurado y metódico, fundamentado

en una larga tradición de búsqueda y adquirido en virtud de la necesidad, como parte de su repertorio intelectual para la supervivencia biológica y cultural”.

(CS) p.11

Reichel-Dolmatoff's conception of how the Tukano form their cultural and ideological 'superstructures,' is a very active one. Their forms of consciousness are never mere mirror-like reflections of nature or society, nor are they the results of a merely passive reception or assimilation of sensory experiences. They are forms of thinking that are structured *and structuring*, methodical and practical; eminently 'material' in that they stem from the necessities of both biological and cultural survival. But they are no mere 'epiphenomena' of material realities; they are creative, intellectual, and spiritual activities; or, in other words, dynamic mental processes. They do not represent the only possible ideas that a given set of material circumstances could sustain or necessitate. Their construction involves active, creative choices:

“.....están siempre dispuestos a acumular el mayor conocimiento fáctico sobre hombre. Dicho conocimiento, según la creencia de los indígenas, es esencial para la supervivencia, por cuanto el hombre debe persuadirse de la necesidad de vivir con conformidad con la naturaleza si desea existir como parte de la unidad de aquella, adecuando sus requerimientos a la disponibilidad del medio”.

(CS) p. 11

The following paragraphs from an article called *Las Bases Agrícolas De Los Cacicazgos Sub-Andinos De Colombia*, in *Estudios Antropológicos*, also underline and highlight this approach, which respects both the determinations of material structures and the openness of human agency. Reichel-Dolmatoff again emphasizes that a given set of natural environmental conditions makes possible, or structures, certain economic activities (given particular levels of technical development), and excludes others, but does not absolutely require that any particular economic system evolves within it. 'Cultural factors', that is, human, social choices and preferences, mental frameworks, worldviews and attitudes, also influence and steer decisions concerning economic lifeways, though not of course in conditions of absolute freedom of choice either:

“La naturaleza específica o eficiencia relativa de las prácticas agrícolas subandinas no estaban del todo condicionadas por el potencial ambiental, en lo que se refiere a las diversas conveniencias de los factores físicos, sino que también intervenían factores culturales que influenciaban la selección de las tierras o el énfasis en cierto tipo de uso. En ocasiones el riego se practicaba en regiones de lluviosidad bastante alta y en otros casos se dio preferencia al cultivo de tubérculos donde la tierra hubiera sido muy propicia para el cultivo del maíz. Los Muisca prefirieron, a costa de luchas crónicas, la posibilidad de tener cultivos variados en las zonas templadas, en lugar de intensificar su agricultura de cultivos de las tierras frías por medio de la irrigación. Los Tairona, bajo la presión del aumento de su población, no trataron de expandirse por conquistas, sino que acudieron a una intensiva explotación dentro de los límites de su estrecho territorio, por medio de un complejo sistema de riego y terrazas. Es evidente pues que ambientes u oportunidades similares no evocaron las mismas respuestas culturales; entre los indios subandinos, las pautas de adaptación y de uso del medio ambiente físico, eran muy variadas.

“La evidencia arqueológica obtenida hasta la fecha, parece sugerir que los comienzos y el desarrollo consiguiente de la tradición cultural subandina estaban estrechamente relacionados con el cultivo de una reza evolucionada de maíz. Aunque razas primitivas de maíz pueden haberse dispersado por Colombia, en épocas más tempranas y haber coincidido con la incipiente domesticación de plantas en las vertientes del interior, las etapas pre-formativas y formativas parecen haberse limitado en gran parte al ambiente litoral, ribereño y lacustre del norte del país. La domesticación de ciertos tubérculos que se dan bien en regiones de precipitación baja o irregular, llevó tal vez al asentamiento esporádico en regiones interfluviales, pero la independencia definitiva del ambiente ribereño se hizo posible sólo a través del cultivo de maíz. Ahora bien; el cultivo del maíz para que sea ventajoso, requiere gran cantidad de agua y de sol, pero la productividad depende no tanto de la cantidad de precipitación e insolación, sino de su distribución estacional. Hasta cierto punto, los requisitos específicos de este cultivo que, desde luego, en sí es un producto cultural, mostraban el camino hacia aquellas regiones donde el rendimiento era alto debido a una combinación favorable de factores fisiográficos y meteorológicos. Al mismo tiempo, este tipo de medio ambiente incluía una amplia gama de otras plantas alimenticias de alta productividad. Así, la expansión de la población aborigen sobre las faldas de las cordilleras se hizo posible por el cultivo del maíz. Hasta entonces, estas regiones probablemente no eran más que un territorio de caza y el hábitat de pequeños horticultores del nivel cultural selvático-tropical.

“Esta expansión sobre las montañas escarpadas del interior tuvo consecuencias de largo alcance. El sistema de agricultura que se había adoptado llevó aun tipo de guerra que necesariamente era sólo de carácter local, ya que las unidades sociales encargadas de ésta se basaban ellas mismas en una tecnología-ecología que también eran cacicazgos cuyo poder político se veía constantemente amenazado. El movimiento hacia las montañas fue seguido por la descentralización, el aislamiento cultural y el regionalismo que ya mencionamos arriba. A través de los siglos hubo un notable avance cultural, tal como los muestran la diversidad de los cultivos, la complejidad social religiosa, los adelantos en la metalurgia y la cerámica pero la creciente presión demográfica no llevó a una intensificación del sistema agrícola, ni a una integración más amplia de los controles políticos (como ocurrió, por ejemplo, en las culturas andinas), sino que produjo más bien migraciones y pequeñas guerras locales muy destructivas. La gran extensión territorial de los pueblos chibchas fue una expansión pasiva, y no la consecuencia de conquistas militares; las posibilidades para una expansión política y cultural más amplia fueron limitadas por el provincialismo de adaptaciones económicas reducidas. Muy notable, en fin fue el retorno parcial al ambiente ribereño, paso que muy notoriamente restringía los desarrollos agrícolas en el futuro. Aquellos que no se decidieron a competir en la lucha por las fértiles vertientes, tuvieron que establecerse en zonas que estaban al margen de los centros de cultivo intensivo de maíz. Aunque algunos de ellos lograron crear culturas locales relativamente complejas, la discontinuidad de factores tales como tenencia de tierras, densidad demográfica, un medio ambiente propicio y un cierto ímpetu cultural, inhibieron los desarrollos posteriores.”

(EA) pp. 32-34

The historical-evolutionary dimension is crucial here; agricultural advance in sub-Andean regions was only possible once an advanced breed of maize had been developed. Interactions between ecological, technical, and cultural developments had particular implications, over time, for the evolution of political organizations and of war.

The material exigencies of life, therefore, condition and structure forms of consciousness that actively seek after forms of human life that conform to the norms and demands of nature. Reichel-Dolmatoff's form of ecological understanding in this respect is essentially the same as that of modern, radical 'deep ecology', and ultimately is also at one with the Romantic yearning for Humanity to live in harmony with, and in the deepest unity with - but also as a part of - Nature. So, for example:

“La conducta animal despierta enorme interés entre los indios, pues en ella encuentran con frecuencia modelos para lo posible en materia de supervivencia y adaptación exitosa. Los indios, por una parte, conocen en detalle aspectos tales como la variación estacional y la microdistribución de las especies de animales y plantas de su hábitat. Poseen un alto grado de comprensión de las comunidades ecológicas de la conducta de los insectos sociales, de las bandadas de pájaros, de los bancos de peces y de sus migraciones, y de otras formas de conducta colectiva. Han observado atentamente fenómenos como el parasitismo, la simbiosis, el comensalismo y otras formas de relación entre especies coexistentes, a todo lo cual señalan como posibles modelos de adaptación. Por otra parte, en mitos y narraciones abundan relatos de visitas al mundo de los animales, de gentes que se convierten en animales para aprender más sobre sus costumbres, o de animales que enseñan al hombre como emplear ciertos recursos. En el saber chamánico se hallan a menudo descripciones pormenorizadas de tales contactos e Intercambios; muchos chamanes afirman haber adquirido parte de su conocimiento específico de animales, que les habrían revelado la existencia de un recurso alimenticio inusitado, la cura para una enfermedad, o el procedimiento práctico para resolver un problema cotidiano. Parte de este saber puede, entonces, considerarse como esotérico y secreto, propiedad privada del chamán. Sin embargo, con gran frecuencia, este conocimiento especializado de la conducta animal llega a formar parte de pautas prescritas de acción e interacción humanas, debido a su evidente valor adaptativo. La mitología, además habla enfáticamente de especies animales extintas o que fueron castigadas o degradadas por *no* haber obedecido ciertas reglas importantes para la adaptación.

“La gula, la imprevisión, la agresividad y toda otra forma de exceso viciosos reciben castigo de parte de fuerzas superiores, para que sirva de escarmiento no sólo a la colectividad animal sino también a la sociedad humana. Los animales representan, pues, metáforas de la supervivencia. Al analizar la conducta animal, los indios se empeñan en descubrir el orden del mundo físico, un orden cósmico al cual ajustar las actividades *humanas*”.

(CS) pp. 11-12

Particularly noteworthy in this discussion of Tukano thought is the way that Reichel-Dolmatoff has interwoven zoological and botanical science with myth, cosmology, shamanistic magic, and moral, metaphorical, and ethical wisdom. The following provides further examples of this kind of analytical synthesis:

“Lo sorprendente de estas ideas es que guardan notable semejanza con el moderno análisis de sistemas. En término de teoría ecológica, los Tukano conciben el mundo como un sistema en el cual la cantidad de *output* energético tiene relación directa con el *input* que recibe el sistema. Este, de acuerdo con los Tukano, maneja la energía recibida de dos maneras: la energía sexual reprimida en el individuo retorna directamente al capital total de energía de la que participan los elementos bióticos del sistema. La salud y el bienestar, resultado del consumo controlado de alimentos constituyen un *input* que da energía también a los componentes abióticos del meteorológicos. El individuo jamás debe perturbar el equilibrio general existentes, es en su conjunto se deriva en gran parte del modelo de la fisiología sexual. En el concepto Tukano de energía solar se integran muchos elementos a los que se atribuye un simbolismo seminal a causa de su color, forma, textura y otras características. En correspondencia, otros elementos se asocian con conceptos femeninos de fecundidad y gestación. Las asociaciones de imágenes y símbolos se interpretan entre los Tukano dentro de diversos niveles de abstracción y paulatinamente, se van disociando de los hechos naturales y fisiológicos hasta que, a un nivel de cognición más elevado, llegan a constituir una teoría de sistemas de flujo equilibrado y finito de energía.

“.....Todos los animales de caza están sujetos al Dueño de los Animales, ser sobrenatural con apariencia de enano y acentuados atributos fálicos. Dicho guardabosque sobrenatural vigila celosamente su rebaño, compuesto de venados, tapires, saínos, agutíes, pacas, micos y todas las demás especies que comúnmente forman parte de los recursos alimenticios de los indios. El Dueño de los animales es su protector y procreador directo y todos ellos habitan en el interior de escarpados cerros rocosos o en profundos pozos de los ríos; ambas moradas se conciben como grandes depósitos colmados de animales de caza y pesca. Para obtener el permiso de su Dueño sobrenatural para matar un animal, el presunto cazador debe someterse a una rigurosa preparación consistente en continencia sexual, restricción de alimentos y ritos de purificación, por medio de baños y eméticos, para garantizar la limpieza del cuerpo. Desde varios días antes de salir a una excursión de caza, el hombre debe abstenerse de toda relación sexual; más aún no debe tener sueños de contenido erótico. Además, es necesario que ninguna de las mujeres que viven en su maloca se halle en su período menstrual. Hay otro mecanismo adicional que limita excesos en la explotación de animales de caza. De acuerdo con mitos cosmológicos, todos ellos están asociados con ciertas constelaciones, según las definen los Tukano. Solo pueden cazarse ejemplares de determinada especie *después* de haber aparecido su constelación sobre el horizonte.....

“Cuando hay escasez de presas de caza, el chamán debe visitar al Dueño de los Animales en un trance narcótico para tratar de conseguir que éste le ceda algunos de sus protegidos. El chamán no solicita determinados ejemplares aislados sino más

bien manadas, o aún una buena temporada de caza. A cambio, promete enviar a la morada del Dueño de los Animales las almas de personas que, a su muerte, deben tornar a su gran depósito para reponer la energía de los animales que el guardabosque sobrenatural suministre a los cazadores. El Dueño de los Animales y sus múltiples personificaciones se concibe entonces como administrador de derechos de usufructo; puesto que los recursos de caza son limitados, también son restringidos los derechos que instituyen los seres sobrenaturales, y corresponde al chamán actuar como mediador”.

(CS) pp. 11,13, & 14

Colombia, both ancient and modern, is a region of immense diversity, both natural and human. There has been a deep continuity in the development of modern, mestizo Colombian society from the ancient, indigenous, pre-Conquest cultures that subsisted in the present territories of Colombia. This fact was at the heart of Reichel-Dolmatoff's idea, or vision, of his adopted country, Colombia. In the *Prologue* previously cited, Gerardo Ardila explains a crucial aspect of Reichel-Dolmatoff's thought:

“Este libro es una invitación para pensar acerca de la inmensa diversidad de Colombia y de las innumerables opciones de desarrollo que la sociedad colombiana ha tomado a través de largos períodos de tiempo. En Colombia, además del español, hay al menos 87 lenguas diferentes, las cuales pertenecen a 14 familias lingüísticas. Entre ellas hay dos lenguas criollas (el isleño, que se habla en el Caribe y que no es inglés mal hablado, como algunos suponen, y el Palanquero que se habla en algunos sectores de la costa Atlántica, y que no es español mal hablado), las cuales se han estado desarrollando a partir de la conquista europea, y 85 lenguas indígenas, cuya antigüedad cuyas relaciones aún no conocemos del todo.....

“El afán mas importante de Reichel-Dolmatoff era el de convertirse en interlocutor de los sabios indígenas y en traductor de sus ideas acerca del universo, de las relaciones entre los seres humanos, y de las relaciones entre estos y las demás criaturas de la naturaleza. Cada uno de sus escritos constituye un paso más en su camino hacia el entendimiento de Colombia. Su estudio en la zona adyacente a la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta fue un plan ambicioso, una investigación integral (y holística) de la cultura regional. Su interés era conocer los desarrollos de la vida humana y la cultura en esa región específica, comenzando con el estudio de las primeras sociedades humanas que llegaron a esos parajes; luego quería estudiar cómo habían surgido la domesticación de plantas y de animales, cómo se habían conformado las aldeas sedentarias, y se habían materializado formas políticas y sociales más complejas a medida que la población crecía, los recursos se hacían más difíciles de ser obtenidos y las regiones vecinas empezaban a colmarse de poblaciones nuevas después siguió buscando la comprensión del proceso por medio del cual las sociedades indígenas cambiaban hacia formas de mestizaje cultural que convertían a los indios en campesinos y los involucraban en la vida del estado y, finalmente, quería descubrir toda la riqueza de significados, de enseñanzas trascendentales para la humanidad, que podían aprenderse de una verdadera conversación con los indios. Su trabajo en la

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta y sus alrededores es un modelo no superado de investigación social e histórica de una región”.

Prologue by **Ardila** to **(IC)** pp. 7, 10, & 11

Modern Colombians are predominantly, like most Latin Americans, a racial and cultural mixture of European - mainly either Spanish or Portuguese - with Amerindian and also African blood. When ordinary, modern, mestizo Colombians are asked who or what they are, they say “Colombian”. If you ask: “Are you of Spanish ancestry?” they say: “No”. If you ask whether they are indigenous Amerindians, they also say no, unless they really are members of the many but numerically small, genuinely indigenous groups.

But in spite of this, pre-Hispanic communities as understood through archaeology are often referred to as ‘our ancestors’, in a way that contradicts a great many other popular dimensions of Colombian identity. Vis-à-vis this rather mystified notion that pre-hispanic indigenous peoples were the predecessors or ancestors, pure and simple, of modern Colombians, Marta Zambrano has written:

“La proyección de la nación un proyecto político de la clase dominante del siglo XIX, hacia el pasado “remoto” supone la apropiación ideológica de este pasado; de manera más importante, implica su expropiación.....la historia y trayectoria precolonial de los pueblos indios.....se transforma durante la República en pasado común y explicación de los antecedentes históricos, supuestamente compartidos por todos los ciudadanos no indígenas lo que implica colonizar, negar y robar la historia propia y exclusiva de estos pueblos y silenciar las conexiones entre esta historia y la existencia de indígenas actuales.”

Zambrano pp. 214-215

The Conquest is left out of this metanarrative; the latter picks up again with the movement for Independence from Spain. The *criollo* state founded in the wake of independence is understood, inevitably, as the origin of the modern Colombian nation:

“No es gratuito que al traspasar el umbral de la arcada que conduce a todas las exhibiciones permanentes no podamos escapar el paso entre las efigies enfrentadas de los dos más reputados padres de la patria, enmarcadas a su vez por una profusión de aquellas formas conmemorativas propias de la República, las placas e inscripciones grabadas en letras romanas que tapizan a medias la parte baja de las paredes laterales del portal donde yerguen los bustos.”

Zembrano p. 215

This discussion cannot but remind one of the extraordinary painting of *Bolivar Y La Alegoria De America*, executed by Pedro José Figueroa (C. 1770 -1838). In this, Bolivar is depicted as befriending, by putting his arm around, a female figure who wears an Indian feather headdress and carries a bow (weapon). She looks rather white, and has decidedly European facial features, yet she obviously represents indigenous America. Bolivar is at least twice the size of this allegory of indigenous America. It reminds one of the imagery from the period between the Conquest and Independence, in which colonial Spain or Portugal are depicted as saving

indigenous America from paganism and idolotry. The only real difference is that now it is a military, secular, *criollo* leader that saves or helps the Indians, rather than the *Conquistadores* or the Catholic Church.

The vast majority of Colombians – excluding both the indigenous Indians and the genuine Afro-Colombians – believe themselves to be simply Colombian; they do not think of themselves as a synthesis of Spanish, indigenous, and African blood. Nevertheless, everywhere in Colombia, the reality is that ordinary mestizo people do maintain numerous indigenous Indian traditions, vocabularies, and cultural traits. For example, ancient Amerindians, as Reichel-Dolmatoff recounts, placed conch shells from the Pacific or Caribbean Oceans in magic, ritual circles in many parts of present-day Colombia, including in areas far from the sea:

“Es curioso observar que muchos sitios muy antiguos, del continuum Puerto Hormiga/Barlovento, tienen un plano anular y que el centro del círculo carece de desperdicios culturales. Eso hace pensar que esta forma, por cierto muy antigua también en otras partes del continente, tenga alguna relación con la organización social o religiosa de los habitantes, o que se trate de un círculo gnomónico. La importancia de fijar silvestres, fechas y estaciones, para anticipar la maduración de frutas silvestres, la migración de los animales de presa, o de otros ciclos biológicos, sería entonces la base para un futuro calendario agrícola. De esta manera, los círculos de conchas pudieron haber sido, tal vez, las primeras construcciones de carácter ceremonia.”

(CI) p. 40

When once I asked a lady who lived in Libano, Tolima Department, why she had a large conch shell in her house, she answered that it was because it was useful as a door-stop, and also because she liked it. She was unaware that conch shells had had magical-religious values for the ancient Tolimensians, just as she was surely unaware that shells have symbolized the Holy Spirit within European Christian iconography since the Middle Ages, so that the two sacred traditions merged. no doubt, in *Nueva Granada* after the Conquest.

This lady was also an expert on herbal, vegetable, and fruit cures, as well as on other uses of local plants – traditions and forms of knowledge that have undoubtedly come through from the Indians of Tolima, even though the latter no longer exist as distinct, self-conscious ethnic groups, and even though this lady was only partially aware of the origins of her customary practices in these areas of her life. In any case, traditional Indian knowledge of herbal cures in the Colombian Andes has certainly been mediated by, and sifted through, many European Europeanized scientific researchers, most notably José Celestino Mutis, Fransisco José de Caldas, and Diego García at the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century.

Many people in Colombia today maintain the funereal practice known as ‘secondary burial’, which is clearly a tradition that comes through from pre-Columbian times. After seven years, the buried remains of dead people are transferred to burial urns, which are then placed in different tombs. Reichel-Dolmatoff writes thus of secondary burial in pre-Columbian times:

“En muchas regiones del país se practicaba el entierro secundario, es decir el cadáver primero se sepultó en la tierra y después de algunos años se desenterraron los restos y los huesos se sepultaron luego de nuevo, sea en un pequeño pozo en la tierra o sea dentro de una urna funeraria o gran tinaja generalmente manufacturada para este fin.”

(OC) p. 34

Alter describing the attitudes taken towards the dead in ancient indigenous Colombian cultures, Reichel-Dolmatoff shows that the same kinds of attitude exist today, among both indigenous and a great many mestizo Colombians also. He summarizes thus his ideas concerning:

“.....la convicción de que el pariente difunto aún no estaba muerto en un sentido definitivo, sino que continuaba su existencia, invisible y fantasmal, en las cercanías del entierro y tomaba un activo interés en la familia de los deudos.

“Al juzgar por las creencias de los indios actuales este interés que supuestamente los antepasados toman en sus familiares sobrevivientes, constituye un gran peligro ya que entonces, desde otra dimensión existencial invulnerable, ellos pueden vengarse por cualquier ofensa recibida. Los “espíritus” piden comida, piden fuego, piden toda clase de servicios y favores y aún “se llevan” a un niño o a otra persona para que les haga compañía. En caso de ser olvidados o menospreciados, los espíritus envían enfermedades y otras desgracias a sus familiares. Sería erróneo hablar aquí de supersticiones sin importancia pues la realidad es otra. Ideas muy parecidas a las descritas arriba existen no solamente entre muchas tribus actuales sino también entre gentes no sólo del campo sino de las ciudades del país. Hemos conocido muchos pueblos campesinos donde la gente vivía profundamente preocupada por mantener contentos a los espíritus de familiares y antepasados. Por cierto, los ritos con los cuales se trataba de apaciguar el eventual descontento de los espíritus, mostraban un marcado secretismo de creencias católicas e indígenas.”

(OC) p. 38

Speaking of the *Museo del Oro* in Bogotá, Reichel-Dolmatoff wrote:

“Lo que acabo de describir son ritos antiquísimos, seguramente de origen prehispánico, en los cuales sobrevive la creencia en el “oro santo” y su relación con el sol. En verdad, el lapso de tiempo que ha transcurrido desde la Conquista es tan breve, tan insignificante, que los tesoros del Museo del Oro siguen teniendo una vigencia para los indígenas actuales. De esta manera no es un museo como otros; es un santuario aborígen colombiano”.

