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Baby Hammocks and Stone Bowls: Urarina Technologies of Companionship and Subjection

Harry Walker

In the face of a relatively modest inventory of material possessions, the relational and communicative potentials of things are widely exploited by Urarina of Peruvian Amazonia. Like nature, things too can be “good to socialize” (Descola 1992), engaged in relations which shape personal identities and at once underscore their own person-like qualities. This article explores Urarina theories of materiality and personhood through a close analysis of two such relationships formed between humans and things. Regarded in certain contexts as more than inert matter but less than fully autonomous subjects, the lives of things raise ambiguities which challenge and thereby help to clarify the contours and outlines of local senses of the person. They further highlight aspects often neglected in earlier studies. While a focus on practices of conviviality and the particular concerns of medical anthropology have coincided in advancing models of the person that are, as I read them, grounded squarely in the body and in corporeal processes of substance exchange (e.g. Conklin & Morgan 1996; Pollock 1996; Conklin 1996; McCallum 1996), personhood for proponents of animism and perspectivism is more structural than processual, the outcome of internalized relations with alterity (e.g. Taylor 2001; Viveiros de Castro 2001; Vilaça 2002), and evidenced less through shared substance than the capacity for language (e.g. Descola 1994: 99). For the latter especially, the subject is treated as a ‘given’ with the presence of a (universal) soul, rather than as the product of experience (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471; Descola 1992: 114), a conflation which permits the recourse to dualist models (soul versus body, subject versus object) and overarching theoretical inversions (the former is the ‘given’ in Amazonia, the latter is the ‘constructed’). In all these approaches, bodies alone are social sites. The perspectivist subject is relational only insofar as it occupies the position of ‘predator’ or ‘prey’, and there is little room for gender or other types or degrees of subjectivity. Drawing on the Urarina case, this article points to a notion of subjectivity that is potentially available to both persons and things, is inherently gendered and relational, and does not presuppose the presence of a soul. Emphasising the importance of intimate but asymmetrical relations of dependency and control in the constitution of agency, it suggests a move away from associations between the ‘soul’ as a ‘non-social condition’ (e.g. Gow 2000:53), a cultural valorization of individual autonomy, and egalitarianism.

The Economy of Companionship

Amidst the ties of kinship which connect Urarina within and beyond the local community, relations of companionship (*corijera* or *coriara*) are constructed and dissolved. Unlike kinship, companionship is not elaborated primarily through bodily idioms; *corijera* means literally “shadow-

soul-fellow.” Unlike the body soul (*suujue*), bound up in notions of hardness, interiority, and the “heart” (*suujua*) as the seat of thought and emotion, the shadow soul (*corii*) is associated with reflections, doubles and companions. Founded in complementarity and physical proximity, these informal but typically asymmetric ties last anywhere from the duration of a specific task to a lifetime, and embody a local philosophy of mutuality. “Everyone has a companion,” I was told, “otherwise they could not live in peace... No-one can live alone.” A companion may be “of the same race/group” or “of the same activity.” Birds accompany those who walk in the forest, advising through song on a range of topics from rising water levels to the imminent death of a loved one. Trees are classified into sets of companions reflecting species found together, or held in similar esteem: aguaje palms are the companions of shebon palms; mahogany is the companion of moena; lupuna is the companion of caupuri. Communicative facility and co-operation underpin the relationship. “Lupuna is always conversing with caupuri,” my informant explained, “they co-ordinate their work together... they are neighbors.” Large game animals are said to each have a special type of companion, known as *cojoaorain*, which takes the form of a small bird who advises that animal on a daily basis. The bird is “like its soul,” and “for its protection,” warning of approaching predators and other dangers. Cultigens have companions “in order to produce.” Sweet potato, the companion of manioc, is the latter’s “support” and “resistance,” and each helps the other to grow. “Without help, one cannot work.”