(OC) p.19

Here of course, Reichel-Dolmatoff is specifically referring to contemporary indigenous cultures rather than mestizo culture. But in a way the *Museo del Oro* is a shrine or temple for mestizo Colombians too; the Quimbaya *poporo* so often used to advertise and represent the museum, has become a virtual national symbol.

If one looks at the world around one in Colombia this way, reality is opened up constantly to different insights, which allow the idea of what is distinctly Colombian – neither European nor Indian – to take on a multi-dimensional, vibrant form. Reading the works of Reichel-Dolmatoff is one extremely powerful aid to such a way of understanding the culture, or cultures, of modern Colombia.

In the light of these considerations about the formation of post-Conquest Colombian culture, an issue of major importance and fascination concerns the ways in which colonial art under the Spanish Empire took from indigenous forms, styles, techniques and feelings. On the face of it, and considering the visual arts in particular, every corner of Nueva Granada after the Conquest seems as if it must have been saturated and utterly immersed in Catholic Christian iconography. All the missionary evangelical orders, imbued as they were with the messages of Saint Thomas Aquinas and San Gregorio Magno to the effect that visual images were the most powerful and effective means to instruct, evangelize, and excite religious sentiments in devotion, all worked obsessively to replace ‘pagan’ indigenous images, statuary, and shrines:

“En toda esta empresa y conquista espiritual las imágenes cumplieron un papel esencial. En este mundo iletrado, se convirtieron en el lenguaje trasmisor y unificador de las nuevas creencias impuestas por los conquistadores y religiosos de la iglesia contrarreformaza, que tomó de Tomás de Aquino aquella famosa sentencia defendiendo la utilización de la imagen visual con un fin pedagógico. El arte sagrado inmerso en la teatralidad inundó cada rincón de la Nueva Granada, como en iglesias doctrinas y conventos suplantando la iconografía indígena como imágenes de Cristo, La Virgen, escenas del Antiguo y Nuevo Testamento, santos y mártires. Obras españolas, flamencas e italianas o realizadas en estas tierras bajo la influencia de grabados y estampas europeas, en calidades dispares sirvieron a una sola causa: enseñar, conmovier y convencer.”

Leal De Castillo pp. 109-110

It might seem therefore that the transformation of art after the Conquest, reflecting the re-indoctrination of the indigenous peoples’ minds, must have been all but complete. And yet, large amounts of pre-Hispanic Colombian art exist even today, though most of it was out of view to the majority of people for most of the colonial period, because it was still either underground or in private collections, whether at the Spanish Court or in the hands of Spanish noblemen. Even larger amounts of course were melted down or destroyed by the conquerors.

But also, a certain amount of non-Christian, non-European art was produced in colonial times within the territory of present-day Colombia, and is still being produced there today. This is in spite of that cultural holocaust which the Spanish conquerors called the ‘extirpation of idolatries’.

It remains a major task to investigate thoroughly the ways in which the colonial visual arts imbibed influences from pre-Conquest traditions, sources, and above all perhaps, techniques, as well as aesthetic tastes, inclinations, and sensibilities. For the apparently Christian forms of post-Conquest art and architecture produced in South America, everywhere from Paraguay to Ecuador, whether by creoles, mestizos, or Indians, could not fail to have had seeping through them, whether consciously or unconsciously, creative streams from the worlds of Amerindian aesthetic

spirituality. Thus it is, that colonial Latin American art is no mere derivative offshoot or pale imitation of European, specifically Iberian, Catholic Christian art. It is something else, different; however powerful the Spanish influence on it is. It is a fusion in which indigenous, and sometimes African tendencies, break into the aesthetic impulse of the Spanish Counter-Reformation.

One aspect of this latter process is indicated in the following passage by Héctor Shenone:

“.....el culto de los santos fue uno de los tantos vehículos que facilitaron el proceso de transculturación y según los cronistas - Sahagún a la cabeza - para hacer menos violento el cambio de dioses por los santos; si en un lugar se veneraba a Tosí, la abuela, se la sustituía por Santa Ana; si el reverenciado era Tezctlipoca-Tepochtli, es decir Texcatlipoca-mancebo se ponía a San Sebastián.”

Quoted in **Leal De Castillo** p.110

After quoting this passage by Shenone, the author of an essay called *Importancia de la Natureleza y el Arte en el Proceso Evasngelizador*, María del Rosaria Leal de Castillo, shows how the colonial iconography of Christian saints in Nueva Grenada worked upon the indigenous tendency to associate specific flowers with particular sacred values:

“Interesante en estas iconografías es la naturaleza tanto floreal como animal importada del viejo continente y más adelante americana, como palmas, dientes de león, piñas o aguacates, que acompañó la figura del personaje representado; estos elementos indudablemente con el tiempo se constituyeron en un distintivo de cada santo, facilitando el conocimiento de ellos; más aún evangelizando un pueblo que tuvo igual que el europeo, íntimas relaciones con el mundo natural así fuera con diversos fines y sentidos, estas imágenes se convirtieron en verdaderas fuentes mnemotécnicas de fácil comprensión por parte del evangelizado.”

Leal De Castillo p.111

At the start of the essay, María Leal De Castillo quotes from Giorgio Antei`s discussion of such Spanish chroniclers as Fernández de Oviedo and José de Acosta who, at the time of the Conquest, were acutely observant of the spiritual values accorded to flowers by indigenous peoples everywhere in the New World:

“Además de retratar fielmente la naturaleza de las Indias Occidentales, cronistas como Fernández de Oviedo y José de Acosta se percataron del valor que ella revestía para los aborígenes, aunque no pudieran entender su significado. Acerca del amor para las flores, muy común entre los habitantes del Nuevo Mundo escribe Acosta: “Son los indios muy amigos de flores, y en la Nueva España más que en parte del mundo; y así usan policía y gala que no se puede desear más” (Historia natural y moral de las Indias). Había extrañas flores que, además de causar admiración en Europa: “la flor de la granadilla (...) es tenida por casa notable; dicen que tiene insignias de la pasión, y que se hallan en ella los clavos y la columna y los azotes y la corona de espinas y las llagas” (Historia...) Para figurarse todo lo dicho, sigue Acosta era menester algo de piedad que ayudase a “parecer aquello”: piedad de la que, por

cierto, no estaban desprovistos los misioneros. Siten no suscitara siempre su curiosidad, los evangelizadores encontraron en la naturaleza lujurante del trópico nuevas ocasiones simbólicas, provechosas para la conquista espiritual de las Indias.”

Quoted in **Leal De Castillo**, p. 99

Thus it is that whenever in the colonial Christian iconography of Nueva Grenada one finds saints associated with flowers, one may well be looking into a very complex, and subtly veiled set of interactions and substitutions between pre-Columbian and European spiritual symbols. This recognition is made even more complicated of course, by the fact that the European tradition in question here, itself results from a complex medieval process of interchange and substitution between Judaeo-Christian and 'pagan', Greco-Roman symbolism.

If art is able at times to represent the 'objectification' of an imagined 'free life', just as religion can express a sublimation of the 'free spirit', albeit in alienated modes, then the beauty of some colonial Colombian Christian art represents a realm of wonder, in what Herbert Marcuse called the 'Aesthetic Dimension'. Christian colonial art was an integral feature of the Conquest and subsequent subjugation of the Indians, and of the spiritual rape, humiliation, and manipulative recreation of Indian spirituality. Yet, on the plane considered here, it contained very often, contradictorily and in spite of itself, a 'beautiful image of liberation', the beauty of a spiritual purity. In many of the paintings in which the Virgin Mary is surrounded by flowers, or in the painting of *Saint Francis of Assisi* holding flowers by Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos, there is a kind of beauty, a hope and promise of happiness, and an emotional tenderness, that must have drawn in part, though in now immeasurable ways, from the millennia-long spiritual traditions of pre-Conquest indigenous cultures and civilizations.

It is also fairly clear that in representations of the Virgin Mary in which she is associated with flowers, there is an identification and merging of Mary with indigenous goddesses of fertility, the earth, and Nature.

Much less elusive however is the fact that in Vásquez de Arce's paintings of the *Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt*, and of the *Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*, the background landscapes are not Middle Eastern or Egyptian deserts. Mary struggles on the back of an ass, with the baby Jesus in her arms, through the Sabana de Bogotá. There are species of birds and flowers characteristic of the Colombian Andean plateau all around her, though at the same time the scene takes on extremely Surreal qualities too, among the trunks of nearby trees and the moon that pushes the silky clouds aside.

Also less elusive is the symbolism of the dog, used in José Gomez de Sandoval's portrait of *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*, the founding saint of the Dominican Order. Of this fascinating painting María Leal De Castillo writes the following:

“A Santo Domingo de Guzmán se lo acompañó con un perro llevando una tez encendida en su hocico y en algunas ocasiones, en su mano una azucena o un lirio, la orden deriva su nombre de Domingo, Dominicus – Señor, Domini-canis, perros del señor que van proclamando y predicando la verdad constituyéndose como una auténtica jauría portadores de luz y de la salvación, defensores de las doctrina. Los

misioneros, que no fueron ajenos al simbolismo e importancia del perro mudo americano por parte de los indígenas, debieron aprovechar esta coyuntura para realizar el poder del can e introducir un nuevo significado que tuviera en el indígena gran impacto. De acompañante de los muertos en el mundo prehispánico, como guía de la nueva y poderosa religión erigiéndose como guardián del rebaño o como salvador de los enfermos de peste como lo relata la vida de San Roque, rico francés quien se contagió del mal reiterándose a un monte donde diariamente un perro le llevaba comida. De esta forma el perro se constituirá para el indígena y para el mestizo como un animal positivo y fiel que no desampará al enfermo como Cristo a sus hijos y la orden dominica como auténtico bastión en la defensa de la fe, siempre abierta para acoger a los hombres.”

Leal De Castillo p. 116

The mergence, synthesis, and syncretism depicted here, are representative of the formation of post-Conquest Andean religions generally. To conceive of this process as a simple transplantation and imposition of European Catholicism upon the indigenous Andean peoples is quite wrong. Through struggle, incorporation, and compromise, as well as through domination, abolition, and imposition, the dominant religion of modern Andean Colombia was born, just as the dominant forms of religion in the modern Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and Bolivian Andes were also brought into being.

Another wonderful instance of symbols from the pre-Colombian and the Christian sacred traditions merging is discussed by María Leal De Castillo. Writing about the painting called *Sagrada Familia Con Un Angel*, by Baltasar Vargas de Figueroa, she says:

“...la Virgen lleva un vestido ricamente floreado entre mantas autóctonas, sombrero y joyas; San José porta en su mano su vara florida de rosas rosadas y azucenas blancas; al fondo se divisa un paisaje y la Virgen y el niño se posan debajo de un manzano cargado de frutos, y de pajarillos entre las ramas; al lado del ángel sobresale la cabeza tímida del burro acompañante fiel de la familia. La obra a simple vista recrea una escena cotidiana bastante ingenua. Sin embargo, la presencia del manzano y de las manzanas, enriquecen el cuadro y le dan éste el sentido pedagógico propio de las obras de la Colonia. La manzana está llena de significados bastante plurivalentes y opuestos. Es por excelencia, según las Escrituras, la fruta prohibida causante del primer pecado; da conocimiento, libertad, renovación y juventud eterna; pero se erige como la compañera de la serpiente que le arrebató al hombre precisamente el conocimiento y la libertad sumiéndolo en el pecado. La familia regia se refugia debajo del manzano y de sus frutos; árbol maravilloso, árbol de la vida y árbol de la espiritualidad es según Orígenes “La fecundidad del Verbo divino, su saber y su olor”. El hombre accede a ese conocimiento, no por sí mismo, como lo hicieron Adán y Eva, sino por intermedio de Cristo, que es el ser divino. La familia santa se encuentra en el paraíso, lugar asequible a todos pero a través de la doctrina cristiana.....

“Es de suponer que los misioneros conocieron la importancia de los árboles frutales para el mundo precolombino. En estas tierras fueron considerados, entre otras cosas,

árbol del origen o *yaxché* (entre los Mayas) en el caso de la Ceiba, o árbol primordial entre los Chocó. Creían que quien descansara debajo de las ramas de una Ceiba alcanzaría la felicidad eterna. Era un paraíso reservado a las mujeres que morían durante el parto, a los caídos en guerra, a los sacerdotes y a los que se habían ahorcado en sus ramas. Colocar a la familia santa debajo de un árbol frutal sin duda alguna fue estudiado por los misioneros y provechoso de acuerdo al significado precolombino. La Bienaventuranza y la felicidad sólo se lograrían a través de la nueva doctrina y de sus personajes tan elevados, que se encuentran protegidos por el árbol primordial. Era una clara invitación a pertenecer a este grupo de escogidos.”

Leal De Castillo pp. 117-118

Flowers, fruit trees, the apple and the apple tree, all take on meanings, and reverberate with religious associations, both indigenous and Christian in this account, pointing at one and the same time to processes of subjugation, evangelization, and indoctrination, but also to the partial survival of indigenous spirituality, and to a realm of dreaming in the 'Aesthetic Dimension'.

The genesis of the modern Colombian mestizo is rather well situated in an historical and explanatory framework in an article by Juan Esteban Lewin. He writes:

“Nueva Granada, siglo XVIII. Estamos en un período de cambios: en el mediano plazo, por las reformas borbónicas y, desde una óptica de larga duración nos situamos en un momento del proceso de consolidación de unas nuevas sociedades en el continente americano. Capital dentro de este macroproceso es el mestizaje, esa mezcla de sangres de culturas, de visiones del mundo. En el momento al que se refiere este trabajo, que es cuando los hombres producto de estas mezclas adquieren una presencia realmente importante, es de especial interés preguntarse por la noción del mestizo, para ver qué idas se tenían de él, tanto desde las demás categorías sociales como desde si mismo, es decir, desde su identidad como tal. Si América tiene como producto principal ese “hombre nuevo” que es el mestizo, la producción de la “raza cósmica” de la que hablaba José de Basconcelos, en este trabajo se busca establecer como se entendía esta categoría social en esta etapa clave de surgimiento.

“El interés de todo esto se halla en la intuición de que el surgimiento del mestizo fue uno de los factores más importantes en el resquebrajamiento de todo el sistema colonial. La hipótesis que buscamos probar, más concretamente, es que el mestizo era un elemento social e importancia creciente y con ventajas cada vez más evidentes dentro de una estructura social que lo excluía, razón por la cual facilitó el derrumbe de la Colonia y la creación de repúblicas independientes de todo el continente hispanoamericano.

“Lo primero que debemos aclarar es qué es un mestizo, es decir, cuál es el objeto mismo de nuestro estudio. ¿Es una categoría racial, social, económica, política biológica? ¿ES una condición variable o determinada? El sustantivo mestizaje significa, según el diccionario histórico de Marín Alonso, “mezcla de razas”. Esta acepción, sin valoración alguna se contrapone a lo que la misma obra dice del verbo mestizar “corromper o adulterar las castas por el ayuntamiento o cópula de individuos

que no pertenecen a una misma”. Como vemos, esta forma de entender dicha mezcla es altamente negativa, y proviene del siglo XVII.”

Lewin pp. 129-130

It is within and as part of this contradictory, dynamic, self-transformative process and struggle, whose most crucial genesis Lewin places in the 18th Century, but which of course has continued unabated from that time on and through to the present, that the story of Colombian cultural formation should be narrated and understood. As Lewin puts it:

“.....es dentro de una sociedad cambiante que se desarrolla el mestizo en el siglo XVIII.”

Lewin p.132

Although demographic statistics are difficult to agree upon, it is fairly clear that at its outset the Colony of Nueva Granada was made up predominantly of ‘pure’ Indians and ‘pure’ Spanish, with a small but significant minority population of African slaves. Over time, the mestizo population, stemming from all racial intermixtures, but chiefly from that between Indian and Spaniard, grew in size, until by the 19th Century the *mestizaje* constituted the majority of the population. This group, which in early Colonial times was marginalized and despised by the ruling elites, since in most cases mestizos were the product of sexual relations outside of marriage, gradually came to represent the ‘average’, ‘normal’, ‘characteristic’ Colombian. It is a matter of very great complexity to analyse the relationship between biological and cultural aspects of *mestizaje*, as a social and historical process. The process of biological and cultural mergence and synthesis obviously involved simultaneously much exclusion and rejection initially, by each of the original ‘races’; the creation of the modern Colombian and of modern Colombian culture(s) has therefore been a process involving powerful creativity, limited upward social mobility, but also considerable human suffering. As Lewin expresses it:

“La realidad histórica hizo que muchos hijos de españoles, especialmente si eran mestizos de primera generación y su padre los rechazaba, terminaran viviendo dentro de la comunidad de su madre. Sin embargo, parece ser que dentro de éstas la situación del mestizo podía, en casos extremos, ser negativa, dado que no se le consideraba como verdaderos miembros del grupo. Además la conciencia de su propia condición diferente le podría crear problemas de adaptación, que son los que fundarían ese grupo de mestizos móviles que tan mala fama tendrían.”

Lewin p.141

But, by the 18th Century, as Lewin recounts:

“El efecto más evidente de este lento y silencioso proceso está en la variación también lenta, de los valores socio-culturales. La aplicación de las políticas económicas de los Borbones permitió el surgimiento de una burguesía, que hizo que el oficio de comerciante pasara a ser unos de los más prestigiosos en el siglo XVIII (en esta época, por ejemplo, se fundó el consulado de comerciantes en Cartagena). La concesión real de las “gracias al sacar” se hizo porque un Estado moderno, como el

que querían implementar los Borbones, requiere funcionarios hábiles, sin importar su color.

“Estos cambios en la valoración cultural que se hacía de los mestizos se reflejaron en el relajamiento de las normas sociales que legitimaban su marginamiento. La propiedad individual de la tierra pasó de ser únicamente española para incorporar castas. Se disminuyó el número de pueblos de indios y se incrementó el de parroquias, especialmente gracias al crecimiento del número de mestizos y a la disminución de los indios. La importancia de los artesanos, en su gran mayoría mestizos o mulatos, crecía ante el aumento de la población y los problemas del comercio con la metrópoli. Todos estos cambios sociales se dieron, en todo o en parte, debido al peso social y político cada vez mayor de los mestizos.

“En suma el carácter de la sociedad se va limitando cada vez mas acercándose al modelo de sociedad industrial, dividida en clases sociales, pues el “blanqueamiento” de los mestizos y la pobreza de algunos blancos va borroneando las mismas fronteras de color y linaje.”

Lewin pp. 143-144

Lewin goes on to describe how among mestizos:

“.....existir una definición cultural, una cultura mestiza como tal que se opusiera a la cultura dominante, los lazos de unión eran más difíciles de crear.”

Lewin p.144

With this, we return to the point made earlier, that Colombians do not mostly feel themselves, or think spontaneously of themselves, as a mixture of Indian and Spanish blood, though they may *know rationally* that they are just that. To themselves they are Colombians, for once the tendency to identify with the two poles of society, Indian or Spanish as mentioned above, had faded away, the mestizos had become the social majority.

This fact helps to explain the lack of clear cultural identity among modern Colombians, especially in the sense of *historical self-consciousness*, and also the lack of nationalism in the sense of what might be called a *national political consciousness*. Most ordinary Colombians are rather ‘apolitical’ in an ideological sense, lacking ‘a collective political project’ as Lewin puts it in the paragraph just quoted. But this does not necessarily mean people are ‘lost’, or ‘alienated’. Thus, I have never heard a Colombian speak against their National Anthem for example, even though to my ears it sounds, rather incongruously, like a 1930s hymn to the advancing Soviet Union! Interestingly, the American historian David Bushnell has this to say about Rafael Núñez, the late Nineteenth Century President who introduced the National Anthem, and who wrote the words for it:

“La contribución de Núñez a la causa de la unificación nacional no consistió exclusivamente en la redacción de una nueva Constitución que reforzaba el ejecutivo nacional, sumada a la formación de un nuevo partido que, aunque reconocidamente efímero, se había presentado como alternativa que superaba las disputas entre

liberales y conservadores. También fue simbólica, al dar a sus compatriotas un Himno Nacional. El hecho de que a tales alturas del siglo Colombia no tuviera un símbolo musical aglutinador era tal vez otro de los signos de la relativa debilidad del sentimiento nacional (el himno venezolano, por el contrario, databa de la época de la independencia).”

Bushnell p.201

Colombians have invented and continually reinvent themselves as a people and a (set of) culture(s), very much without strait-jackets, as they are not bogged down in a consciousness of a presumed or imagined homogeneous national past. This lack of a sense of cultural identity rooted in a clearly perceived past is in some respects a down-side to the Colombian scene, but its positive aspect is the creatively anarchic, free-spirited, unconstrained, dynamic energy with which its cultures are constantly produced and reproduced. The Indian, the Spanish, and the African from the past; and the modern European and North American from the present, provide infinite elements that are constantly recombined and innovated upon, often without too much concern for labels or definitions with regard to their sources or original meanings.

Another slant on these considerations upon the formation of the modern, mestizo Colombian is provided by Hermes Tovar Pinzón. He summarizes the process of Spanish subjugation of the Indians, and the inadvertent, unintended accompaniment of this process with the bringing into being of the Colombian nation, thus:

“El afán de someter el espacio, los hombres, las lenguas, los paisajes, las economías, las ideas, las formas políticas y los hábitos hizo que toda diferencias fuera la esencia que contradecía los principios de universalidad y de unidad en dios y el rey. Este primer esfuerzo de homogeneización que practicó España supuso un desastre demográfico y el origen del hambre y la miseria, y le abrió perspectivas a las tramas de una diversidad cultural que se consolidó en la totalidad agredida. La historia de este fracaso de unificación es lo que hizo posible la riqueza de la identidad que no pudo ser universal sino esencialmente local. La exclusión fue mutua: por una parte estaban los europeos buscando imponer la unicidad de sus valores y por la otra los nativos, reconstruyendo en el silencio y en la soledad los últimos muñones de su cultura. Por eso es importante conocer el siglo XVI, un período esencial en la construcción de la diversidad como fundamento crítico del colonialismo que ha marcado y marca la historia del Nuevo Mundo. El caso es que en México, Perú y Yucatán, el colonialismo fragmentó la unidad sojuzgada, mientras que en la actual Colombia se le dio unidad a la diversidad múltiple. Esta es una diferencia más de los Andes Centrales y Mesoamérica con Colombia y una de las razones por las cuales muchos expertos dicen no comprender este curioso país. Aquí prevaleció la diversidad como unidad y nuestra dificultad ha consistido en no haber aprendido la variedad y la verdad fundamental de nuestro destino. México y Perú fueron ante todo una unidad y después la diversidad, mientras que Colombia fue primero diversidad y su reto ha sido la unidad en la diversidad.

“La irrupción española introdujo propuestas de utilización del espacio en las cuales se puso de manifiesto la lucha por el poder y la confrontación social. Los diversos

paisajes que encontraron los europeos no eran simples escenarios naturales sino construcciones culturales alteradas por la superposición de otros escenarios que, al codificar el mundo simbólico de los españoles, terminaron por segregar lo diverso en su intención de convertir el mundo sojuzgado en una unidad territorial. Uno de tales elementos fue la ciudad, cuyas trazas no se reducían al cuerpo de sus representaciones urbanas sino que incluían un *hinterland*, grandes valles abiertos sobre sus cuatro costados y una iconografía de símbolos hispanos, como la plaza con su iglesia, cabildo, picota y residencia de caciques y señores. La función de lo urbano en la reordenación espacial del Nuevo Mundo no hace referencia únicamente a las grandes ciudades sino al significado sociológico de esta institución que codificaba un orden material y espiritual con el que se agredía el doblamiento disperso de las comunidades: "...los buhíos de estos indios están distintos e apartados unos de otros y son menester días para juntillos...", fue lo que se dijo de los naturales de la provincia de Calamoyma, dependiente de la ciudad de Mariquita, en 1559. En las Instrucciones de Santafé se mantenían sus territorios, pero se introducían dos elementos de control de que hecho empezaban por agrietar el paisaje de los indios como representación de su cultura. En primer lugar, había que juntarlos para "su policía espiritual y temporal" y, e segundo término, para delimitar cada parcialidad o pueblo manteniéndoles sus montes, pesquerías "y cacaderos". Las autoridades eran conscientes de que al introducir el principio de lo urbano se alteraba "el amor y querencia" que ellos tenían por sus "antiguos sitios y solares" y por sus antepasados. El paisaje de casas dispersas, con toda la iconografía de la tradición, era sustituido por el de un poblado, con los símbolos del poder hispánico, que además ordenaría la vida de los indios según principios cristianos. Las agregaciones rompían la continuidad histórica del paisaje y, de hecho, con una tradición. Al ordenar incendiar sus habitaciones para forzar tales rupturas, la ceniza se volvía movimiento de no retorno y se abrían los caminos a nuevas construcciones del pasado y a una redefinición de la identidad con su historia comunal y personal.

"Fundado sobre la *libertad* y la *capacidad* de vivir en "orden", el debate jurídico de la primera mitad del siglo XVI giró en torno a si los indios debían ser o no ser tutelados por los españoles. Como las conclusiones a sesudos estudios y argumentos fueron negativos, se abrió paso a la "encomienda" que, como forma de "repartimiento", prevaleció hasta mediados del siglo XVI. Es en este contexto del derecho a la libertad y a la capacidad de vivir conforme al espejo hispánico, en donde se contextualiza el origen de las llamadas reducciones, congregaciones y agregaciones de comunidades. El "resguardo" como tal, o la decisión de reorganizar la vida de los nativos según la idea de urbanismo, llega acompañado de transformaciones en la economía, en la sociedad y en el Estado. Las *instrucciones* sobre el gobierno de las Indias de 1503 precisaban la necesidad de irrumpir en los territorios de los naturales para lograr una administración eficaz. Poblar era crear condiciones para el adoctrinamiento, para el trabajo, para la monogamia, para la educación y para ordenar que "ni se bañen, ni se pinten ni purguen tantas veces como agora lo hacen". En septiembre de 1516, la Instrucción dada a los padres Jerónimos reiteraba y ampliaba estos mismos principios: el pueblo debía tener una iglesia, plaza

y calles bajo la administración de un cacique y su población no debía superar los 300 vecinos.

“El orden implícito en la idea de reducir a poblados significaba disponer de las riquezas y de la fuerza de trabajo, vigilar las costumbres y mantener el control sobre la vida diaria de los nativos. La vida diaria no era sólo la religión y los tributos sino la alimentación y los afectos. En el Nuevo Mundo, lo urbano, en su doble dimensión de ciudad de blancos y poblado indígena no fue para los nativos sinónimo de libertad sino de opresión, de segregación y de agresión a formas culturales que debieron redistribuirse y reproducirse en otros espacios, En su esencia, la ciudad mantuvo en el Nuevo Mundo las imágenes de la barbarie, al no integrar plenamente a lo urbano aquello que pretendía civilizar. El desarraigo se encubrió con la agregación, el desorden, con la orden de vivir “en pulicía”. Los bohíos se transformaron en casas y solares y el uso abierto del espacio, con sus nichos ecológicos dispersos, se convirtió en tierras limitadas de pastos y ganados. En este nuevo orden, que en realidad era desorden, las entidades étnicas se agrietaron mucho más y las cenizas de lo que se reagrupó se cosieron en una nueva colcha formada por “barrios”, congregaciones y resguardos. La gran explosión que siguió a 1492 dejó una construcción viva y permanente de mundos. Esta transfiguración de espacios desató otros elementos nacidos de la represión que, al ser compartidos, fundaron nuevas formas de identidad en América Latina, La historia como ocultamiento y revelación, como apariencia y simulación, se convirtió en un universo móvil que de hecho negó la aparente parálisis de unas pretendidas raíces prehispánicas. Si lo pasado sobrevive es por la capacidad que mostró el mundo comunitario de transformarse para seguir arrastrando la vitalidad de un sueño encallado en el futuro. La identidad que se ata al profundo mar de los simbolismos oníricos no ha renunciado a la posibilidad de volver a ser, de poder estar y de crear los esquemas de un destino cierto, de recuperar los paisajes y los espacios para confrontar la diversidad étnica, el pluralismo lingüístico, la dispersión del dogma y el fin de la igualdad que excluye. Todas estas experiencias compartidas por la sociedad que nació después de 1500 son las que se amotinan hoy como fundamento de una idea de nación.”

Pinzón (2) pp. 200-203

In an earlier essay, Pinzón had explained the diversity of identities, and the lack of national unity in the consciousness of Colombians, in terms of geographic and ecological factors that had operated in both pre-Hispanic and colonial times. This was, of course, a recurring theme in Reichel-Dolmatoff's thought, as we have already seen. Pinzón writes:

“Hecho de culturas minúsculas, como de complejas organizaciones políticas, el territorio de la actual Colombia ofrecería toda su riqueza a miles de conquistadores, para que pudieran constituir una sociedad en donde la estructura del poder pudiera organizarse con gran autonomía local y regional. Al final Colombia disponía de una riqueza diseminada en multiplicidad de centros de producción. Sobre su territorio nunca hubo una unidad política, ni hegemonías de caciques y señores prehispánicos, sino una gran diversidad de empeños y de culturas, fundamentados todos sobre recursos ocultos bajo una gran magnitud dispersa.

“Colombia no tuvo un nombre como México o Perú. Comenzó por ser Tierra Firme, luego fue el Darién, para quedar convertida en las provincias de Cartagena y Santa Marta. Sólo a partir de 1550 sería el Nuevo Reino de Granada, con las nuevas provincias de Popayán, Tunja y Santa Fe. Un hecho tan intrascendente nos remite a un problema de identidad. Nunca nuestros antepasados tuvieron una idea global de lo que hoy es nuestro territorio. Sólo la Nueva Granada comenzó a dar sentido geográfico a la actual Colombia, pero dentro de ella actuaban múltiples localidades y regiones, que seguían ordenando sus espacios y sus sociedades conforme a una tradición histórica que anclaba sus raíces en el mundo interior a 1492.

“Esta ausencia de identidad espacial no proviene únicamente de una decisión ideológica de los españoles del siglo XVI. Se origina en la naturaleza misma de nuestro paisaje, que durante milenios el hombre transformó, componiendo pinceladas de un cuadro que sólo el tiempo llegaría a unificar, con los trazos forzados de marcos jurídicos que dieron forma a una multiplicidad de manchas, que parecían reproducir en sí mismas pequeñas obras de arte.

“Estos rasgos tan particulares de nuestra geografía y de nuestros paisajes, producto de la naturaleza y del esfuerzo del hombre prehispánico, hicieron que los europeos caminaran miles de leguas desde múltiples esquinas, tratando de descifrar el enigma de una región que escondía un magnífico Dorado y pueblos con sus indomables Amazonas. Sin embargo, la primera trampa que debieron superar los españoles fue la de la diversidad de los paisajes y de los espacios que se anunciaban, ahora sí, después de cada pausa, como los grandes centros del Dorado. Cuando las huestes arribaban con sus pulmones abultados de cansancio, debían desinflarlos con un pasmo repartido entre cacicazgos y señoríos. Entre el cansancio recostado desfilaban nativos con sus oros relucientes, esperando el ritual de un encuentro que podría combinar la amenaza de una guerra, la sumisión o la entrega de alimentos y metales como un frágil testimonio de un canje por la paz.

“La unidad espacial en los tiempos prehispánicos no estuvo determinada por la fuerza de una sociedad capaz de sojuzgar todos los horizontes para su propio beneficio, a la luz de un proyecto político diseñado por los hombres Muisca, Quimbayas, Arawaks o algunos de sus predecesores. La unidad espacial de la actual Colombia, como la de otros países de la América española, tuvo su forma en las disposiciones jurídicas de la corona castellana, que la anexó como un fragmento colonial más a la administración del Imperio español. Sin embargo, los españoles duraron cerca de 50 años intentando delimitar estos territorios y construyendo el que sería la Nueva Granada. Pero este proyecto de delimitación colonial del espacio hizo abstracción de múltiples especificidades, produciéndose un cierto abandono en la conciencia colonial, de paisajes que se entremezclaban con otros más determinantes en la formación de la economía. De la capacidad que tuvieron los colonos de asumir tales especificidades, surgió el poder de las localidades y ese mundo complejo de clientelas e historias regionales, que desde entonces marca la personalidad histórica de los colombianos.

“El dominio y comprensión del espacio fue desde hace miles de años, el desafío para el hombre que habitó la actual Colombia. En esta lucha apenas se roturaron tierras, se incorporaron montes a las economías indígenas y los ríos y las selvas formaron unidades espaciales integradas a la pesca y a la caza. Ríos, montañas, selvas, bosques y planicies se articularon en señoríos y en cacicazgos, para combinar climas y recursos vegetales y animales, en un proyecto de crecimiento y desarrollo. Lo que no se encontraba en estos diversos micro-ambientes, se obtenían en otros territorios, en un acelerado esfuerzo porque los mercados suministraran aquello que el desarrollo exigía a microambientes limitados.

“En muchos relatos sobre la conquista se encuentran referencias como las que describen a Anzema, ubicada en el Valle de Amiceca, sembrado de “muchos pueblos”. Al oriente de la ciudad se abría otro valle, el de Chamburugua y un poco más allá, a sólo 4 o 5 leguas, se levantaban los pueblos de Irra, Angazca, Guacayca, Aconchara y “otros muchos”, escondidos en los cuatro puntos cardinales, Toda la tierra estaba poblada “de una parte y de otra”, como lo estaba el territorio de los Quimbaya o donde dominaba el Señor Ebexico. Fue esta fragmentación lo que le dio dinamismo a las unidades que los Españoles forjaron para materializar con ellas nuevos conceptos de administración y dominio. Esta dualidad que nos ubica entre la unidad colonial y la diversidad prehispánica, ha sido otro de los desafíos que nos dejó el sistema colonial y que aún hoy luchamos por descifrar y manejar.”

Pinzon (1) pp. 47-49

A sense of what it means today for someone to be Colombian is easily sounded by hearing or seeing his or her reaction to the raising of the name of Simón Bolívar. Bolívar is not to be criticized; he is beyond any criticism. If one tries to speak in rational or historical terms about Simón Bolívar, one's interlocutor's eyes glaze over, as if one were criticizing the Virgin Mary, or declaring that Colombian women were not obviously the most beautiful and wonderful women in the world, the most full of joyous life imaginable.

Now Bolívar was of course a creole, not a mestizo, but as Lewin puts it:

“Esta condición de exclusión y limitación a la movilidad social (que permitiría, individualmente, escapar del apartamiento) podía desembocar en una situación de violencia e insurrección. Sin embargo, es bien sabido que, durante la guerra de Independencia, el conflicto social que se dio en realidad fue entre criollos y españoles. Debemos entonces preguntarnos qué ocurrió, dentro de la sociedad colonial, con la presión que ejercía sobre ella el grupo de los mestizos.

“Es en este punto donde nuestra tesis se concreta de forma más clara: el mestizo, como ya vimos, tenía cada vez más peso demográfico y era el único que tenía la posibilidad, si bien limitada de movilidad social. Estas cualidades, dentro de la sociedad, no fueron dirigidas de manera conjunta a subvertir el orden existente, sino que socavaron las instituciones sociales hasta el punto de permitir que las guerras de Independencia se llevaran a cabo”.

Lewin pp.142-3

And:

“En suma, por estas y otras razones que deben ser mejor entendidas y más estudiadas, el mestizo nos e unió como grupo social para luchar por sus intereses, sino que intentó forzar, individualmente, los caminos de la movilidad social para ser mejor aceptado en la sociedad; el mestizo si participó en las revueltas, pero lo hizo no como mestizo sino como artesano o, incluso como “americano”.

“Esta idea nos plantea un nuevo interrogante, relacionado con los hechos que, a fines del siglo XVIII, ya se podían entrever, y que cambiaron la estructura de poder. Para el mestizo, este enfrentamiento era una posibilidad ideal para unirse como grupo social, al igual que lo estaban haciendo criollo y “chapetones”, y reivindicar sus intereses y sus derechos. El mestizo, sin embargo, luchó en uno u otro bando, al igual que los indios o las demás castas. Sus razones para apoyar a unos o a otros dependían no de los intereses grupales sino de otro tipo de factores. Pero recordemos, en todo caso, que lo contrario habría sido una lucha de clases sociales, lo que era claramente impensable en aquél momento.

“Debió existir, sin embargo, algún tipo de relación entre los llamados de los revolucionarios criollos a la libertad y los intereses mestizos, pues aun si se trataba de individuos aislados, este tipo de llamados se dirigía a la realidad personal e individual, con lo que sí encontraba algún punto de unión con el interés del mestizo”.

Lewin pp. 144-5

The above brings together a number of the points previously made, in particular the emotional, rather than political sense of what it means to be Colombian; the hero-worship of Bolivar; the lack of a very clearly agreed collective political project in the minds of Colombians. It is significant that Bolivar is worshipped as the Liberator, whilst his post-Independence career as a statesman, during which many of Colombia's still persistent national and political `problems` were already displayed, does not really enter into his reputation, and few people besides students of history are very concerned with it.

These attitudes certainly do not conform to `normal` nationalism, nor even to `normal` patriotism; few ordinary Colombians think Colombia has succeeded as a nation politically, economically, or militarily in the wider world.

Marcos Palacios makes some very important points regarding the nation, the state, the people, and the citizenry within both the Colombian imagination and the Colombian reality. For example:

“.....hemos tenido a nuestra disposición no una sino varias historias patrias monumentales (bolivariana, santanderista, bipartidista...), historias de gobierno e historias de oposición.

“Bastaría hacer el contrapunteo de las narrativas históricas durante las reformas liberales de mediados del siglo pasado y las que se fueron construyendo durante la

Regeneración, negadas, a su vez, por las de la república liberal (1930-46). Si algo ayuda a explicar la popularidad de las interpretaciones de Liévano Aguirre de los años iniciales del Frente Nacional, es el tono heroico que empleó para impugnar la historia patria apagada con que el régimen buscaba legitimarse.

“Estas historias no pueden escaparse de la tirantez entre dos conceptos del nuevo legitimismo, entrelazados pero ambiguos, y que sirven para calificar la soberanía estatal: pueblo y nación: lo popular y lo nacional. Las guerras de Independencia dan origen a la nación en cuanto liberaron el territorio del dominio de la potencia colonial española. Liberado el territorio, los constituyentes patriotas consagran los derechos inalienables del pueblo (el derecho por nacer en el país y el derecho por la sangre), dentro de una forma republicana que es antítesis del principio monárquico: los nuevos ciudadanos colombianos, soberanos en el suelo patrio, estarán para siempre sometidos a las leyes republicanas, no a los reyes tiránicos, “pueblo” era el vocablo polisémico por excelencia; podía incluir “nación”, “Estado” y “ciudadano”. Pero no se concebía que los ciudadanos fuesen iguales en el derecho a elegir y ser elegidos.

“De las victorias de Boyacá (1819) y Carabobo (1821) que permitieron fundar la República de Colombia – es decir, la Gran Colombia- y del modelo político que informó su corpus constitucional y legal- la ley Fundamental de Angostura (1819) y la Constitución de Cúcuta (1821) – habría podido emerger una épica o mito fundador para aquella “comunidad políticamente imaginada como inherentemente limitada y soberna”. Pero no ocurrió así dadas las disputas cada vez más agrias entre El Libertador y El Congreso; entre el ejército libertador y los políticos; entre el militarismo y civilismo; entre venezolanos y neogranadinos. En el fondo, sin embargo, todos estuvieron de acuerdo en que la república sólo sería viable como una forma de reconstrucción política del orden social erigido sobre las castas coloniales.

“El colapso de la Gran Colombia no puso fin a las disputas. Se proyectaron hacia atrás, en las distintas lecturas que fueron haciéndose de la Patria Boba (1810-16) y hacia delante, en los discursos constitucionalistas fuertemente entrelazados a las narrativas posteriores a 1830.

“La falta de consenso de las elites revolucionarias de la década de 1820 en torno al nuevo Estado se polarizó entre el proyecto bolivariano de centralizar la revolución para que, a partir del Estado colombiano, pudiera inculcarse el amor a la patria, a sus leyes y a sus gobernantes, y el proyecto más pragmático de los legisladores que respondía a los intereses, sentimientos y tradiciones localistas y regionalistas. A pesar de que el regionalismo tenía un carácter social (regiones más aristocráticas o más aburguesadas), afectado por el grado de destrucción a causa de la guerra, la lucha política en la Colombia bolivariana fue diferente de las luchas criollas anteriores. Primero que todo, se daba en un marco estatal no colonial, o precisamente anticolonial. Ahora el poder descansaba fundamentalmente en un ejército popular y profesional compuesto de neogranadinos, venezolanos y ecuatorianos (de 25.000 hombres a 30.000 en 1825, que absorbía unas tres cuartas partes del gasto estatal financiado con cargo a la deuda pública externa), dominado por Bolívar y un

comando militar ostensiblemente venezolano. En torno a el Libertador se fueron tejiendo redes que con el correr de los años fueron reagrupando segmentos de las viejas clases aristocráticas, a las cuales habría de sumarse en 1828 la mayoría del clero, ante el viraje doctrinario del presidente. En la Nueva Granada el contrapeso fue creciendo en las redes que, al menos en el oriente de la actual Colombia, eran más aburguesadas por la posición de su miembros en la sociedad (La mayoría abogados) y por su visión del mundo, y que fueron agrupándose alrededor de Santander.

“Consolidado militarmente el dominio territorial (más o menos hacia 1825), las capas populares que hacían el penoso tránsito de castas a ciudadanos imaginarios, buscaron refugio en una u otra coalición elitista, según lo dictara las condiciones de tiempo y lugar.

“La independencia (1810-30) no sólo fue contradictoria en sí misma, sino que dividió las aguas que ha irrigado el imaginario colombiano hasta épocas recientes. Pero todas nuestras historias patrias son ambiguas respecto a la naturaleza de las guerras y el significado de la Independencia en la formación de la nacionalidad: ¿Fueron guerras anticoloniales o civiles? ¿Fue la Independencia una revolución anticolonial o una mera sustitución de potencia imperial? ¿Fue, acaso, una revolución sin revolución? ¿Cómo se pueden integrar en la gesta libertadora la Patria Boba y las guerras posteriores a 1830? ¿Se había formado la nacionalidad antes del Estado nacional?”.

Palacios pp. 425-427

A word about the emergence of the two parties, Conservative and Liberal, which dominated Colombian politics for most of the Republican period, is very relevant here. This extraordinary phenomenon is analysed by David Bushnell. The civil war of 1839-42 was the period in which the notorious two-party system first formed:

“A comienzos de 1842, las fuerzas del gobierno lograron finalmente dominar a los revoltosos. Para entonces, los antagonismos entre el presidente Márquez y sus críticos se habían disparado, incluidos los progresistas que nos e habían levantado en armas.

“Además para suprimir la rebelión, Márquez se vio precisado a reforzar sus lazos con los bolivarianos, en particular con sus jefes militares claves, tales como Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera y Pedro Alcántara Herrán. En medio del conflicto bélico, Herrán ganó las elecciones a la Presidencia, como sucesor de Márquez, lo cual completó el acercamiento entre liberales moderados del corte de Márquez y antiguos seguidores de Bolívar. Como éstos fueron de los que ocuparon cargos públicos, tanto civiles como militares, se les llamó “ministeriales”, o “partido ministerial”: pero en realidad constituyeron en forma embrionaria el partido que en 1848 adoptaría el nombre de Conservador, Sus oponentes, por su parte, comenzaron a abandonar el nombre de progresistas y pasaron a denominarse liberales. Para todos los efectos y propósitos, habían nacido los dos partidos tradicionales de Colombia.

“Como organizaciones formales, los partidos evolucionaron solamente a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y sólo en nuestro siglo se establecieron de manera

permanente. De igual manera, aún antes de la Guerra de los Supremos, los activistas políticos habían conformado organizaciones *ad-hoc* y redes de correspondencia para las elecciones. Entonces, la guerra civil de 1839-1842 constituyó un hito porque en ella los bandos se alinearon sólidamente según patrones que serían duraderos. Sin embargo, tales patrones no son fáciles de definir. Como ya se dijo, el conflicto entre Santander y Bolívar y sus respectivos seguidores durante la década de la Gran Colombia anticipó, hasta cierto punto, la posterior división entre los partidos.

“Los adeptos de Bolívar que aún sobrevivían, con muy pocas excepciones terminaron en el bando ministerial/conservador. Pero la situación es mucho más compleja en lo que respecta a los primeros partidarios de Santander. El mismo Márquez, después de todo, había sido uno de ellos. Más importante es el caso de Mariano Ospina Rodríguez, uno de los implicados en el atentado contra Bolívar de septiembre de 1828 y que terminó siendo aliado de Márquez y posteriormente secretario del Interior en la administración de su enemigo de otrora, el presidente Herrán.

“Las diferencias sociales y económicas entre los dos grupos tampoco eran claras. Algunos autores trataban de explicar la dicotomía liberal-conservadora con base en un conflicto entre “tienda” y “hacienda”, en el cual los liberales representaban los intereses comerciales y profesionales y los conservadores los intereses de los grandes terratenientes. Pero, como señaló Frank Safford en el que continúa siendo el más agudo análisis de la conformación inicial de los partidos, las diferencias ocupacionales fueron tenues en la formación de los mismos, entre otras cosas porque el mismo individuo podía ser a la vez terrateniente, comerciante y abogado; o, si no lo era, en su familia había individuos comprometidos con cualquiera de estas actividades. Además, como se verá, hubo muy pocas instancias en las que los intereses específicos de comerciantes y terratenientes determinarían su alineación en partidos políticos opuestos. Safford propone entonces un esquema según el cual los conservadores fueron más fuertes en las áreas que, a fines de la era colonial y comienzos de la republicana, eran las más importantes política y económicamente (Bogotá, Popayán y Cartagena, especialmente), mientras que los liberales dominaban en las áreas periféricas (como, por ejemplo, las provincias orientales que luego serían los departamentos de Santander y Norte de Santander). El análisis de Safford apunta hacia diferencias en términos de prestigio social y conexiones familiares entre los dirigentes de ambos lados, y también hacia diferencias regionales.

“No sugiere ninguna diferencia clara en cuanto a ocupación económica, aunque tampoco excluye la posibilidad de que los comerciantes o terratenientes conservadores pudieran haber sido más poderosos que sus contrapartes liberales. El esquema de Safford rechaza, así mismo, el aroma levemente más aristocrático de la facción bolivariana como enfrentado al de la santanderista durante los años de la Gran Colombia, aunque admite abiertamente que se trata sólo de un modelo en bruto y que no puede dar cuenta, dice, de la tendencia predominantemente conservadora de Antioquia, que en cierta manera (social y geográfica, si no económicamente) podrían ser clasificada entre las regiones periféricas.

“En cualquier caso, ambos partidos eran multclasistas y cubrirían todo el territorio nacional; y a pesar de todas las diferencias en la pujanza *relativa* de una región y otra y de los estragos que causaron a veces sus disputas, los partidos eran una de las pocas fuerzas unificadoras en una nación dolorosamente fragmentada geográfica y culturalmente. Los partidos no sólo estaban presentes en todas las regiones del país, sino que también estaban destinados a promover la colaboración más allá de las fronteras de clase, o, en términos diferentes, estaban destinados a servir como mecanismos de control social mediante los cuales los dirigentes de las clases altas manipulaban a sus seguidores de las clases inferiores. En el momento en que los partidos comenzaban a formarse, la mayoría de los ciudadanos hombres y mujeres, estaban excluidos legalmente de la participación activa en la política electoral, si bien es cierto que los artesanos urbanos generalmente cumplían con todos los requisitos para votar, al igual que muchos – no necesariamente todos – pequeños propietarios rurales. Pero los jefes políticos buscaban el apoyo de aquellos que no podían votar, para organizar manifestaciones, intimidar a sus adversarios y combatir en las guerras civiles. En las etapas de formación del sistema de partidos es difícil precisar qué tanta identificación emocional existía, por parte de los seguidores, con uno u otro partido, incluso en el nivel de los que estaban capacitados para votar. Sin embargo, en la medida en que surtió efecto, tal lealtad a una causa partidaria que traspasaba las fronteras de clase no podía menos que contribuir a mitigar los conflictos entre los grupos sociales.

“Entre los sectores urbanos que no pertenecían a las élites, los artesanos eran los más propensos a participar conscientemente en la política partidista, con programas propios que presionaban en favor de sus intereses. La protección arancelaria para sus productos es el punto clave de su plataforma de lucha, aunque también estaban interesados en la capacitación en artes industriales y en una serie de mejoras cívicas. Toda vez que los artesanos podían ofrecer votos y habilidades, los políticos a menudo se esforzaron por conseguir su apoyo, prometiéndoles trabajar en pro de sus peticiones, que casi siempre olvidaban al ser elegidos. Se ha supuesto generalizadamente, por otra parte, que los campesinos terminaban afiliados a un partido por la irresistible influencia de algún jefe político local o cacique, quien algunas veces era también el principal terrateniente de la región.

“La idea de que las afiliaciones de las masas rurales a los partidos respondían a imposiciones y no a convicciones o decisiones conscientes bien puede ser exagerada. Pero es significativo que desde el comienzo las comunidades rurales se inclinaron masivamente hacia una u otra de las alternativas, mientras en las ciudades había siempre representación para un mayor número de tendencias.

“Tanto en las jurisdicciones rurales como en las urbanas, los sacerdotes a menudo actuaban como organizadores políticos, casi invariablemente del lado ministerio/conservador. La actitud del clero se basaba, desde luego, en el mismo temor a las reformas anticlericales y a la educación a lo Bentham que había determinado que la Iglesia apoyara a Bolívar contra Santander en los años veinte. A pesar de la cautela que Santander mostró como Presidente de la Nueva Granada en

relación con los asuntos religiosos, él y sus seguidores – el naciente Partido Liberal – todavía despertaban en el clero sentimientos que iban desde una moderada desconfianza hasta la hostilidad fanática. Además, era mucho más fácil para el clero que para cualquier agitador laico llevar a las masas a la acción, como se hizo evidente en un tumulto que estalló en Medellín en 1836 con el propósito de sacar de la prisión a un sacerdote alborotador.

“La ventaja táctica de contar con el clero como apoyo político no se olvidó luego de las primeras etapas del Partido Conservador, y durante el resto del siglo la gran diferencia entre ambas colectividades tuvo que ver precisamente con la situación legal de la Iglesia. Los liberales intentaban todavía reducir su poder e influencia, por considerarlos obstáculos para el progreso material e intelectual de la nación, si bien, al igual que Santander, se daban cuenta de que la población en general no estaba preparada para grandes cambios.

“El naciente Partido Conservador no pretendía volver a instaurar la Inquisición, a pesar de que algunos propagandistas liberales lo insinuaban, pero sus miembros proponían que la innovación eclesiástica debía ser lenta, y no solamente por el beneficio a corto plazo que significaba tener al clero como aliado. Debido al estado incierto del orden público y lo que para algunos era una peligrosa pérdida de la disciplina social, los conservadores veían en la religión Católica un soporte esencial de la estabilidad tanto política como social. El catolicismo era, después de todo, una de las pocas cosas que servía, al menos nominalmente, para unir a todos los miembros de la sociedad. Por esa misma razón, sus instituciones no podían alterarse a la ligera.”

Bushnell pp. 135-139

Such a phenomenon, in which the two parties, whether in conflict or in collaboration, have not differed in very significant ways in terms of their politics on real, *practical* levels as opposed to rhetoric - at least in most periods of their existences, nor in their visions for a national project (except in respect of their views regarding the position of the Church in society), nor in their social class bases of support, exemplifies very well the lack of political consciousness of the kind we are considering here. Speaking of the period of the so-called *La Violencia*, Forrest Hylton has written:

“.....the logic of the ‘defensive feud’ between embattled local communities, each with its recollections or fear of grievous injury, was in place from the beginning (of the peculiar history of the two-party state system, the sectarian Conservative-Liberal Colombian ‘dyarchy’)......

“.....Strands of social conflict were never absent from it, as tenants, sharecroppers and squatters on the coffee frontiers were drawn into successive waves of fighting on both sides. But *La Violencia* as a whole was a huge historical regression, in which archaic partisan hostilities swamped not only the legacy of Gaitán’s short-lived populism, but also the chance of any independent class politics beyond it. The havoc it wreaked was all the more futile, in that by 1948 there was little substantive disagreement left between the Liberals..... and the

Conservatives..... The two elites were united in a common devotion to Cold War capitalism and anti-communism.....”

Hylton pp. 24 & 26

Few people in Colombia today care greatly for politicians or governments, beyond a thought that this or that one might be slightly less ghastly than all the others within living memory. The lack of faith in politics and politicians, along with the feeling that the political system in Colombia is inevitably undemocratic, even to the point that the degree of democratic procedure that does exist is often underrated and disregarded, is legendary, even by South American standards. It is widely assumed that the political elite is inevitably and always remote, distant, and corrupt.

Being Colombian however, is a deep, gut sense of love and belongingness, quite unavailable to citizens of countries with tired, jaded, worn-out nationalisms, such as Britain, Germany, or the United States, for whom great national crimes and hypocrisies in the past inevitably spring to mind, enwrapped within any sense of pride, joy, or awe that might simultaneously be raised by the thought of their countries, in the minds of their citizens. If they have the slightest ability to question themselves, or doubt the dogmas of authority, citizens of these countries will feel irked by nationalistic sentiments. In Colombia on the other hand, the love of one's country has nothing to do with pride in the European or North American nationalistic senses, nor any arrogant or bragging conceit about one's nation's victories and achievements, nor even, as the above quotation from Lewin implies, does it entail a strong sense of common interests; rather, it is like the love for one's mother. The wildest rock musician, his long unkempt hair tumbling chaotically around his shoulders, various tea-shirts spilling roughly around his disordered jeans, whacked out on marihuana or alcohol, will inveigh thus into a microphone:

“This is Colombian Rock, not American, nor English; this is Colombian Rock!”

And the wild, grinding music will be exactly so, however much it has drawn from Jimmi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, or The Animals.

The same sentiments will be expressed no less by any Colombian girl, from whatever class, no matter how much she yearns to marry a German, or live in Florida or Switzerland, or work in Madrid. She will be forever Colombian, make no mistake about it.

Thus it is perhaps, that Colombians are able so easily to relate friendlily, or at least directly, to foreigners. *Nationality* has nothing to do with one's deep *Colombian identity*; one is Colombian *per se*, so why not relate pleasantly to foreigners? Nothing about being Colombian can be threatened by foreign music, the English language, or even Yankee Imperialism. How could any of these things affect the Colombian air, the Colombian Andes, the Colombian sky, the Colombian sun, or the Colombian stars?

Beyond and within his search for the modern Colombian, and for modern Colombian culture and cultures, Reichel-Dolmatoff was, as we have already seen, throughout his life-work engaged in the pursuit of a 'human universal', or, for a particular aspect of the 'universality of humanity'.

Such an idea is central to his understanding of shamanism, as it subtly synthesizes elements from human physiology, neurophysiology, psychology, the cognitive sciences, symbology, mythology, cosmology, ethics, aesthetics, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, economics, and political science; and these with the deepest levels of epistemology, ontology, and even the metaphysics of religion. It is a groping after the profoundest spiritual essences of the individual human being and of all human beings, on a par with the quest of such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, C.G. Jung, James Frazer, Mircea Eliade, or Joseph Campbell.

Reichel-Dolmatoff's inter-disciplinary approach to the understanding of shamanistic visions and the role of hallucinogens within this mode of experience has already been briefly discussed. In the following he examines what he regards as a universal ritualistic shamanistic physical position, in which the shaman squats and hugs his knees with his arms. Reichel-Dolmatoff then relates the iconography of specific ancient Muisca and Tairona pieces of shamanistic goldwork, to contemporary indigenous shamanism in Colombia, and both in turn to shamanistic ritual in all times and places:

“Un conjunto muy distinto (en el colección del Museo del Oro) consiste de una serie de figuras en cuclillas, con los brazos enlazando las rodillas. Esta es una posición chamánica ritual universalmente bien conocida en la iconografía. Las figuras aquí ilustradas parecen de origen muisca, aunque varían estilísticamente, lo que podría sugerir diferencias cronológicas. Es notable la escasez de adornos corporales, salvo los casos con orejeras y la marcada diferencia en las formas de los gorros. Otro personaje muisca porta una especie de escudo en el brazo izquierdo.

“Esta posición ritual la he observado en varias tribus colombianas y existen descripciones en ella en otras regiones americanas, así como en otros continentes y diversas épocas cronológicas. El observador casual diría que se trata simplemente de una posición de descanso, pero los chamanes Tukano explican que la persona que asuma dicha postura lejos de estar relajada, se encuentra en gran tensión e intensamente concentrada, sea en la percepción de sensaciones externas o de voces interiores. A esta posición y estado de aguda percepción se añaden estos factores más: en primer lugar, al abrazar las rodillas, los muslos ejercen presión sobre el tórax de modo que hay un marcado control de la respiración la cual se vuelve muy lenta y en segundo lugar, la persona frecuentemente concentra la vista en un punto luminoso, por ejemplo una antorcha. He visto chamanes tukanos, sentados por largos ratos en esta posición, fijando sus ojos en la luz intensamente roja de una tea puesta en el centro de una casa, por lo demás oscura.”

(OC) p.44

A little later in *Orfebrería Y Chamanismo* Reichel-Dolmatoff discusses the pre-hispanic gold *poporos* and *palillos* to be seen in the Museo del Oro, in relation to the contemporary usage of *poporos* and *palillos* by the Kogi of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in northern Colombia:

“Representaciones de recipientes para la cal (poporos), tal como la usan actualmente los indios para el consumo de la coca, se hallan tanto en la orfebrería muisca como en la de la Cordillera Central y seguramente eran de uso ritual. La forma arqueológica de

calabacito que aparece en la orfebrería es prácticamente la misma que la de los poporos de los indios que hoy viven en la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Hay algunos poporos grandes, antropomorfos, zoomorfos y quizás fitomórfos. Algunas de las piezas más vistosas, tanto del Museo del Oro como del llamado Tesoro de los Quimbayas, del Museo de América, de Madrid, son precisamente estos grandes poporos rituales.

“Los palillos de oro, con remates decorativos en su extremo superior y que se han encontrado ante todo en las regiones Calima y Quimbaya, no son “alfileres”, como piensan algunos autores sino que servían para extraer, en su extremo inferior humedecido con saliva, adheridas pequeñas cantidades de cal para llevarse a la boca y mezclarla con las hojas de coca masticadas, proceso en el cual se precipita el alcaloide.

“Para los actuales indios de la Sierra Nevada el poporo y su palillo conllevan un simbolismo muy complejo y no hay duda de que estas creencias tengan una base prehistórica. “En primer lugar, el calabacito representa simbólicamente una mujer. Durante el ritual de la iniciación de un joven adolescente el chamán (mamá) le entrega un calabacito y un palillo, con las palabras: “Ahora te doy el poporo: ahora mujer. Como ya eres hombre, te doy ahora mujer”. En seguida le explica al joven el simbolismo sexual del poporo y le ordena perforar el calabacito con el palillo, acto que representa el coito.

“Según otra imagen de los Kogi el poporo simboliza un templo y se dice que “el templo es el poporo del sol”. En ciertas fechas del año, un rayo de sol cae a través de un pequeño orificio en la cúspide del templo y toca a los fogones, lo que, para lo Kogi tiene un doble sentido: por un lado, el rayo es un falo divino que fertiliza al útero que es el templo; por otro lado, el rayo es el palillo que el Padre Sol inserta en su poporo para buscar cal en las cenizas de los fogones.

“En otra imagen, la Sierra Nevada es un poporo; sus cumbres nevadas son blancas como la cal que se acumula alrededor del orificio de un poporo, y el palillo es el eje del universo, que atraviesa la montaña en su parte más alta. Finalmente, el poporo constituye un modelo cósmico y así un chamán u otra persona entendida pueden referirse detenidamente al calabacito y su palillo, para explicar un sinnúmero de detalles cosmológicos.

“Los palillos que emplean los Kogi para extraer la cal se distinguen individualmente por muchísimos detalles que se refieren a la clase de madera, el lugar de su obtención, su color, su largo, aspectos todos que deben corresponder al linaje de su poseedor. En efecto, el palillo. Constituye un medio de identificación y cualquier hombre Kogi reconocerá inmediatamente la filiación de otro hombre, simplemente por mirar el palillo. Téngase en cuenta que generalmente los hombres tiene varios palillos, uno para el uso diario y otro para ocasiones rituales. El poporo con su palillo constituye un elemento indispensable para acompañar conversaciones rituales; hay una serie de posiciones prescritas que simbolizan o enfatizan ciertos conceptos; el manejo tanto

del calabacito como del palillo, constituye un lenguaje de gestos que todo hombre iniciado conoce.

“El *poporo* y su *palillo*, por insignificantes que parezcan a primera vista, están imbuídos de un simbolismo muy complejo y al mirar ahora los palillos de orfebrería, con su gran variedad de adornos antropo y zoomorfos, se justificaría pensar que estas pequeñas representaciones tan elaboradas tuvieran antiguamente un significado emblemático, relacionado con el linaje o rango de su dueño. También es posible que estos objetos se hayan usado sólo con ocasión de ritos específicos.”

(OC) pp. 50-53

One aspect of Reichel-Dolmatoff's 'non-Christian' kind of search for the human 'soul', is that it recognizes the 'dark' side of human spirituality. This is just one of many characteristics he shares with the rather maverick thinkers mentioned above. Aggression, for example, is for Reichel-Dolmatoff an essential facet of the shaman's personality, which exists in a definite relationship with his other powers, as a curer, fixer, negotiator, explorer, harmonizer, and stabilizer:

“En muchas indígenas se distinguen varias categorías de chamanes y con alguna frecuencia se habla de “brujos”, quienes, bajo la presunta forma de animales o disparando minúsculos proyectiles invisibles, dicen poder causar la enfermedad y aún la muerte de otra persona. Indudablemente estas creencias ya existían en tiempos prehistóricos. Es un hecho que, por sus supuestos contactos con el mundo sobrenatural, el chamán fácilmente aparece como un personaje de las tinieblas, asociado con la lechuza y el murciélago, temido y acusado de hacer daño a sus enemigos. En efecto, la agresividad es otra característica del chamán quien frecuentemente aparece como un luchador, un guerrero que se enfrenta tanto a supuestas fuerzas maléficas sobrenaturales, como a enemigos personales. En ocasiones dos chamanes enemigos ponen en escena verdaderos duelos; pero en la mayoría de los casos estos encuentros violentos no ocurren en realidad sino se representan muy dramáticamente en la esfera alucinatoria. Los contendores yacen en un profundo trance, y su lucha se desarrolla en una dimensión irreal.

“Hablar aquí de chamanes buenos o malos, de magia blanca o negra, me parece una polarización algo dudosa, basada en prejuicios y conceptos occidentales; más bien habría que aceptar que los chamanes actúan de acuerdo con las definiciones del bien y del mal de sus culturas respectivas y que difícilmente se pueden medir con los valores y normas de otros credos. De todos modos, la agresividad es parte esencial de la constitución psicológica del chamán y a veces se expresa en forma violenta, acrecentada, como es natural, por los efectos de las sustancias psicotrópicas que consume. Cabe añadir que sus atavíos, sus máscaras y sus gestos a veces violentos, pueden inspirar temor reverente a participantes en rituales nocturnos. Además muchos chamanes emplean en sus cantos y ensalmos un idioma arcaico, secreto, lo que aumenta desde luego la sensación de lo misterioso de los ritos.”

(OC) p.27

Thus it is a sort of cosmic acceptance of all kinds of spiritual forces, not only those that are 'good', that is at stake here; a sort of recognition that all 360 degrees of the compass exist and are important, so to speak; all hours of the day and night. And this is linked, clearly, with the fact that it is sometimes necessary to fight for survival, as an individual or as a group. Shamans have to lead, help, and direct collective struggles against other groups sometimes, and also in defence of their natural environments; and if they were unable or unprepared to do this, for reasons of 'pure', 'pacifistic' kinds of ethical spirituality, they would be of little use either to their own particular ethnic group or to themselves as individuals, or to the stability of their ecological environments.

Of course, in Christian theology aggression *is* regarded as necessary 'in practice' sometimes. This is indicated, for example, by the lion who lies at Saint Jerome's feet, that must roar at times in defence of Christian dogma, and against all forms of heresy; but this is precisely an example of the ethical hypocrisy and intellectual contradiction which are inherent in Christianity, since in all other contexts anger is a sin, and there is no way within orthodox Christianity of satisfactorily reconciling this fundamental conflict.

Of course, on one plane all religions and spiritual traditions are required by societies to 'deal with' real contradictions, as they are experienced in the lives of individuals who exist within the particular societies which have given rise to them. Thus Christianity for some fifteen hundred years has not attempted to 'reconcile' practically, and nor could it, 'good' with 'evil', love with hatred, violence with peacefulness, aggression with tenderness. What it has done, particularly in the Catholic, Baroque, Counter-Reformation form it took on in the Spanish American colonies such as Nueva Granada, was to entrain its subjects to accept, live with, and expect, moral inconsistencies in life. Colonial subjects, especially Indians and black slaves, were required to bow down before their Colonial rulers or else suffer naked violence, at the same time as to show piety, accept suffering gladly as the Christian saints and martyrs had done, and to control their bodily passions. Christianity expected its subjects to fight and kill in wars where required, execute and torture or otherwise punish miscreants or heretics as defined by the temporal or ecclesiastical authorities, at the same time as to yearn for peaceful sanctity, adore divine, spiritual beauty and tranquillity, and to worship a supposed God of love, forgiveness, and mercy.

Meanwhile, the shamanistic cosmologies of indigenous Colombia also had to square the existential coexistence of peace with violence, aggression with gentleness, good with evil. It is simply that Reichel-Dolmatoff, in sympathy with other observers and commentators, seems to find the latter's 'solutions' to these problems of existence more metaphysically satisfying, less ethically hypocritical and contradictory, and more psychologically compatible with the deepest, universal levels of the human psyche and its archetypes, than their counterparts within Christianity.

The aspect of shamanistic ethical philosophy which we are discussing here, and which Reichel-Dolmatoff deals with frequently, is a non-dualistic one: unlike Christianity and most other monotheisms, which are inevitably and inherently morally hypocritical, or at least contradictory, the shaman's cosmos is not divided into 'good' and 'evil' dimensions. Or, at least, where it is, the Creator is not assumed to be both omnipotent and all-good, as is the God of Christianity,

possessed as He is of 'Divine Perfection'. Thus, Reichel-Dolmatoff records his Desana informant in *Amazonian Cosmos* as saying that:

“.....the Sun did not create only the principle of good but also of evil, to punish mankind when it did not follow the customs of tradition.”

(AC) p.28

And Reichel-Dolmatoff states very clearly elsewhere in *Amazonian Cosmos*:

“Although omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, this divine personification (the Creator of the Universe, the Sun, or the Sun Father) is not without moral blemish because, as we saw in the myth, he committed the outrageous sin of incest. He is an anthropomorphic god who himself passed through a moral transformation, from a state of purity to sinfulness and then back again to purity, thus being as much an image as a model of an anxiety-charged social situation.”

(AC) p.41

Just as shamanistic cosmology is ultimately pantheistic, uniting the natural with the supernatural, so is shamanism's philosophy ultimately unifying on the ethical plane. Thus, it seems that Reichel-Dolmatoff's idea of the 'philosophy of shamanism' once again implies that, unlike Christianity and the other 'Semitic' religions, it is not orientated towards light squashing out dark, 'good' overcoming evil, 'goodness' bleaching out 'badness'. And so, Reichel-Dolmatoff records his Desana informant in *Amazonian Cosmos* as reporting that:

“.....the Sun gave *Vihó-mahse* (the Being of *Vihó*, the hallucinogenic powder through which people could put themselves in contact with all the other supernatural beings) the power of being good and evil and put him in the Milky Way.....”

(AC) pp.27-28

This cosmic attitude, which Reichel-Dolmatoff seems implicitly to hold himself, makes for a more sane, gentler in the long run, calmer psychological orientation than exists in the Western, especially the Protestant Anglo-Saxon and Germanic psychic worlds; obsessed as they are with purging all that is wrong with the world, killing the enemy, overcoming obstacles, mentally controlling physical and physiological nature; turning everything around one into what one believes it should *really* be like.

Equally of course, an emphasis runs through Reichel-Dolmatoff's work, that sexuality is normal in the natural and supernatural worlds of *Colombia Indígena*. Here for example is part of the Desana Creation Myth from *Amazonian Cosmos*:

“The Daughter of the Sun had not yet reached puberty when her father made love to her. The Sun committed incest with her at Wainambí Rapids, and her blood flowed forth; since then, women must lose blood every month in remembrance of the incest of the Sun and so that this great wickedness will not be forgotten. But his daughter liked it and so she lived with her father as if she were his wife. She thought about sex so much that she became thin and ugly and lifeless. Newly married couples become

pale and thin because they only think of the sexual act, and this is called *gamúri*. But when the Daughter of the Sun had her second menstruation, the sex act did harm to her and she did not want to eat anymore. She lay down on a rock, dying; her imprint there can still be seen on a large boulder at Wainambí Rapids. When the Sun saw this, he decided to make *gamú bayári*, the invocation that is made when the girls reach puberty. The Sun smoked tobacco and revived her. Thus, the Sun established customs and invocations that are still performed when young girls have their first menstruation.

“(Although the original incest forms the mythical basis of the law of exogamy, the theme is not well developed. The informant mentioned several times that the Daughter of the Sun was “very frolicsome” and makes her appear as a seductress.)”

(AC) pp.28-29 plus note 10

Sexuality may need to be controlled, as Reichel-Dolmatoff strongly insists is the case in Tukano culture, but this is a matter of energy balances and regulation, not of repressive morality. Sexuality could indeed scarcely be thought of in negative moralistic judgemental terms, when phallic penetration of the female is so central a metaphor for all of life, in such great contrast with Christianity's obsession with the chaste, 'pure', Virgin Mary who gives birth to Jesus Christ without needing to be penetrated by a man's penis:

“El carácter fálico del chamán se expresa generalmente en las actividades rituales relacionadas con la siembra, la caza, la pesca, la recolección de frutas silvestres, es decir en los ritos que puntualizan los principales hechos en los ciclos biológicos. Las semillas de las plantas o la freza de los peces se equiparan con el semen humano y el acto de una cosecha se compara con un parto. Sobre el nivel alucinatorio simbólico, el chamán amazónico se presenta a veces directamente como procreador de la fauna. Entre los indios Cubeo del Vaupés, a comienzos de este siglo, se celebran bailes fálicos rituales ejecutados por hombres enmascarados quines, con gestos inequívocos “regaban el semen” en todas las direcciones.

“Los mismos gestos se pueden observar cuando los chamanes de otras tribus Tukano “diseminan” el cascabeleo de sus bastones fálicos provistos de una sonajera, interpretando esto como un rito de fertilidad. La azada ritual y el adorno formado por un cilindro de cuarzo, también son insignias fálicas del chamán Tukano. Muchos personajes chamánicos que figuran en la mitología kogi, son seres fálicos y actúan en los episodios míticos, sea en un sentido benéfico de procreadores y gestores de la fertilidad, o en un sentido negativo, como seductores y agresores. En el Chocó, las tallas chamánicas de madera frecuentemente son itifálicas y en la arqueología del país abundan representaciones de este tipo. En la sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, la desfloración de las jóvenes es un acto ritual chamánico. En varios idiomas Tukano, el chamán se denomina *yee*, palabra derivada del verbo *yeéri*, copular. En muchos aspectos, la curación de enfermedades implica un simbolismo de impregnación, de revitalización, y es el chamán Tukano, en su imagen fálica quien actúa entonces como curandero. Sería largo enumerar más ejemplos; la esencia de las ideas subyacentes es que el chamán representa una energía procreadora.”

(OC) pp.28-30

And how could people who have the following as their essential *Genesis*, possibly be *too* anti-erotic?

“Al comienzo de los tiempos, el Padre Sol, principio invisible de energía eligió un lugar sobre la línea ecuatorial donde su vara sonajera se levantara derecha sin producir sombra. Gotas de semen cayeron de él sobre la tierra formando un remolino; pronto emergieron los primeros seres humanos y luego se embarcaron en enormes canoas, en forma de anaconda, que los llevaron río arriba”.

(CS) p. 23

The same point is clearly indicated, from a different angle, in Reichel-Dolmatoff's reference to the ethnographer Konrad Preuss's work on the Kogi, early in the 20th Century:

“Parece que el puritanismo de Preuss y su marcada impaciencia con los indios le habían cerrado muchas vías de investigación y similarmente parecía haber ocurrido con otros estudiosos.”

(K1) p.13

It seems obvious that a good deal of the ethical philosophy considered above has been carried forward, or has percolated into, modern, erotically permissive Colombian cultural attitudes.

Reichel-Dolmatoff has no hesitation about linking, as does Mircea Eliade, the ancient shaman's descent into the Underworld – whether in the Old or New Worlds – with the Graeco-Roman myths of Orpheus, Odysseus, or Aeneas. This is what Reichel-Dolmatoff writes about the Kogi of the Sierra Nevada:

“Entre los Kogi de la Sierra Nevada, el chamán mítico Duginávi, visita varios mundos superpuesto y desciende por una cuerda al mundo de los muertos; en varias de estas dimensiones cósmicas, Duginávi se demora y recibe enseñanzas esotéricas. En otro mito de los mismos indios, el chamán Nahúna visita el mundo de los muertos y recibe enseñanzas de ellos. Ambos mitos de los Kogi contienen el tema de Orfeo y Eurídice.”

(OC) p.27

Reichel-Dolmatoff can assume these connections because he always thinks of a particular Colombian ethnic group's form of shamanistic spirituality as existing in relation to a larger, more general, New World form of shamanistic spirituality, and this latter with a pan-human, universal form of shamanistic spirituality, which includes Old World forms. This latter, universal spirituality in its turn implicitly incorporates, or infuses into, all kinds of human creative-visionary psychic-spiritual life. It is a matter of grasping, for Reichel-Dolmatoff, one dynamic totality as being situated within another, larger totality; and the latter within a yet greater, more complex, dynamic whole; rather as the Marxist literary critic Lucien Goldmann was wont to place a particular literary work within a bigger world-vision, and then situate this dialectically within the 'mental structure', or *Weltanschauung*, of a particular social group or class; and to see

this last as part of a dynamic, interactive set of relationships within a wider social whole, or social formation.

Reichel-Dolmatoff uses a socio-historical typology which has become virtually universal now among archaeologists, anthropologists, and sociological theorists. It rests on the distinctions between the nomadic, hunter-gathering *band*; the settled, or partially settled, village-based *tribe*, which is at least partially horticultural; the *chiefdom*; and fourthly, *state* society.

A core idea of *Orfebrería Y Chamanismo* is that it was in those societies that had attained chiefdom types of socio-political organization in pre-Hispanic Colombia, that gold work developed a hugely important status. In these societies shamans were beginning to take on, or had already fully taken on, the status of priests. Reichel-Dolmatoff makes it clear that in his view the present-day Kogi are also a people in this category:

“Entre los kogi, según el alto desarrollo que ha tenido la religión, se justificaría usar el término sacerdote.”

(OC) p.27 note 11

Reichel-Dolmatoff ends the chapter *La Cosmovisión Chamanística* in *Orfebrería Y Chamanismo* with the following summary of this idea:

“Para terminar este capítulo, caben algunas breves observaciones acerca de la relación que puede haber habido entre la cosmovisión chamanística y ciertos contextos sociales de los grupos orfebres de Colombia.

“Aunque no se dispone de fechas cronológicas precisas, parece que el auge de la orfebrería coincide con los llamados Cacicazgos o Señoríos, muy aproximadamente entre 500 antes de Cristo y la época de la conquista española. Los principales cacicazgos se desarrollaron en la Cordillera Central, en el Macizo Andino, el valle del Cauca, Tolima, el altiplano nariñense en la Costa Caribe. Rodeados por sociedades tribales más o menos extensas, los cacicazgos existían en la época de la Conquista y tenían un marcado carácter bélico; hay indicios de que estas guerras internas, con su secuela de migraciones, canibalismo, sacrificios humanos y contactos entre culturas muy variadas, ya existían desde épocas muy remotas.

“Los cacicazgos eran unidades políticas autónomas que, por lo general, abarcaban varias aldeas dominadas por un solo jefe. Otro rasgo característico consistía en que se trataba de sociedades de rango (a diferencia de clases), a saber: el cacique y su parentela, una categoría de jefes de menor rango, los chamanes o sacerdotes, los guerreros, el común de las gentes y, eventualmente, una categoría de prisioneros de guerra o esclavos. Como es obvio, se trataba de sociedades esencialmente desiguales, un rasgo que, por cierto, se relacionaba generalmente con la posesión y el uso de oro.

“Aunque se sabe muy poco acerca de la relación entre la institución del cacicazgo y la orfebrería, en términos de causas y consecuencias, la gran importancia del oro en este

tipo de sociedades está conformada por las crónicas españolas y los hallazgos hechos en las tumbas indígenas. Por cierto, su importancia continúa en la faz socio-política estatal que, en algunos casos siguió la de los cacicazgos.

“Una distintiva de los cacicazgos consistía en el hecho de que la religión estaba centrada en templos, donde había uno o varios ídolos, algunos de oro. Esta combinación de chamán-templo-ídolo, aparentemente no existía en las sociedades tribales y dio al chamanismo una función muy importante en los cacicazgos, elevando a veces al chamán aun status sacerdotal.”

(OC) p.31

If we take seriously the associations made by Mircea Eliade and Reichel-Dolmatoff, between such ancient Greek myths as those that concern Orpheus, with Amerindian or Siberian Shamanism, it becomes fascinating to speculate about the similarities that must have existed in the kinds of society in which those myths originated. Like most Greek myths, the origins of Orpheus myths were pre-Homeric – that is, in Homer’s time they were already old, probably Mycenaean or older. The archaic civilizations of Mycenaean Greece were chiefdoms, whose ‘chiefs’, ‘kings’, or ‘lords’ were such as the legendary Agamemnon. The tombs of these kings have, of course, yielded the most fantastic gold work, ever since Heinrich Schliemann commenced his explorations.

In the following passage from his Introduction to the Second Edition of *Los Kogi*, Reichel-Dolmatoff speculates precisely upon the relationships that exist between the study of the ‘Kogi world’, and that of Mediterranean Antiquity, as well as touching on a number of the most important of his ‘organizing ideas’ in respect of his life-work generally, to which I constantly find myself returning throughout this essay:

“La cultura Kogi ha ganado la admiración y el respeto de mucha gente que ven en ella una opción válida, una filosofía trascendental e importante para nuestra época. Creo que el conocimiento de la cultura Kogi ha enriquecido la vida de tantos de mis lectores; es mucho lo que debemos a estos indios, y más aún lo que podríamos aprender de ellos.

“En un comienzo, cuando penetré lentamente en el mundo Kogi me sentí atraído por la exuberancia de sus imágenes; era un mundo impresionante por su coherencia y su organización. Pero tan pronto como me familiaricé con su lenguaje simbólico pude darme cuenta de que, por extraño que fuese, era un mundo en el cual se podría participar, pues muchas de sus formas y contenidos me eran en parte conocidas mediante otras culturas, antiguas, históricas y aun reciente. Lo que en realidad encontré entre los Kogi no fue un *corpus* disecado de datos que podía formar un escrito académico, sino el conocimiento coherente de una realidad profundamente relevante para mi propia cultura tradicional. Los años que pasé con los Kogi me enseñaron que el estudio detallado de las últimas sociedades remanentes, mal llamadas “primitivas”, constituye la última oportunidad de conocer nuestras propias raíces culturales. Los antiguos mundos del Mediterráneo y del Medio Oriente, cunas de nuestra civilización, se hacen más comprensibles al estudiarlos antropológica y

diacrónicamente, es decir, al apreciar en ellos no sólo las elevadas ideas éticas y estéticas de sus períodos clásicos sino al explorar también sus fases subyacentes y formativas; al reconstruir sus gentes de carne y hueso, junto con sus categorías e imágenes hermenéuticas, sus sistemas simbólicos, sus metáforas y metonimias. Al analizar los antiguos textos – Hesíodo o el Gilgamesh son ejemplos obvios – encontramos en ellos una base común, un parentesco innegable con los estilos ideológicos de los indios americanos. En la actualidad, los historiadores-antropólogos franceses, tales como Louis Gernet, Marcel Detiene, Jean Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Nacquet y otros, al aplicar una metodología esencialmente etnológica estructuralista al mundo de la antigüedad, no están revelando formas de pensamiento que esclarecen y enriquecen inmensurablemente nuestros conocimientos acerca de los orígenes y desenvolvimientos de la Civilización Occidental.

“¿Cómo podríamos entonces menospreciar las milenarias tradiciones de los Kogi, los Huitoto, los Tukano? Un texto mítico recogido en las orillas del Amazonas o en las faldas de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta nos debe infundir el mismo respeto, la misma admiración por el vuelo del espíritu humano, que un texto en sánscrito o un texto en latín o griego. ¿No es *uno* el género humano? Los chamanes, los sacerdotes y filósofos de todas las sociedades de la tierra han ideado imágenes vívidas en las cuales representan situaciones focales de la condición humana, sean ellas los predicamentos físicos de la sobrevivencia individual o social, o sean ellas las dimensiones espirituales y visionarias. Estas imágenes vividas en las cuales representan situaciones focales de la condición humana, sean ellas los predicamentos físicos de la sobrevivencia individual o social, o sena ellas las dimensiones espirituales y visionarias. Esas imágenes son esenciales porque permiten la categorización y el manejo de situaciones críticas. No cabe duda de que el estilo, la selección y el contenido de estas imágenes chamanísticas y religiosas de las culturas indígenas son de suprema relevancia para la interpretación de nuestra propia imaginaria, ya que la base neuropsicológica de esta condición es la misma. ¿Qué tan cerca está el pensamiento medieval europea al pensamiento chamanístico de América? ¿Dónde está el límite entre el santo y el chamán? Los Kogi son una de las tribus colombianas que manifiestan una profunda conciencia del sentido trágico de la vida. Las tribus selváticas de las tierras bajas tropicales son a veces dramáticas en sus ritos y mitos, dionisiacas si se quiere, hundidas en el fácil éxtasis de las drogas alucinógenas. El clasicismo de los Kogi, en cambio busca el equilibrio, el “acuerdo” como dicen ellos. Pero el camino hacia tal estado de ecuanimidad y beatitud se ve obstruído a cada instante por la *hybris* o la inercia del hombre. En la mitología Kogi encontramos personajes e imágenes inolvidables que expresan esta idea de un destino trágico. Ahí aparecen chamanes soberbio, madres consoladoras, la insolencia del poder y la búsqueda del visionario que, mas allá del Bien y del Mal, explora las dimensiones de otros mundos dentro de su propio ser.”

(K1) pp.15-17

Reichel-Dolmatoff's conclusions about the relationships between shamanism, chiefdoms, and gold work are quite unequivocal, with respect to pre-Hispanic Colombian cultures:

“.....las representaciones del vuelo chamánico son tan frecuentes en la orfebrería, este debe haber tenido una función social muy importante. Al respecto caben varias preguntas: Fue el éxtasis chamánico un escape, la búsqueda de una existencia espiritual, de una realidad aparte? Era el vuelo un objetivo o era solo un medio? Fue un refugio para un grupo de iniciados? O, por lo contrario, fue la experiencia alucinatoria la fuente de la violencia y la de la destrucción característica de muchos cacicazgos? Nunca lo sabremos. La imagen alada simboliza tanto la ascensión a las alturas, como también el descenso a los avernos.”

(OC) p.32

Reichel-Dolmatoff also points out that

“Los cronistas hablan muy claramente de la gran influencia que tuvieron los chamanes en sus comunidades y que a veces casi superaban la autoridad de los caciques. En gran parte la autoridad del chamán se basaba en sus visiones.....”

(OC) p.32

Transformation, both as an abstraction and as a concrete experience, is of course inherent to shamanism, as it is to myth, dream, and hallucination. Symbol-condensation and transformation are intrinsic to the Freudian understanding of the human unconscious mind, and thus to human spiritual and aesthetic creativity generally. Transformation and metamorphosis are not only central to Reichel-Dolmatoff’s interpretations of shamanistic flights, of the relationship between the shaman and his animal spirits, and to shamanistic magic overall, but also to the relationship between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in the Amazonian shamanistic world. In another section of the Desana Creation Myth as it is presented in *Amazonian Cosmos*, Reichel-Dolmatoff’s informant recounts that:

“The Sun had the first maloca built. This was in *gahpí-bu* / “place of the yajé plant,” on the Macú-paraná River, in the place that is now called Wainambí. He ordered *Emekóri-mahse*, *Diroá-mahse*, *Vihó-mahse*, and *Vai-mahse* to teach the first Desana how to make their homes. When they had built the first maloca, *Vihó-mahse*, and with him sickness and sorcery, hid in the cracks and crannies of the house posts to do evil to the people. *Vihó-mahse* made use of the “ancient eagles” (*gàa meera*) which were sitting in the trees near the house. The eagles were chewing coca, and their beaks were flecked with white. The eagles brought nets in the shape of funnels; they were like the nets that are now used for fishing, and they put them on the doors of the maloca to trap the people. Then the evilness hid again in the cracks of the house posts, and the eagles put up other nets until there were two at each door. But *Diroá-mahse* trapped the eagles and wrapped them up in the nets and threw them into the Milky Way. There the eagles took bodily form again; since then they have been beneficent and take care of the malocas.

“(This transformation of the eagles from “evil” to “good” is not clear; there is a lacuna here in the Myth.)”

(AC) p. 29 plus note 11

In the following paragraph, Reichel-Dolmatoff pithily expresses the essence of the worldview that so often belongs to small-scale hunter-gathering societies:

“Los mitos cosmológicos que expresan la visión del mundo de los Tukano, no describen el lugar del hombre en la Naturaleza en términos de superioridad o de dominio sobre un ambiente subordinado; tampoco expresan en absoluto la noción de lo que podría llamarse entre nosotros “armonía con la naturaleza”. La naturaleza, desde su punto de vista, no es una entidad física que exista aparte del hombre y, por consiguiente, éste no puede enfrentársele u oponérsele, ni armonizar con ella como si fuese entidad separada. El hombre puede ocasionalmente desequilibrarla al funcionar defectuosamente como parte de la naturaleza, pero nunca puede existir independientemente de ella. El hombre se considera parte de un conjunto de sistemas supraindividuales, sean ellos biológicos o culturales, que trascienden la vida individual y dentro de los cuales la supervivencia y la conservación de cierta calidad de vida sólo son posibles si se permite también a todas las demás formas de vida evolucionar en concordancia con sus necesidades específicas, como lo establecen los mitos y tradiciones

(CS) p.20

It is just such a worldview which modern ‘eco-philosophy’ is so desperate to recreate, albeit on new terms, within modern, global, market-capitalist society. Its essence lies in the conviction that ‘society’ should exist, and work, in harmony with ‘nature’.

If such a shift in values, practices, and institutions were to occur in modern global society, nothing less than an ‘eco-socialist’ revolution would be implicated. I think it is reasonable to assume that Reichel-Dolmatoff would have welcomed such a global transformation.

Reichel-Dolmatoff was quite specific about correlating Amazonian hunter-gatherer Indian cosmologies with the most advanced ‘ecological’, ‘systems theories’ of society in its interactions with nature:

“.....quisiera anotar que hasta época muy reciente los etnólogos y arqueólogos han tratado de explicar la evolución y el cambio cultural en términos de modelos lineales de causa y efecto, enfoque que todavía utiliza la mayoría de los especialistas en estos campos. Gregory Bateson fue el primer etnógrafo en percibir la necesidad de aplicar el modelo de la teoría de sistemas para interpretar sus datos etnográficos, aunque su ahora ya clásica monografía sobre Nueva Guinea fue escrita mucho antes de que se desarrollaran los aspectos formales de la teoría de sistemas.

“Entre los arqueólogos ha habido una especial propensión a depender de explicaciones y modelos de tipo “causa y efecto”, construidos sobre los principios de la causalidad lineal; esta tendencia se ha acentuado con el movimiento intelectual denominado “Nueva Arqueología”. Recientemente Kent Flannery ha hecho notar que la “Nueva Arqueología” emplea dos clases muy diferentes de modelos explicativos. Una de tales escuelas, a la que Flannery ha dado el nombre de “arqueología de la ley y el orden”, es explícita en su adhesión a la causalidad lineal.

“La otra tendencia, menos popular, es la aplicación de la teoría de sistemas para interpretar el cambio cultural, atribuyendo su dinámica a desviaciones muy lentas que se originan en parte del sistema y que luego se convierten en modificaciones mayores. Al parecer, este enfoque tiene más probabilidades de producir modelos significativos que el de “la Ley y el Orden”.

“Es notable que desde hacia varias décadas, tanto etnógrafos como arqueólogos hayan comenzado a aceptar como único modelo explicativo que puede usarse para manejar las relaciones ecológicas, el tipo de modelo de sistemas generales adoptado por los indios “primitivos” desde hace largo tiempo.”

(CS) p.20

In *Amazonian Cosmos* Reichel-Dolmatoff describes Desana cosmology thus:

“The principle energy of the Sun does not operate along a straight line, fertilizing this or that aspect of the Creation, but constitutes mainly a huge closed circuit in which the entire biosphere participates. The Desana imagine this circuit as having a fixed quantity of energy that flows eternally between man and animal, between society and nature. The quantity of energy being fixed, man must remove what he needs only under certain conditions and must convert this particle of “borrowed” energy into a form that can be reincorporated into the circuit. For example, when an animal is killed the energy of the local fauna is reduced; when the game is converted into food, however, the current continues, now in the field of society, because the consumers of the food acquire energy that previously belonged to the animal. This energy is handled in two ways: taken as biospermatic energy, it is repressed and thus returns to the capital of total energy in which the animals participate again; taken as mere vitality and health, it returns to the total energy of the biosphere. This, then, is a process of feedback. Any human action that participates in the circuit restores energy to nature that, for its part, acts on society again. The individual should never cause an interruption in the circuit; that is, he should never use energy without restoring it again.”

(AC) p.50

Reichel-Dolmatoff seems to have conceived of shamanistic philosophy, or cosmology, as something similar to Coleridge’s Romantic philosophy as presented in the latter’s *Biographica Literaria*. The creativity of the individual Shaman for the first, and of the Poet for the second worldview, partakes of a wider, divine, ultimate cosmic creativity. In between these levels lie the acts of creation, progressively, of particular human groups, whole societies, all humanity, and then all nature.

The summary Reichel-Dolmatoff provides in the chapter of his *Amazonian Cosmos* called *The Creator And His Creation*, of what might be called the *shamanistic philosophy of ultimate creation*, as he heard it from his Desana informant, reads like this:

“The Sun Creator was not the same sun that now illuminates our earth but a creative principle that, although continuing in existence, is now invisible and can be known only by the beneficial influence that emanates from it. After the act of Creation and of the establishment of the moral norms, the sun returned to *Ahpikondiá*, the region of Paradise, not to remain there as a *deus otiosus* but continuing to participate in his Creation. He sent on his eternal representative, this sun that we see today in the sky, and it is through it that the Creator Sun exercises his power, giving his Creation light, heat, protection and, above all, fertility.

“The Creation consists of four fundamental elements that, in innumerable constellations and microcosmic combinations, constitute the basis of the Universe and of the life that animates it: land, water, air, and energy. Our world is formed by land and water; that is, the forests and rivers that are two opposing but complementary elements. That which is land is masculine and that which is water is feminine. Their dichotomy is essential because it establishes the model for all that is created and will be created. It is a sexual dichotomy but, in a wider sense, it represents the division between categories of givers and receivers, thus establishing a system of reciprocal relationships. The obligatory coincidence of opposites leads to new creations, or more correctly speaking, to procreations, and these establish new obligations and ties among their components. Between these two principles, the air, the great asexual element, expands between, this world and the supernatural world, between the biosphere (the term is used here in the meaning of P. Teilhard de Chardin) and the exosphere; it is, therefore, the communicating element through which contact is established.

“But above all is the element of energy. Energy is the element of the Sun itself and is essentially beneficent and protecting. It seeks the continuity of life through the cycle of fertilization and gestation, of growth and renewed procreation. It is the energy of the Sun that makes women conceive and give birth, makes the animals reproduce and the plants grow and causes the fruit to ripen. But other cyclical phenomena are also subject to this power; the movement of the stars, the seasons of the year, the scarcity or abundance of food, and the increase or decrease of physiological human phenomena. So the energy of procreation-creation is a masculine power that fertilizes a feminine element that is the world. Of course, the biosphere has both masculine and feminine aspects, but seen in its totality, as a field of creation, it has primarily a feminine character over which the Sun exercises its power.

“We will summarize at this point some principles that can be derived from what has been said In the first place, the creative principle is masculine (Sun, yellow) and acts upon the biosphere (red) that although composed of a masculine element and a feminine one, is imagined essentially as a feminine element. In the second place, the Universe consists of three super-imposed planes. The upper zone is divided into a solar sphere (orange-yellow-white) and a blue sphere of communication, this last being constituted by the Milky Way. While the solar sphere is exclusively beneficent, the stellar sphere is ambivalent because it contains an ambiguous seminal concept (semen = sickness); both spheres are eventually subject to the manipulations of

human beings who are endowed with the capacity of trance and, therefore, with communication. The intermediate zone of the biosphere is not divided except in its western part, associated with sickness. The lower zone has a paradisaical-uterine character (coca, green) and is, at the same time, the dwelling place of the Creator Sun, once again combining a masculine principle with a feminine one.”

(AC) pp.41-47

The ambiguous (in respect of being both ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’) erotic creativity into whose realm we have now been brought, could not be more powerfully complemented than by the following druggy, but also sickly, voyeuristic eroticism from The Creation Myth as it was narrated to Reichel-Dolmatoff by his Desana informant:

“The Daughter of the Sun..... had been cooking, and suddenly the contents of the vessel boiled over, almost putting out the fire. The Daughter of the Sun became angry and cried: “Well, then, go out!” and she urinated on the embers. Then they burned her pubic hairs and the odor spread out everywhere. *Vihó-mahse* was looking and became distracted. Then, instead of observing the world from the Milky Way he began to think of the vagina of the Daughter of the Sun.”

(AC) p.35

Reichel-Dolmatoff explains that:

“.....the Milky Way is interpreted as an immense seminal flow that fertilizes all of the intermediate zone, or the underlying biosphere. This principle of fertilization has, however, a somewhat ambivalent character. In the first place, the Milky Way is the zone of communication where contact between terrestrial beings and supernatural beings is established. These contacts are obtained by means of hallucinogenic drugs or, at least, by means of visions induced by a state of profound concentration. The Milky Way is directly designated as a “zone of hallucinations and visions” into which the payé and other persons who take a hallucinogenic drug can penetrate and thereby pass from one cosmic level to another. This zone is dominated by *Vihó-mahse*, the divine personification of the *vihó* powder (*Piptadenia*) who, in a state of perpetual trance, travels along this celestial way observing the earth and its inhabitants. In their trance the payés rise to the Milky Way to ask *Vihó-mahse* to serve as intermediary with the other divine personifications, *Emekóri-mahse*, *Diroá-mahse*, or *Vai-mahse*. But on the other hand, the Milky Way is the dwelling place of the sicknesses. It can be thought of as a large, rising river in whose turbulent and foaming waters float residue and waste; these are the essences of putrefaction and, consequently, are very dangerous pathogenic factors for living beings. Putrefaction is the same as illness, and *Vihó-mahse* can channel the current in such a way that illnesses come to contaminate the earth. The Milky Way is also the place where the vultures live, or the “ancient eagles.” These are large birds that feed on carrion and are therefore closely associated with putrefaction and sickness. At times, these birds offer their services to mankind and carry diseases from the earth to the sky, to put them there, using the Milky Way as a kind of “dung-heap” where these noxious elements float and drift forever. *Vihó-mahse* is nothing but an intermediary between the payé and society. Since a payé may

try to act with evil intentions, Vihó-mahse occupies a very ambiguous position and can cause good as well as evil. Since the birds mentioned occupy a similar position, the Milky Way is a zone of great danger. In the dimension of hallucinations, man can obtain good and find divine illumination, but, in taking undue advantage of this state, he can also cause evil. Of course, the two components – the fertilizing seminal skein and the current or “rotten wastes” of a pathogenic character – form part of one single concept of insemination and contagion.

“(For the Desana any insemination has the character of a pathological contagion; the sexual act is dangerous in any circumstance.)”

(AC) pp. 43-45 plus note 4

The following discussion of the Desana divinity is also crucial:

“The divinity is a “bone” because of his strength, his resistance, and his quality of being an axis, a center. He is, then, an *axis mundi* and constitutes the basis of the moral validity. When the divinity is compared with a bone, the Desana attribute to him the stability that he, in turn, gives to the organism that is the Universe. But seen on the second plane, the bone acquires new and even more important characteristics. The Desana compare the divine bone with a tube, and in this form it is designated as *ve`e go`á*. The word *ve`e* means “tubular cane,” like those used to make thin flutes or an arrow, and this tube is said to connect the divine sphere “on high” with the divine sphere “below,” the latter being imagined as a primogenic uterus located under our world. This uterus is *Ahpikondiá*, and the tubular bone that is the divinity penetrates the Universe vertically in the form of an immense phallus. “The bone-god is a penis,” says our informant, and adds “This tube, this bone makes contact between man and *Ahpikondiá*: through it arises inspiration. It is the principal channel that interconnects. The bone-god is the penis, the fundamental part of the Creation.” The process of fertilization is effected through the bone-tube that unites the cosmic levels in permanent copulation and, the informant adds, “Between the visible world and the invisible there is sexual contact.”

(AC) p.49

In the course of a discussion of *bogá*, which means ‘a factor of fertilizing communication’, Reichel-Dolmatoff returns to the question of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in Desana philosophy:

“The informant says: “*Bogá* has two meanings: good and evil; the owl takes part in the evil aspect. The owl is the representation of the waste of *bogá*.” This idea of the waste of *bogá* is obviously related to an action that diminishes the total energy of the circuit, an attitude represented in this case by an animal closely associated with a principle of evil. The evil character of *bogá* appears clearly in the following example: When a person with evil intentions wants to do harm to a pregnant woman, he invokes the “black skein” (*bogá nyi`i*). This is a negative power that obscures the “yellow skein” or, as the informant also expresses it: “.....it makes the *gohséri bogá* (light) turn black.” An intermediate form of such malefic magic is found in the case of those who attempt to cause an illness to a newly born child. *Nyi`i diabiiri bogá*

(black-reddish *bogá*) is invoked. The informant says: “Then the child suffers because of the black aspect, but does not die as a consequence. There are two aspects: the reddish one is good and the black is evil.””

(AC) p. 53

Here we see that the principle of ‘evil’ is connected with a loss or waste of energy, and with ill-health, not with ‘immorality’ in its Western, ‘Christian’ sense. ‘Evil’ is that which disrupts cosmic harmony, which Reichel-Dolmatoff describes thus:

“The larger circuit of fertilization-fecundity, of the attraction of two fundamental complementary elements, embraces all the biosphere, all the Cosmos, in a grand synthesis of the structure of the Universe. This structure is hyperbiological in that it derives from the model of sexual physiology an endless number of associations, images, and symbols that withdraws farther and farther from physical facts until it constitutes a dynamic philosophy of equilibrium.”

(AC) p. 55

Of course, one must be aware of the many different versions of theological Christian morality when making generalizations such as I have just made here. Thus, for example, the Colombian Dominican scholar Luis Francisco Sastoque emphasizes that Christian morality is based on free choice, and emanates outwards from the deepest essence of the human being. Moral goodness is a participation in “el Sumo Bien, la Bienaventuranza eternal, la felicidad”; it entails the possibility of freely cooperating “con Dios, en la realización del orden del universo.” And very much like Reichel-Dolmatoff’s Desana informant, Sastoque states that:

“.....al obrar el mal la persona hace mucho más que adquirir una perfección, es causa actuante y total-dentro de su propio orden- de que se haga presente en el mundo la acción de Dios, que conduce al universo hacia la manifestación de su gloria. Y, por lo mismo, al obrar el mal la persona no sólo falta a la racionalidad de su naturaleza, como ocurre en la moral de Aristóteles, o compromete su destino por una falta, como ocurre en los mitos de Platón; sino que introduce el desorden –el pecado- en el orden divino.”

Sastoque, pp.17,19,20

Nevertheless, it is surely fair to say that, throughout the great sweep of its history, Christian morality has mostly entailed a simplistic and simplifying dualistic dogma of ‘goodness’ as being engaged in a perpetual struggle with ‘evil’. Christian moral goodness has in practice been anything but a matter of ‘inner’ or freely chosen attitudes and actions: it has usually been a question of obedience to an externally imposed list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’.

Reichel-Dolmatoff says:

“.....the soul is a kind of mark or sign that the Sun gives to each individual, but which is devoid of any moral principle.....”

“The soul is immortal inasmuch as it is the part of the individual that returns to *Ahpikondiá* (the paradisiacal uterus), where the body rises again as a hummingbird; however, the soul can separate itself occasionally from the body during life as, for example, during a hallucinatory state.....

“.....the soul is not considered an individual element related to a moral concept but is simply an organ, to be sure the most vital, but interchangeable and impersonal.”

(AC) p.67

Lest one might imagine Reichel-Dolmatoff is in the slightest bit over-idealistic about the Desana, let us read the following observation he makes about their culture:

“Spiritually and psychologically, in terms of our culture, the Desana is not an individual we would call contented, balanced, and adjusted. His sense of being a man is dominated by the constant conflict between his attempts to balance the normal gratification of his sexual impulses and the prohibitions that his culture imposes on him. The message of the Sun Father, of avoiding incest and of maintaining exogamy, is not simply a code designed to regulate sexual relationships in the narrow circle of relatives living together in one maloca or in one neighbourhood; it has a much wider and deeper meaning for the culture. Underlying the problem are economic considerations involved in maintaining a viable equilibrium between the productive capacity of the tribal territory and the needs of human consumption. We must not forget that we are dealing here with sedentary groups that tenaciously insist on the hunt as a cultural focus. The biotic equilibrium is thus easily upset.”

(AC) p.67

Here we have a ‘base-and-superstructure’ analysis that relates the ecology and economy of the Desana to their culture and psychology, and grasps contradictions in their lifestyle in relation to their material existence; as something in dynamic transformation or transition, between hunter-gathering and horticulture, and perhaps periodically back again to hunter-gathering.

A philosopher, in the deepest and original sense of the word, is one who both pursues knowledge and loves knowledge; such certainly was Reichel-Dolmatoff, a philosopher therefore in the widest possible sense.

As he probes ‘Desana cosmology’, detail by detail, through one subtle conceptual distinction after another, he periodically enters into broad generalizations, and looks for a moment at the forest rather than the trees. In the following passage, he seems to suggest that the Desana’s worldview is similar to that of Immanuel Kant, though without mentioning the latter’s name. For like Kant, the Desana distinguish between the ‘phenomenal’ world of things, practicality, sensations, and measurable reality, in contrast to the ‘noumenal’ world of the invisible, the imperceptible, and the spiritual:

“Los desana dividen el universo en dos componentes básicos: primero está *deyóri turi*, el mundo “visible” o “transparente”, que comprende a toda la naturaleza y lo que podemos percibir en ella con nuestros sentidos como dimensión material de colores,

temperatura, movimientos, sensaciones olfativas o acústica, o sabor y textura. En dicho mundo, la gente está empeñada en la consecución de comida, *deyo bari*, *deyo bari*, y el alimento se percibe sensorialmente. La otra dimensión es *deyóribi turi*, el mundo “invisible”. Contiene un conjunto diferente de significados, no ocultos sino sólo diferentes en su trascendencia para el hombre. Ser visible es *deyori*, y *kuíru deyóri* es la capacidad del ojo humano para percibir formas, colores o movimientos. Pero *kuíri boyorí* significa reconocer las cualidades no vistas de las cosas; dicha expresión conceptualiza e interpreta. El verbo *boyorí* significa “arrojar luz sobre algo”, y de él se deriva la palabra *boyero*, aurora. Puede emplearse en el sentido físico de “encender”, en el sentido de “ver con claridad”, o en el sentido de “caí en la cuneta de que”. Los chamanes desana dicen que, para poder vivir en el mundo visible, uno debe verlo por medio de intuiciones adquiridas en el mundo invisible. No todo el mundo tiene la capacidad de hacerlo, y sólo la “gente entendida”, *mahsá deyokē iia*, puede reconocer, traducir y transformar los significados del *deyóbero*, lo invisible y así nutrirse espiritualmente. Todos los comestibles consumidos en este mundo tangible deben evaluarse y manejarse de acuerdo con sus cualidades no visibles. En resumen, *deyóro*, lo perceptible y *deyóbero*, lo invisible, pueden traducirse como “material” y “espiritual” respectivamente”.

(CSP) p.46

One could also find a resemblance between this Desana worldview and that of the Hegelian Marxist Georg Lukács, with his all-important distinction between the categories of socio-historical ‘essence’, and ‘appearance’.

Reichel-Dolmatoff has no difficulty in moving into implied analogies with central European, abstract ontologies, and then back once again to the magical transformations, the dream-symbolic condensations and associations, the metaphorical imagery, and the erotic fantastical realms of Desana thought:

“Para el Dueño de los Animales, la tierra entera es una enorme telaraña horizontal, *bēhpē suriro*, también de forma hexagonal, cuya estructura, en forma de rueda de carreta, simboliza la red de trochas prescritas por las cuales hombres y animales deben moverse, sin descarriarse jamás de ellas. Los desana dicen que, así como un hombre puede aplastar una telaraña que halle en su trocha de la selva, así mismo *vaimahsē* domina al mundo animal. Se dice que es un mundo frágil, que se altera y perturba con facilidad, y es por ello que se afirma que el Dueño de los Animales ejerce sobre éste un control permanente. El mismo puede parecerse al cazador en forma de araña, y la araña, *bēhpē*, se identifica con el trueno, *buhpú*. *Vai-mahsē* deambula con frecuencia por la Vía Láctea y desde tan ventajoso punto observa las acciones de hombres y bestias. Luego desciende al “nivel de la nube blanca”, *boréri bogá*, bajo el cual se extiende la *dehkó bogá*, “lluvia-energía”, nubes de lluvia oscuras, y desde allí, en forma de relámpago, se proyecta a sí mismo sobre la tierra.

“Asumiendo las funciones de un dios fertilizante de la lluvia, se le imagina arrojando sus rayos de astillas de cuarzo blanco o, mejor, se convierte él mismo en rayo que de repente cae sobre un cerro, un árbol o incluso una maloca. La gente dice: *vai-mahsē*

mohó yuriáya, “*vai-mahsë*-arma su –deja caer”; o bien puede decir: *yee mohó yuriáya*, donde la palabra *yee* representa bien sea un jagua o un chamán. En efecto, el Dueño de los animales es ambos: en forma de jagua r domina a todos los demás animales, y entre sus criaturas es el chamán sabio, el protector, el mediador entre el cazador y su presa. Puede también manifestarse en forma de una gran tormenta o como un gallo de la sierra que exhibe su vivo plumaje amarillo, o como una lagartija, un pez o un pájaro cacique o arrendajo. Algunas veces, además se manifiesta, después de una llovizna, como el fuerte olor de ciertos líquenes y musgos que crecen en el suelo enmarañado de algunas partes de la selva, o como el olor de juventud, *mamari*, como los desana lo llaman aludiendo a sus connotaciones eróticas y a su semejanza con la esencia de los pequeños manojos de hierbas aromáticas, *bará*, que los hombres jóvenes se ponen en sus atuendos en los bailes. Pero a *vai-mashë* también se le identifica con el *boráro*, monstruo de la selva, conocido bajo el nombre de *curupira* por muchos indios amazónicos. En resumen, *vai-mashë* se concibe como una fuerza inmediata de la naturaleza, y como tal se le designa a veces como *túlari bogá*, “fuerza-energía.”

“Debo adelantar aquí algunas observaciones sobre *vai-mëra turi*, “caza-animal-sistema”. La naturaleza, dominios de *vai.-mashë* entendida aquí como el ambiente físico habitado por animales, plantas, se cree contener, en todas sus manifestaciones, el mismo conjunto interrelacionado de energías, *bogári*. Primero todos los animales y plantas, tanto en su carácter de categorías taxonómicas como de especímenes individuales, se dicen contener las mismas series de energías cromáticas que se derivan, respectivamente, del sol y la luna visibles. La distribución proporcional precisa tiene importancia y, en el caso de los animales de caza y los peces, se describe así: un gran componente de negrura, que ocupa cerca de la mitad del conjunto cromático total, está acompañado por una cantidad menor de rojez (potencial de crecimiento femenino), y por una porción todavía menor de amarillos débil y pálido (potencial generativo masculino). El segundo conjunto de “energías”, también presente en todos los animales, está conformado por las calidades inherentes a olores, que son: almizcle, estro y florar; a temperaturas, como “caliente” y “fría”; y a sabores, como “dulce” y amargo”. El esquema completo puede también aplicarse a todos los alimentos silvestres y cultivados.

“Mientras que, en el sistema de pensamiento desana, los hombres son partícipes de la energía solar original, junto con la cual comparten una cantidad igual de todas las energías cromáticas, la vida animal se concibe como enteramente dependiente de los hombres. Esta idea se expresa de varias maneras. En primer lugar, el Dueño de los Animales se imagina como un poderoso cazador que camina por la Vía Láctea de este a oeste, a su regreso de la caza. En su espalda carga su presa, un animal simbolizado por cierta constelación que acaba de levantarse sobre el horizonte. A lo largo del año, *vai-mashë* estará entonces llevando sus animales de caza, peces y frutas por su trocha celestial, para que todos los vean. Tan pronto como determinada especie animal se percata de que su constelación se está elevando, sabe que su estación de cría se acerca, y que su alimento específico, como frutas, bayas, hojas o raíces, estará pronto disponible, gracias al Dueño de los Animales. Por cuanto el Dueño es el mediador

entre animales y hombres, se establece una relación de dependencia. La energía humana se transmite a través del circuito humano; el suyo es un circuito en el cual el hombre, al consumir animales, transmite la energía de éstos y la transforma en su fuerza vital, que está restringida a este mundo. Los animales lloran a la muerte de una persona, por cuanto un portador potencial, un eslabón en su circuito energético, ha desaparecido. La energía animal depende en alto grado de los ensalmos e incauciones que los chamanes pronuncian en su favor. Des este modo, los animales se creen depender de los rituales de fertilidad de los chamanes y de la distribución de recursos practicada por el Dueño de los Animales quien, en medio de ellos, es representante de los cazadores. Regresaré a este punto más tarde.

“El *Vai-turi*, “peces–sistema”, que recibe también la denominación de *dehkó turi*, “agua-sistema”, está conformado por todos los ríos, quebradas, lagos y pantanos del hábitat de los desana, pira-tapuya y Tukano, junto con todas sus especies de peces. Esta dimensión se imagina dividida en tres capas superpuestas, de acuerdo con la profundidad relativa; la capa más profunda se dice estar habitada principalmente por peces “negros” y “fríos”, la capa intermedia por peces “rojos” y “fríos”, y la capa superior por peces “parduscos”, de condición “caliente”. Esta división en varias gamas de profundidad se enfatiza en el caso de los pozos profundos que se hallan al pie de muchos raudales, y en el fondo de los cuales *vai-mahsë*, en su manifestación de Dueño de los Peces, tiene sus moradas. He hablado ya del *vai-mëra turi*, “caza-animal.sistema”; al mismo sistema pertenece el *yuhkërituri*, “árbol-sistema”, que incluye el *ohtéri turi*, “cultivo-sistema”, que cae directamente bajo la influencia de las “energías” lunares. Estos sistemas abarcan toda la vegetación especialmente los árboles frutales y las plantas cultivadas, junto con algunas materias primas medicinales, aromáticas y de importancia tecnológica. Cada árbol o planta se concibe dividido en tres capas superpuestas horizontalmente, cuyo frutos respectivos se dicen ser verdosos en el fondo, rojo, amarillentos en el medio, y parduscos en la capa superior. Dicha estratificación triple se aplica también a la sección subterránea de plantas de tubérculos. Por ejemplo, se dice que los tubérculos mas profundos de yuca brava son gruesos y de color amarillento, los de profundidad media se dicen ser algo alargados y rojizos, y los tubérculos más superficiales son notablemente alargados y de color pardusco. La división vertical de las plantas se toma en cuenta en relación con preparaciones culinarias, medicinales o narcóticas.

“Regreso ahora a otro aspecto de la energía. Los chamanes desana, y en realidad la mayoría de los chamanes entre los Tucano Orientales, utilizan cristales de orca transparentes como objetos de poder. Tales cristales de roca, a veces de quince centímetros de largo, reciben el nombre de *ëhtá bohóru*, que significa “piedra-condensada”. Mientras que el sufijo *-ru* indica esencia masculina, la palabra *boho* se deriva de *bohóri*, “secarse, condensarse, concentrarse”. La palabra *ëhtá*, piedra, contiene la raíz *ëh*; *ëheru* significa “volver, recibir o emitir gran calor” y, en sentido más amplio, “transformar”. Se dice que un cristal de roca es calor condensado, y el calo es *ahsíri*, relacionado con la raíz *ëh*, y también con *ah*, *ahp*, la cual, como he mencionado en otra parte, se relaciona con el concepto de transformación. En verdad, de cuerdo con los desana, un cristal es el resultado de una transformación y, al mismo

tiempo, es un instrumento para la transformación. El cristal de roca del chamán representa, entonces, muchos conceptos diferentes pero interrelacionados. Ante todo, aun nivel abstracto contiene la “blancura” del sol, no del sol visible sino del Padre Sol, creador del universo. En este contexto, se hace referencia al cristal como *abé yeéru*, “sol-pene”, y se dice consistir en semen cristalizado; guarda entonces una poderosa fuerza creativa. Pero en otros contextos el cristal se convierte en clítoris y se hace referencia a él con la expresión *igo yanyée*, “su (de ella)-cosa”. El cristal es, pues, un elemento hermafrodita de creación y transformación y puede utilizarse para muchos fines diferentes. También está estrechamente relacionado con el jaguar y chamán es la misma, *yee*, derivada de *yeéri*, “copular”. Se puede hablar del cristal con la expresión *yee vii*, “casa-del chamán”, o “casa-del jaguar”. También se le llama *dehkó siriro*, “agua-piedra”, y se dice consistir en agua solidificada.”

(CSP) pp.48-52

In the spectrum of light observed in a crystal, the Desana see the ‘original energies of creation’. As William Blake once did, they see the Whole within a Microcosm:

“Si se observa un cristal grande, con la luz que cae sobre éste proveniente de la espalda del observador o de un lado, tal vez luz solar o, mejor aún, de una antorcha o de una fogata, pronto se vislumbran vívidos reflejos, Cuando se da vuelta lentamente a la piedra con la mano, se percibe en las profundidades del cristal, cerca de su base, donde hay granos y nubes, un rayo de luz, y pronto aparecerá la imagen de un arco iris. Con algo de práctica puede aprenderse a controlar dichos reflejos y así, dependiendo de la fuente de luz y del ángulo en que se sostenga la piedra, pueden repetirse tales efectos luminosos en determinado orden. Es un hecho, entonces, que los colores primarios del espectro prismático a que se refieren constantemente los desana, se observan originalmente en el brillo del interior de la piedra; los chamanes confirman que tales reflejos son las energías originales de la creación. Se hacen observaciones similares en cuanto a espectro cromático, matices variables o sensaciones luminosas de manchas fugaces con relación a los arco iris (semen de *vai-mashë*), a las figuras iridiscentes que se ven en la cortina de agua de un salto, o en la aspersión de gotitas de un golpe de remo, del salto de un pez o de una piedra que se arroja al agua, o en las gotitas atrapadas en una telaraña o en el rocío del comienzo de la mañana. Otras impresiones visuales comparables se derivan de estrellas fugaces o de chispas que escapan de un fuego en la oscuridad, Desde luego, todas estas experiencias visuales se definen en toda su magnitud por los frecuentes trances alucinatorios de los indios, durante los cuales aparecen los mencionados colores con todos su deslumbrantes matices y, más aún, emergen entonces en un contexto sagrado, como lo explican los chamanes que se encuentran presentes en estos rituales colectivos.”

(CSP) pp. 52-53

After this Reichel-Dolmatoff returns to the Kantian or Lukácsian distinction between the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ worlds:

“El cristal, como un todo, se dice estar envuelto en “luz blanca”, y saturado por ella. En efecto, el cristal es la luz blanca, y contiene así un potencial abstracto, invisible, “*boga*”, que a su vez, es activado por *túlari bogá*, “fuerza-energía” o, digamos, energía cinética. El espectro cromático, junto con sus componentes blanco y negro se cree estar presente en toda la naturaleza.....”

(CSP) p. 53

But then this complex totality of ‘nature’, whether visible or invisible, is brought to bear upon the interrelatedness of all the ‘components’ of human society, nature, and the cosmos:

“.....los componentes de la naturaleza son interdependientes, sus fuerzas reproductivas deben controlarse; el amarillo y el rojo deben equilibrarse y adecuarse a las exigencias que cada parte de la naturaleza hace sobre otra. La gente depende de los recursos animales y vegetales para sobrevivir, pero debido a la limitación de tales recursos (pues su amarillez es “débil”), los seres humanos deben controlar su tasa de natalidad y abstenerse de excesos en la caza y pesca y todos los demás abusos en la explotación de la naturaleza. Si la gente desatiende tales normas restrictivas, se les castigará con enfermedades; el Dueño de los Animales utilizará a sus protegidos para llevar enfermedades a hombres, mujeres y niños, como retaliación por la persecución descontrolada de animales de caza, de pesca y otros recursos.

“Bajo circunstancias normales las energías cromáticas se consideran estar balanceadas y conservar ciertas relaciones fijas, pero tan pronto como se abusa de los recursos, el equilibrio de colores que presenta una persona se supone cambiar y producir efectos nocivos para la salud. Puede aumentarse determinado color o debilitarse otro; la amarillez masculina puede abrumar a la rojez femenina o viceversa. El estado de las energías de una persona lo puede determinar el chamán pasando lentamente el cristal sobre el cuerpo del paciente y observando los sutiles cambios en los reflejos. A este proceso se le llama *yee uhúri*, literalmente “chamán-absorbe”, pero con el significado aquí de “detectar”; el verbo *uhuri*, además, está relacionado estrechamente con *ëhëri*, “transformar”; en efecto, el chamán transforma a su paciente. Una vez establecida la naturaleza de los cambios cromáticos, la tarea del chamán consiste en aplicar las inagotables energías contenidas en su cristal para restablecer el equilibrio perdido. Ello supone un proceso de mezcla, combinación disminución e intensificación de colores; introducción de ciertos matices; disminución de la intensidad de un brillo en cierta parte, o su aumento en otra; todo ello se hace en prolongados ensalmos e incautaciones, a menudo con el chamán, así como el paciente, en trance narcótico. La idea fundamental detrás de estos procedimientos consiste en la creencia de que las prácticas curativas equivalen a un renacer del paciente, quien ha de ser re-creado *ab ovo*, es decir, desde el estado embrionario. Las palabras que en desana significan “nacer” y “curarse” son las mismas, como ya he señalado antes. Regresaré más adelante a este tema; aquí deseo sólo subrayar la importancia del simbolismo cromático en el restablecimiento de la salud del paciente, afectada por el abuso de los recursos naturales.

“En manos del chamán el cristal constituye un microcosmos. En un sentido, es poderoso instrumento que puede utilizarse para crear vida, restaurarla, o aun destruirla; en otro, es un modelo del universo, o de una porción particular de éste. El chamán puede ya sea ver en su interior y buscar indicios sobre sus energías latentes o los actos de otros chamanes, o ya colocarse dentro del cristal y ver hacia fuera hacia un mundo que de otra manera sería visible. Puesto que el cristal es también un modelo de la maloca, el chamán puede mirar en él cualquier vivienda que desee vigilar. Allí puede ver a otros chamanes trabajando y examinar todas las actividades que tienen lugar en cualquier sitio que elija en el interior del cristal.”

(CSP) pp. 53-54

NOTE: The following books by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff were used in this essay:

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XII

SOME THOUGHTS FOR AN ECOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

There exist a number of very different kinds of interaction between human beings and the natural environment in the Peruvian Amazon. The various kinds of society, with their different identities and different ways of feeling and identifying themselves as Peruvian, include:

Native societies

Mestizo and Andean Quechua or Aymara colonists (small farmers - including coca growers in the Rio Huallaga area especially, labourers, traders)

Mestizo and foreign extractors or producers of natural resources and primary products (mainly timber, oil, animals and animal skins; cocoa and coffee on plantations, cattle on ranches)

Inhabitants of towns and cities

Terrorists/insurgents/narcotraffickers/other bandits

These represent different ways of humanly relating to the rainforest environment, different ways of living in this particular form of nature and wresting satisfaction of human needs from it, each of which have different consequences for the rainforest ecosystem. The idea of an `ecological sociology` is a sociology that thinks of social structures and practices in relation always to their embeddedness in, and interactions with, the natural environment.

Processes of so-called `development` in the Peruvian rainforest involve each of these major forms of social relationship with nature, and the dynamic interconnections between them, as well as mutual interactions between the environmental changes wrought by each of them. That is, the different environmental consequences of these different groups` activities interact upon one another, so that social groups affect each other`s modes of existence through their environmental effects as well as directly.

Each of the different social forms tends to hold distinct perceptions or prejudices towards the others. The attention of this article is largely on urban and colonizing mestizo society`s prejudices and superiority complexes toward native ethnic groups, whose ecologically more sustainable, harmonious, and appropriate forms of production are looked upon as `uncivilized`, and not as `proper` production. (The term `appropriate` seems reasonable to describe native society`s generally effective form of adaptation to the rainforest.) This is therefore a kind of `sociology of knowledge` of urban and rural non-native perceptions of native society, from which a good deal of light can be shed upon the history and present predicament of the Peruvian

rainforest.

The nomadic, hunter-gathering, shifting cultivation lifestyle is frequently regarded by outside societies as not involving 'real' work. The very qualities of the traditional native lifestyle that ensure an effective cultural and ecological adaptation to the rainforest environment - lack of individual property or ownership over productive resources, little or no understanding of money - are seen as 'lazy'. Such negative judgements in their turn ensure that useful lessons are not learnt from natives by non-natives. So often the dominant society does not see native society - its worldviews effectively obliterate the realities of native life-forms as meaningful references for understanding existence in the forest.

But at the same time, in characteristic Peruvian fashion, jungle mestizos see something authentic about themselves in the natives. This is similar to the way that Peruvian mestizos in the Andes and on the coast see their origins and identity as largely contained in indigenous history, which is exemplified in the way a pre-Columbian monument like Macchu Picchu has become a national symbol. Tupac Amaru, the Andean Indian leader of the extraordinary uprising against Spanish rule in the late eighteenth century, is a national hero. The very popular 'folklorico' style of music is thought of as deriving from 'real' Andean Indian music.

In turn Andean culture pays homage and celebrates, through myths dating back to Inca times, as also in 'chuncho' (jungle native) dances at Andean fiestas today, its legendary origins in the jungle. In this, legend holds a truth, as the origins of Andean culture - including some of its crucial motifs, themes, and physical bases, from coca to hallucinogenic shamanism to jaguars to parrot feathers - do indeed lie in the tropical rainforest. The central motifs of Chavin art - Chavin (circa 850 - 460 BC) being thought of as the 'mother culture' of Andean civilization by the Peruvian archaeologist Julio Tello - are tropical animals: felines, lizards, caymans etc. It is a cruel irony that the remnants of traditional native societies in the rainforest today, who retain so many of the cultural elements that underlay pre-hispanic Andean civilization - which in turn is felt to be the true basis of modern Peru - are held in such low regard.

In the rainforest regions of Eastern Peru, the urban 'brujo' (witch doctor) bears a complex relationship to the native shaman. Mestizos frequently display a respect for the visionary and curing aspects of shamanic sessions at which the hallucinogen ayahuasca is consumed: participants confront spirits, meet their ancestors and their culture-heroes who founded their ethnic-linguistic group, and work to cure what in occidental terms would be called 'psychological' and 'physical' problems.

But the mestizo idea of the 'brujo' has transformed the shaman's activity according to models of the priest in church and the medical or psychiatric clinic. Once again there is a contradiction between respect for the primordial and the original, and a compulsion to improve upon, civilize, and tame the looked down-on primitiveness of native culture.

The free and anarchistic style of a native shamanistic session is replaced by a more controlled, ministered, and sedate approach.

At the same time as feeling disdain for 'uncivilized' natives, mestizos often also see the lives of natives in the jungle as free and untrammelled. Similarly, more acculturated natives such as the

Machiguenga, the Piro, or the group of Yaminahua in Sepagua - to take some examples from northern Cusco Department and southern Ucayali Department(1) - both admire 'uncivilized' natives and remember their 'pre-civilized' past with pride, fondly reminiscing about making fire without matches, or hunting with bows and arrows for all their protein food, yet also feel sorry for those not yet 'civilized'. This structure of ambiguity in ideas and sentiments is constantly found.

There are therefore recognizable general complexes of disdain, feelings of superiority, and contempt for the 'backward' savage, alongside admiration, nostalgic yearning, respect and a sense of loss for the 'noble' savage - in relation to various facets of lifestyle, culture, productive activity and ecological orientation. Perhaps these inclinations - Hobbesian and Rousseauist respectively - are common to much of humanity - at least, that portion of it (the vast majority now) which has moved beyond a nomadic, hunter-gathering mode of existence; though no doubt they take on specific forms in particular cultural and historical circumstances.

Contrary to many Western, 'mythical' accounts of 'progress' - both the 'orthodox' or 'standard' versions of history and the Marxist or other radical versions - most transitions from hunter-gathering to settled kinds of food-producing society have in the past not been the result of voluntary decisions, but more often due to necessity, in the form of population pressures acting within a context of limited natural resources. (In the Amazon basin, before the Spanish Conquest, this transition only occurred in certain riverine areas. Only a minority of Amazonian peoples moved into a more complex form of civilization, developing stratification, occupational specialization, and the beginnings of a form of state.) For the shift from hunting and food collection to animal domestication and agricultural production may increase the offtake of energy as edible food per unit area of land, but the productivity of labour typically falls, so that the average time spent working increases.

This increase in work for the majority of people as a consequence of the 'neolithic revolution', is perhaps registered in the almost universal mythical theme of a Fall, or expulsion from paradise, in post-hunter-gatherer societies. An experience that was at the time traumatic, representing a transition to a less happy condition, is however later revised in 'official' histories (of progress, or self-congratulatory accounts of the emergence of civilizations); though a trace of the real experience perhaps remains in poignant archetypes of alienation.

The food surplus produced typically increases in small-scale, settled agricultural societies, and still more in large-scale 'civilizations' with their enormously greater populations integrated into much larger geographical territories, with their states, classes, and urban centres, their specializations in productive roles and their complex divisions of labour. Yet, though these make the existence of non-producing classes possible, and there emerge among them hitherto impossible advances in the sophistication of culture, religion, cosmology, science and the arts, for the majority of people the transition to settled production and civilization rests upon an increase in toil and an exclusion from many of the cultural gains these developments make possible.

It is not therefore surprising that representatives from indigenous hunter-gathering societies today almost uniformly express a clear wish to continue in their traditional lifestyles, whilst

rejecting the options of settled farming or urban life for as long as they are able. As just suggested, it is more than reasonable to see in the lop-sided 'progress' of social history a major source of the widespread myths of a Fall from Grace amongst post-hunter-gathering societies, deriving from the realities of transitions from nomadic to settled, especially civilized, societies. The 'angel of history' in Walter Benjamin's millennial, visionary, eschatological 'Marxism' views the past as Paradise, and progress from it into the present and future as a catastrophic storm causing debris and ruins to pile up along its path(2). In this tragic view of history - a catastrophic inversion of Marxism - instead of humanity facing the future and moving forward, it is blasted away from the Paradise at which it stares, transfixed by what it is losing and moving away from, its wings tangled up in the storm. Involuntary, violent, piling up heaps of rubble at the feet of the angel of history, with all revolutions aiming for a better world going wrong: this predicament of the 'angel of history' is also that of the Peruvian mestizo seeing his or her identity and origins in the Indian, or native indigenous, pre-Columbian past - though distortedly, hazily, in alienated forms, in line with the alienated and sometimes violent historical 'progress' that has itself brought about the movement and distance from those origins.

A fundamental aspect of traditional native cultures that is misunderstood within the mestizo worldview, exists in native mythologies which are based on holistic cosmologies, according to which nature and supernature are cyclic processes in which energies and forces are recycled. As Reichel-Dolmatoff puts it:

“The (Tukano) Indians conceptualize man and the universe in terms of a huge circuit of restricted energy in which the individual person must always try to avoid causing a disturbance. There exist very concrete reasons for this, apparently very idealized, concept. The carrying capacity of the rainforest habitat is defined by the Indians chiefly in terms of the availability of protein-rich food resources such as game, fish, and certain wild fruits. In order to avoid walking excessive distances, frequent relocation of settlements and, in general, the depletion and degradation of the physical environment, the uses of these resources must be regulated and restricted. The uncontrolled killing of game, the over-harvesting of forest fruits, and the reckless exploitation of raw materials are thought to diminish the total energy of the universe, an energy that must be restored by the individual who has to restrain his biological needs by observing frequent sexual abstinence and strict dietary prescriptions during many ritual and secular activities. Population growth is checked by the use of oral contraceptives of plant origin, and the common belief that game animals and their spirit-masters are the main causes of illness is an effective mechanism in the control of overhunting.”(3)

Or, as von Hildebrand writes:

“The Ufaina believe in a vital force called fufaka which is essentially masculine and which is present in all living beings. This vital force, whose source is the sun, is constantly recycled among plants, animals, men and the Earth itself which is seen as feminine. Each group of beings, men, plants, animals, Earth or water require a minimum amount of this vital force to live.

“What is of importance, according to the Ufaina, is that the vital force continues to be recycled from one species to another, in such a way that not too much accumulates in any one of them, since this would cause another to be correspondingly deprived of his vital force. The delicate

balance between a community and its environment makes it defenceless; consequently any disturbance, however slight, necessarily affects the whole.

“Human beings, although superior to animals in knowledge, are also part of this energy recycling system, and are subject to the same constraints.”(4)

Within the organic flux of nature and supernature(5), shamans must negotiate with and appease spirits of animals and plants, within a worldview that recognizes the need for a ‘giving back’ to nature, and for limits to the harvesting from nature. Hunted animals and collected plants must be returned, recycled into nature. For example, rites and rituals ensure that animal spirits are sent back into the forest(6). Such magical cosmologies contain an intuitive understanding of the finiteness of nature and of natural resources, and of humankind as a part of, and link within, nature’s system of energy flows and food chains. The ecological need for a human economy to achieve a steady state, is recognized within native Amazonian mythology and cosmology. Man needs to play his role in ensuring that nature’s flows and cycles are perpetuated, unlike so often for modern consciousness which apparently presumes that nature inevitably and always restores its processes after the depletions and interventions made by human beings. In the Amazon, small-scale societies based on hunting, gathering, and shifting cultivation have been made up traditionally of nomadic groups, flexibly undergoing fusions and fissions. Survival is experienced as the consequence of a direct, interactive metabolism between the social group and nature. The following is how Philippe Descola describes this type of society in connection with his analysis of the Achuar, a native group that lives in both the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon:

“The Achuar are a perfect synthesis of those enigmatic inclinations peculiar to many societies of Amazonian Indians. They are a near caricature of zero-degree social integration..... The lack of those institutions (sometimes) regarded as the sociological axes of classless societies - chiefdoms, village communities, unilineal descent groups- does not seem to hamper the Achuar..... Internal conflict is permanent, but it does not follow (a) fine segmentary logic.....In view of the extreme atomization of these quasi-autarkic households engaged in endemic feuding, it is obviously tempting to evoke the presocial condition in which, according to the well-known formula, every man is Enemy to every man..... In point of fact, their residential atomism is tempered by a supralocal structure..... the ‘endogamous nexus’..... consisting of from ten to fifteen households scattered over a relatively well-defined territory, whose members are closely and directly related by kinship and affinity..... the highest rates of endogamy being found in those with the highest demographic density; many exogamous unions stem from the abduction of women in the course of raids on neighbouring nexus.....a clear military victory of one nexus over the other does not imply territorial annexation.....This endemic feuding has important demographic consequences, since.....one out of every two male deaths can be attributed to war..... This brings out the highly labile character of a system of social relations organized around factionalism and institutionalized feuding.”(7)

It is easy to see how such social groups would die off or reduce in population if nature were taken from unsustainably and were degraded locally. The cosmologies of such traditional Amazonian societies tend to be pantheistic, non-dualistic, and expressive of Heraclitean fluxes and transformations, with continuous movement occurring between the supernatural world of

spirits, demons, gods, dead ancestors and culture heroes and the empirical (to the Western mind) world of nature and humanity. Michael Harner speaks thus of the non-dualistic view of reality within shamanism generally, and within Amazonian native shamanism in particular:

“.....shamanism (can be) characterized in terms of Carlos Casteneda’s distinction between ordinary reality and non-ordinary reality. It is useful because it does not introduce the concepts of mental and material. In shamanic experience, when one is in non-ordinary reality things will seem quite as material as they are here.”(8)

Time is cyclic, repetitive, yet burgeoning and spontaneously determined in rhythm and rate from within processes of organic development, rather than by external law-like mechanisms. Matter and spirit are drawn upon by human groups from nature and supernature, then returned to them in ritual and psychic identifications; the spirits of animals hunted and eaten are released back into the forest of nature and supernature, in processes that involve an intuitively understood need for balance, and for a ‘steady state’ economy of energies within the metabolism between humanity and nature.

In the Andes by contrast, small-scale local, settled, agricultural communities became integrated into large-scale civilizations occupying large territories, through complex state apparatuses, classes, occupational specializations and bureaucratic administrations. Very varied ecological niches and ecosystems were brought under human control to produce for human need.

Complex agroecosystems were created to direct energy flows toward humanly constructed ends. A centralized religious- cosmological system integrated the regional variety of myth and spirit-world into a more or less unifying system, which included a hugely complex astrological-calendric cosmology based on close observation and measurement of the movements of the celestial bodies. This cosmological system harmonized religious ritual throughout the wider civilization or empire, coordinating the agricultural and pastoral tasks that varied in content and timing between different localities, underpinning the mechanisms of exchange, and movement of products between different communities and classes.

In the modern western European worldview that began with Francis Bacon and Descartes, nature has been thought of as infinite, so that once its secrets are understood in terms of scientific laws, it can be taken from infinitely and treated as if it were an infinite ‘sink’ for human wastes.

By contrast, the hunter-gathering, nomadic, shifting cultivation strategy and lifestyle of Amazonian natives do not normally result in environmental degradation of the rainforest. The level of production, use of resources, and population, do not exceed the carrying capacity of the ecosystem, because of the form production takes. The essential features of traditional shifting cultivation are that ‘chacras’ (fields) are not made too close together, and are left to return to jungle for long periods. The fields are policultures, mixes of crops, displaying many species of plants and trees in a variety of sizes and kinds, so that they imitate the forest ecosystem.

Yet human existence in the rainforest has undoubtedly modified the environment over millenia, so that it should not be regarded as a pristine environment unaffected by human beings. Some authors argue that the entire ecosystem has been shaped by human activity, as the system of

letting fields return to jungle, and continually harvesting the products of trees and plants for several generations(9), selectively modifies the balance of plant and tree species, so that in a sense the entire rainforest is like a very freely-growing 'garden'(10). There is an infinite sliding scale between the extreme concepts of 'collecting' from a completely wild environment on the one hand, and 'domesticating' a completely controlled and simplified one, on the other. One of the characteristic misperceptions of the traditional native, or 'primitive' mode of production in the Amazon on the part of outsiders, is the failure to understand that the forest is not left 'unused' because it has not been transformed into the kinds of agriculturally or industrially productive environments familiar in other regions. The kind of humanly-shaped environment characteristic of regions where a full-blown agricultural revolution could take place - for example the Andes or coast of Peru - is recognized as being 'used', or 'farmed'. By contrast, in the traditional rainforest native economy, natural products appear to be simply collected, in an arbitrary fashion by wandering savages - a conception often expressed as part of a non-native prejudice about natives being lazy and opportunist. This, together with the fact that native societies lack money, and thus wages and wage-labour, as well as private ownership of land, allows non-natives to view natives as people who do not work.

This issue concerns the coevolution and development of nature and society, in agroecosystems(11). From the point of view of members of societies in which a qualitatively new nature/society dualism has emerged, nature and society appear indistinguishable in a 'primitive' agroecosystem. From the viewpoints of traditional Andean Indian colonists, rural and urban mestizo migrants, and of foreigners, the native agroecosystem in the rainforest lacks a driving force of 'progress' with the project of refashioning nature behind it, converting it into agricultural and industrial processes under more or less scientific control. The humanly-induced transformation of 'wild' nature into 'countryside', which cannot exist separately from a society involved in settled land use, comes to be a necessary physical and visual aspect of 'civilized' existence. The cultural attitudes of both poor Andean or mestizo colonists, and wealthier mestizos or Westerners (for example Alfred Russel Wallace, who developed a theory of evolution contemporaneously with Darwin and also visited the Amazon, envisioned the forest being transformed into 'productive' agricultural land), share the judgement that the jungle must be conquered(12) and the trees cut down, even when all the evidence from experience - including the colonists' own experience of planting fields of single crops, leading to soil degradation - indicates that this does not generate wealth or comfort. 'Virgin' jungle does not appear to outsiders as properly transformed by human society - even though in fact it probably has been over millenia; and from their perspectives it simply must be, for both utilitarian and, so to speak, moral reasons. These values and perceptions are hegemonic in most areas of Peru where the jungle is taken into consideration at all, not only in the jungle itself.

This in turn is related to the failure to understand that native societies now, as in the past, have and did have population levels more or less suited to the environment's varied carrying capacity. For the patchwork quilt of nomadic societies, which the Amazon basin is, leave nowhere 'uninhabited'. Nothing could have been both more factually false as well as immoral than former Peruvian president Belaunde Terry's depiction of the Peruvian jungle as land without people for people without land. The indigenous pre-Columbian population of the Peruvian jungle may have been nearly 1.5 million, about the same as now (including urban inhabitants), but as so many died of diseases in the wake of the Spanish Conquest this fact was never

understood - until recently, by a relatively small number of people. The Spanish conquest did not result in a thorough penetration of the jungle in Peru, before the rubber boom at the end of the nineteenth century.

The immediacy of a traditional native group's relationship to its natural environment, would mean that its population level would have always adapted to the local environment's carrying capacity fairly quickly - given the particular form of production, social practice, and environmental regulation and transformation. Environmentally destructive practices would not be continued for long, quite simply because the people who undertook them would not survive long. No complex civilization with large-scale coordination of social activities, large-scale capacity to extend sensory-motor powers vis-a-vis the environment through tools, weapons, technology or means of production, or the ability to transport large quantities of food to populations living far from where it is produced, ever before the present period emerged in, or conquered, the rainforest and its inhabitants. No pre-Columbian Andean civilization, up to and including the Incas, nor the post-Conquest hispanic colonial system, nor the Republic until quite recently, was able to undertake this feat. For a civilization to persist in destructive, ecologically ill-adapted practices as in the Amazon today, it must have highly developed structures of technology, transport, and administration, but also the characteristic that those who make crucial decisions concerning the fate of the forest are not those who suffer from its destruction. There does not yet exist, at any rate, an effective feed-back system to ensure experience is learnt from, and destructive practices replaced by undestructive ones. It is nearly unique to the Amazonian rainforest as an environment, that it is moving historically from the culture and technology of simple, small-scale, traditional native society, almost directly to modern, technocratic, global industrial society, through a 'forced Westernization'. There was little in the way of complex, class civilization in between: the limited development of state-forms and larger-scale social and productive activity in riverine areas before the Conquest, mostly disappeared in its wake, and was certainly not on a scale comparable to that which arose in the Andes or on the Coast. Ecological factors made such development very difficult or impossible(13): lack or very limited availability of stone or metal, limited availability of uninundated land, low restrictions on agricultural productivity and concentrations of human population, the restricted speed of transport and communication, are just some.

The ecosystem's human culture is apparently jumping more or less straight from 'primitive' to modern, in a form which lacks communal or normative regulation over its relationships to nature. Technical and scientific advance is experienced as an alienated, reified force, out of control and thus far unstoppable. Of course this is not some mysterious telos of history, but a consequence of the reification of the capitalist market, of key institutional processes of corporate control, of state power, and of scientific and technical development.

In the traditional, indigenous mode of existence within the rainforest, if a local ecosystem starts to become degraded, either the human population falls, or alternatively productive strategies adapt quickly, to become more ecologically viable. Only now is it possible - over the short-term and in the context of largely irreversible environmental degradation - for the population level, especially in urban centres, to exceed rainforest carrying capacities. This excess is in terms of the production of food and other commodities, and in terms of the environment taking up waste and pollution. Forms of agriculture and resource extraction, especially logging, are practiced

which are environmentally destructive - are indeed more akin to a 'mining' of the forest as if it were made up of non-renewable resources, than a form of renewable agriculture or managed forestry.

It is illegitimate to read off from a specification of the biophysical environment what its carrying capacity might be in terms of human population, in an abstract way. Culturally and historically specific social customs and technical practices must obviously be taken into account. There is no purely 'natural' mode of human relation to the rainforest, as for any other environment; each social form is characterized by its own specific constellation of limits, affordances, and vulnerabilities to the ecologically unintended consequences of its activities. This is an aspect of the general truth that there is no single, 'natural' way of living for human beings; people always live in societies of one form or another, each of which has its distinct set of structures and practices. An ecological sociology should not fall into the trap of thinking there is a single, objectively given, 'natural' way to live in any particular environment. Different societies will meet ecological limits and respond to ecological potentialities in different ways, even if they are all 'sustainable' - due to cultural and historically structured preferences and institutionalized tendencies and activities. Not only is there no one 'right way' for any given environment, but there is no 'automatic' way that societies adapt to their environment. Cultural or religious influence on particular material practices for example, may or may not ensure that they conform to the requirements, or 'logic', of a particular environment. Sometimes a cultural habit that is ecologically inappropriate to a particular environment may have originated in a different environment where it was appropriate, but this is by no means always the case. Yet, in certain cases ecologically attuned social forms have arisen, and it is important to try to understand why this is so.

The possible forms of human ecology within any given environment may be infinitely variable; but they are, nevertheless, also ecologically bounded from forms that are impossible - except perhaps in the very short run. As a simple analogy one could imagine a circle; societies may be situated on any of the infinite points within it, but outside it they will not in the long run survive. With respect to the idea of 'learning' from native societies, this analogy underlines the point that what is at stake is not a literal copying of native socio-economic strategies, but rather a coming to understand where the circle lies within which societies must choose how to live.

Thus it should be possible to pinpoint roughly the population level that can be supported sustainably by any particular area of forest, assuming that the form of human ecology practiced is similar to what we have been calling 'traditional native'. To repeat, this does not entail assuming there was an ecological 'golden age' when traditional native societies were in perfect, timeless harmony with their environment - a caricature of the situation that is often set up in order to attack native human ecology the more easily. For the remaining native societies that continue to practice traditional forms of existence in the Amazon are by no means pristine examples or unchanged remnants of a typical pre-Columbian form, unaffected by subsequent history.

Frequently when it is asserted that no presently existing native society functions exactly as its forbears did more than five centuries ago, this is assumed to imply that nothing can be learnt from these contemporary cultures about a style of life that survived in essential harmony with the

forest for several thousand years. But in terms of the present discussion, it is surely reasonable to speculate that the ecologically important features of such native cultures are indeed similar to those which must have prevailed over the millenia. On the other hand it is sometimes alleged that indigenous peoples did degrade parts of the rainforest over very long periods; though this may be true it does not refute the central argument concerning the identification of a sustainable mode of social existence within the rainforest ecosystem. Such contemporary native societies cannot serve directly as models for an ecological Utopia, but if approached subtly, much of practical value can be derived from an understanding of native human ecology, in order to develop a sustainable form of livelihood for mestizo, or no longer traditional native, communities.

It is possible to conclude that urban concentrations as large as Iquitos or Pucallpa exceed the jungle's carrying capacity in terms of sustainable absorption of waste and pollution into the rivers, for example - a situation which would remain even if the import of food could make possible an avoidance of excessive harvesting of plants, fish, domesticated or wild animals. It might be that this exceeding of carrying capacity would persist given present population levels whichever form of as-yet practicable urban human ecology were adopted. It may be that even if the best of presently-available techniques and technologies were installed, a town like Iquitos could not be sustainable with its present population.

Small colonist farmers, practising as they mostly do at present forms of agriculture deriving from their experience in the Andes or the coast, exceed the rainforest's carrying capacity - that is, are unsustainable almost whatever their number. Typically they make fields too close, plant too few kinds of crop, and leave fields fallow for insufficient time: the result is deterioration and erosion of the thin topsoil, and sometimes climate change. Particularly in the foothills of the Andes, as colonization eats into the jungle, changes in climate follow it.

Similar consequences result from plantation monoculture, cattle ranching, and the most dire forms of logging. Through experimentation it should be possible to arrive at judgements concerning what population levels can be supported, or not exceed carrying capacity in particular contexts, so long as sustainable forms of human ecology are practiced. Research might yield recommendations concerning upper limits to urban populations, sustainable harvesting levels for fish, wild plants and animals, sustainable extraction levels for renewable resources, and minimally disturbing ways of extracting non-renewable resources (such as oil and minerals) where that is still considered wise or desirable. The lessons for agriculture would emphasize mixed cropping with some animals present, using all levels from ground to forest canopy, mirroring the forest ecosystem, ideas such as these being already practiced in a few places dotted around the Peruvian Amazon. Resource extraction would focus on the sustainable gathering of rare and valuable forest products, such as medicinal plants.

Other crucial emphases would be on labour-intensiveness and little-mechanized methods, in agriculture and in general; developing good output/input energy ratios, and good protein or other nutritional outputs per unit of land. All this goes against the logic of the capitalist market, though not necessarily the logic of any kind of market at all. The capitalist market constantly moves towards mechanization and reduction of labour-intensity: something very different from capitalist rationalization is what is wanted. The capitalist market works to maximise profit from

the yield of a given amount of land, and it tends to raise the productivity of labour - though indirectly, as a consequence of its concern for profit. It is generally unresponsive to ecological requirements concerning sustainable use of land and ecosystems, input and output energy ratios, and ratios of nutritional value produced by a given area of land. A new kind of regulated market is needed, slanted towards ecological well-being as well as supporting human equity and justice; using appropriate indicators as part of feed-back mechanisms that allow continuously effective adaptive learning from experience.

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XIII

RAINFOREST UNDER THREAT IN PERU

Nowhere is it more evident that social and ecological processes are completely interwoven, than the Amazonian rain forests of South America. Although the situation in Peru is less disastrous than in some other countries, notably Brazil, it is still very serious, and essentially for the same reasons.

The great paradox of tropical jungle ecology is that, though it is by far the richest terrestrial environment in existence in terms of numbers of plant and animal species and in terms of biomass per unit area, it is also one of the most fragile. The numerous levels of flora and fauna, from the tree-top canopy down, rely upon a very thin humus topsoil. This is possible because the jungle has developed an extremely fast food cycle, via growth, predation and decomposition, and an environment in which the soil is protected from rain and wind erosion.

The luxuriant jungle environment sustains the impression that it can be a provider for the infinite future. But the forms in which it is presently 'developed' for agriculture and extraction of resources cause deforestation, followed by erosion of the soil down to the clay below it. The 'conquest' of the jungle not only destroys it but in time renders the land useless; the eroded land is then often subject to flooding which causes landslides, disturbing hitherto untouched forest. Beyond this, deforestation on the huge scale presently practised - between 50 and 100 acres will be destroyed in the world as a whole in the time it takes to read this paragraph - is having global climatic consequences as well as causing irretrievable loss of genetic variety with as yet unknown potential.

'Eating the seed-corn' in this way, with short-term gain for only a minority, involves both destruction of the ecosystem and what has been termed 'ethnocide' for the indigenous peoples that have lived in it for millennia. The myth of a 'vast emptiness', as expressed in former

Peruvian president Belaunde Terry's depiction of a 'land without people for people without land', rests upon ignorance of both the ecosystem and these indigenous peoples.

Some sixty distinct ethnic-linguistic groups with a total population of about 220,000 still inhabit the 3/4 million square kilometres of Peruvian jungle which cover about 60% of the country. Despite extraordinary cultural variety, their traditional ways of life have in common an 'economic strategy' that maintains a non-destructive equilibrium with the natural environment.

This strategy rests upon an itinerant agriculture, whereby small, dispersed groups of families cut and burn patches of forest and plant crops. The fields are not too close to each other and a variety of different plants are grown there. Avoiding high concentrations of people and intensive interference with the forest, native communities sow and harvest fields which mirror the forest ecosystem. When their productive potential has run down, the fields are abandoned and allowed to revert to forest. The diet of traditional native groups depends also on hunting and collecting in the forest. These activities are undertaken in ways that do not lead to depletion (for example, pregnant female and young animals are not killed).

The flexible, itinerant forms of traditional social organisation, combined with a profound botanical and zoological knowledge gained from long experience, allowed considerable populations to live in the Amazonian basin before the European conquests. Indeed, the present population of the Peruvian jungle — some 1 1/2 million with natives and colonisers combined — may not be very much greater than that of pre-Columbian times. The problem now concerns the number of migrants in the jungle, their excessive concentrations of population and their activities.

The most destructive kind of 'development' activity is probably the creation of plantations (cocoa, coffee, etc) or cattle ranches. The soil is degraded within a few years and the land abandoned as more or less useless. In the meantime, the products, destined mostly for export, benefit few people other than the owners and traders. It is difficult to imagine, even given a rational and concerned approach, that such undertakings could ever be appropriate to this environment.

A bigger long-term problem is presented by small-farmer colonisers. Poor peasants from the Andes and, to a lesser extent the urban poor and unemployed, are lured to the jungle by an image, presented by various authorities and the media, of a potentially rich larder, empty of people. Colonisation destroys with its excessive population densities and bad agricultural methods. Unlike the traditional natives, colonisers cut and burn fields too close to each other and sow only one or a few crops. This is due both to habits brought from different environments and to a gearing of production to the market rather than to subsistence. Land is found to be unproductive after a few years and the poor colonisers frequently sink into worse poverty, disillusionment, bad health and malnutrition. Their diets rarely achieve the balanced, if unvaried, proportions that the natives enjoy when unaffected by the advance of 'civilisation'.

It is clear that poverty in the Andean and coastal regions of Peru must be attacked as part of any solution to the problems of the jungle. The message *conquer the jungle* is a substitute for, and distraction from, the transformations that are needed in the Andean, coastal, and urban socio-

economic systems. Education of colonisers, linked to the application of agronomic research into how the jungle can be used non-destructively, could improve the situation.

But colonisation would still almost always involve displacing indigenous peoples or forcing them to change their way of life, for example, by preventing them from hunting in an area large enough to secure sufficient protein. This results in natives becoming dependent on fluctuating markets in production and consumption, and on insufficient opportunities for wage labour, like the peasant colonisers that have displaced them.

Existing *Laws of Native Communities*, though emanating from the good intentions of the Velasco government of the 1970s, are badly conceived and constantly infringed due to lack determined enforcement. Even on paper, they fail to understand and protect the traditional system's capacity to operate in equilibrium with the jungle. The fate of native groups not left sufficient territory for traditional ways of life is acculturation to the dominant, capitalist civilisation or, put more pithily, **ethnocide**. Sometimes this means physical disappearance as when natives fall ill with diseases, brought to the jungle by outsiders, against which they have no immunity. For others it means migration to shanty towns or becoming 'settled', living more or less like other poor peasants (economically, if not culturally and linguistically). In recent years, however, there has been a big development of native federations demanding full territorial rights so that either traditional strategies can be maintained or production for the market can be undertaken on the natives' own terms and under their control.

Finally, major problems ensue from the extraction of resources for export from the jungle. Between 1860 and 1910 the rubber boom destroyed large areas of forest and caused death and misery for many thousands of natives. Presently the main extractive industries are timber and oil, though hunting for animal skins, and fishing (legal and illegal) are also problems.

These activities also highlight inadequacies in the law and the lack of secure native rights over resources in their territories. They cause deforestation and dislocation of native groups, through the construction of roads for movement of personnel and raw materials which then opens the forest to colonisers. Improvements in these areas would depend on policies and laws quite foreign to the 'grab quick and get out' logic of the capitalist system.

POSTSCRIPT

This article was first published in the London-based ecological journal *New Ground* in 1986. It was sent by the Labour MP Tam Dalyell to the then Minister of Overseas Development, Chris Patten. Chris Patten's reply to Tam Dalyell's letter accompanying the article is printed below, as well as the comments of *New Ground's* editors.

Peru rainforest: Minister replies:

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION
ELAND HOUSE
STAG PLACE LONDON SW1E 5DH

From the Minister to:

23 January 1987

**Tam Dalyell Esq MP
House of Commons**

Thank you for your letter of 30 December, with which you sent me an article on rainforests by Tim Cloudsley, in the winter issue of *New Ground*.

Like yourself, I have a great interest in environmental problems and, in particular, the threats to tropical forests. When looking at new proposals for bilateral aid, we take account of environmental factors as a matter of course. Our aid for forestry is up 80 per cent over the five years to 1985. The major multilateral donors and agencies, such as the World Bank and FAO, are also increasingly sensitive to these problems. They have taken a positive initiative to tackle them through the FAO Tropical Forestry Action Plan, which has our full support and cooperation. I am sending you a short note of what we are doing in this field.

In Peru, as in the majority of Latin American countries where we have an aid programme at all, we have only a fairly modest technical cooperation programme, running now at around £1 million and mostly committed to existing projects. Within the resources of the Aid Programme we have had to settle our priorities carefully and, as I am sure you know, most of our aid goes to the poorer Commonwealth countries of Africa and Asia. This does not give us the opportunity for a really major bilateral project in the field of tropical forests in Peru, but what we already do is relevant to the needs of the poorest people, with which the article is concerned. We are giving support to work in the veterinary field and in water resources, we are looking at a proposal for a fisheries project and, under the Aid and Trade Provision we are providing equipment and expertise for supplying potable water for forest villages.

CHRIS PATTEN

Editorial Note: Despite Mr Patten's support for tropical forests, the World Bank's record is not as good as he suggests. Both **Friends of the Earth** and **Survival International** newsletters have recently drawn attention to World Bank schemes which threaten tropical rainforests and the people in them. **Friends of the Earth** point to a decision last June to bail out two vast hydro-electric projects, the Tucuruí and Balbinas dams, in Brazil, which together will flood over 3,600 square kilometres of rain forest. Tribal Indians will be displaced by both projects. **Survival International's** 1987 newsletter has a whole supplement on the World Bank and the various projects it has supported. Many of these are dams, which, in India, Ethiopia and the Philippines as well as Latin America, have dispossessed or forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of tribal people. In 1982, the Bank announced new policy guidelines on tribal peoples and economic development. **SI** says "*the rhetoric sounded fine but the reality since then has been different.*" **SI** accept that there has been a lot of British government concern which has influenced the Bank but its practice still falls short of its theory.