A thing, too, can be a companion of another thing, provided the relation is one of likeness and proximity, but not identity. A sock’s pair is its “other” (*laucha*) but never its companion. A canoe’s companion may be another canoe, but necessarily one belonging to a different owner. Artifacts can be and often are considered the companions of humans, though the relation must be established through continual use and ever-increasing familiarity, until the identity of each entwines with the other. Things are not formally distinguished grammatically in the Urarina language from animals, plants or humans: there are no markers or pronouns for animateness or gender and no nominal classifiers. All may, on occasion, be attributed life (*ichaoha*), a Mother or Owner (*neba* or *ijiaene*), and an animal or vegetal soul (*suujue* or *eeura* respectively).¹ Ultimately, however, it seems less the explicit attribution of such qualities which defines them as particular kinds of subjects, than attitudes held towards them and ways of speaking about or to them in particular contexts. A shaman’s ceremonial breast band is credited with a vegetal soul (*eeura*) when first fabricated, but is considered to acquire a semi-autonomous subjectivity only after repeated use, when it displays affection for its owner by, for example, transforming into a boa and licking his face during healing sessions. Many such possessions which partake of their owner’s personhood in some way, such as the ceremonial paraphernalia of a shaman, or the woven fan or cooking implements of a woman, remain inalienably connected to their owners even at death, and must accompany them to their grave. The ontological status of a thing is by no means self-evident, nor is it immune to change, and it is perhaps this temporal dimension which is of greatest importance in understanding the ambiguous position of things in Urarina social life.

A Gift of Love: The Baby Hammock

Among the most intimate of all companionships established by Urarina is that formed at the very outset of life between a newborn baby and its hammock (*canaanai amaa*). A baby enters the world in a highly vulnerable and ambiguous state of existence, and the fabrication and use of the baby hammock form part of an extensive series of parental interventions intended to form and fortify

its body, protect it from disease, and ensure its successful entry into full social personhood. The mother weaves the hammock from palm fibers (*Astrocaryum chambira*) just prior to leaving the purpose-built annex (*jata*) of palm leaves in which she gave birth and must reside with her child in isolation until its umbilical cord falls. Like the hammock into which the child is then immediately transferred, the *jata* is a protective environment designed to minimize contact with alterity, and a liminal space for the passage from one social status to another. When I once asked why a mother weaves the hammock, I was told simply, “because she loves her baby.” It is an act which materializes her maternal love, alongside relations with female kin who, during the term of pregnancy, present gifts of selected items from hammocks their own children have outgrown. Such gift giving is also a concrete expression of their love, and the two acts are linguistically identical (*belaiha*). Through this investment of labor and love, the hammock is identified with its maker as a partial extension of her person (cf. Erikson, this volume), explicitly intended to substitute for her as the child is progressively distanced from its mother.

The hammock is prepared for use, and the child for emergence from the birth annex, through the performance by the father or other male relative of a chant cycle known as the *canaanai mitu baau*. This blesses a preparation of achiote and the roots of a piri-piri plant with which the child and hammock are each subsequently painted, in order to “maintain the body” and protect it from harm. Performed through the night directly prior to the child’s emergence and lasting up to several hours, the chant invokes an extensive repertoire of beings – from mythical ancestors to species of birds and fish to the sun, moon and celestial jaguar – with the aim of appropriating desirable qualities or relations. Prominent among these is *acarera*, “vitality,” “vital breath/strength” or “longevity.” The chant gradually builds up a compound identity for the child/hammock until it is, finally, the entire ensemble of vitalities which is painted, as the following extract indicates:

Never capable of dying	chabana baitenachara
The vitality of the iguana	leleno acarera
And the vitality of the child’s spirit	rai corii acarera
Are being formed as in the womb	necoulucuna que
The boy’s vitality	aine calabi acarera
Shall be painted with achiote	coiainaritiin ne
This jaguar	caa ataebuinae
Who dwells in the sky	cana ichoae que terequi
Tremendous beast	catojoaain cotabaji
Never passes to this earthly side	chabana necoerateein
Since the creation	necooauna caje
Is never diminished	chabana netabatacajeein
And there not forgotten	nii baitenacai
As the child’s spirit grows	nejoerate rai corii
Painting with achiote	coiane que
This collectivity of vitalities	acarera caa calauri
Shielded from dangers	elunai que
Painting the newborn	coiane ne najanoacoa
With piri-piri	cobiri que

His vitality	rai acarera
Shall be painted with achiote	coiane que coianaritiin ne

When not in the arms of its mother or sleeping in her bed at night, a newborn baby spends most of its time in the hammock, under constant supervision, for there are no baby slings or other carrying devices (see Figure 1). With time, the child's *acarera* is said to permeate the hammock, remaining there even when no longer in use, and painting both with achiote pre-empts this fusion. The hammock gradually forms an integral connection to the baby, a kind of "ensoulment" (see Santos-Granero and Miller, this volume) through which each becomes an extension of the other, and the hammock will not be reused by another baby once outgrown, but guarded by the mother until it deteriorates. In exchange for this investment of vitality, the hammock actively forms the child's own nascent personhood, a role prefigured by the performative force of the *canaanai mitu* chant. Of central importance is the hammock's rattle (*torara*), a heterogeneous collection of items affixed beneath the position of the baby's head. Its bulk is made up of dry hollow seeds and gourds whose primary purpose is to produce sleep-inducing "lullabies" (*jororoa*) as they swing to and fro. By means of a long, taut string wound through her toes, a simple rocking of the caretaker's foot keeps the hammock in constant motion. Sleeping is considered the ideal state for a newborn baby, and the rattle's lullabies are often augmented with vocalized versions, personalized by the caretaker, which implore the baby to sleep, often promising union with its mother (or father), recently departed for the garden or forest, by means of its hammock 'canoe':

Come, lay in your hammock	chajaocha tijiquin
Sleep now child	sinira canaanai
Go and follow Mummy, child	chajaocha mama sacuniu canaanai
If you stay behind you will cry, child	nedai ne te chanatoriqui canaanai
The rain already closes in on her, child	inae mama jourichaje elo canaanai
Go and call her, child	cotihaniu canaanai
Go and be together with Mummy	mama que tacaain cotihaniu
Come on, go in canoe, child	chajaera lalautoracha canaanai
Go laying and swinging, child	chajaocha tijitijico canaanai

[INSERT: Figure 1]

The rattle's lullaby promotes more than sleep, for attached to the seeds and gourds is a diverse and often extensive collection of animal parts: bones, teeth, claws, beaks and tails, woven together with remnants of foreign goods such as empty bottles, disposable razors, plastic spools, mirror frames, and sewing kits (see Figure 2). Each is more or less explicitly associated with some useful quality to be instilled, evoking pan-Amazonian notions of the transmission of animal qualities: the shoulder bone of the sloth, for example, an animal said to rarely defecate, is attached to build a child's resistance to diarrhea; the tongue of the paucar bird to develop its vocal abilities; coati teeth to transmit this animal's ability to find honey and avoid snakebite. Snail shells might be tied to the rattle "so the baby's ear doesn't grow too big," while tiny glass vaccination bottles collected from the visits of local health workers, wrapped in colorful cotton jackets, continue to build resistance to that particular disease. Many items are gender specific: spent shotgun shells, collected from kills not misses, promote hunting ability; packets of needles might be affixed to a girl's rattle "so she will

know how to sew - so she doesn't grow up useless," and plastic combs so her well-brushed hair will remain free from lice. A single rattle may boast dozens of such components, the meaning or value of which can be idiosyncratic, or evident only to one familiar with its origins, and final interpretative authority always rests with the mother. The rattle is her unique and personalized contribution to the continuing formation of the child outside the womb. It embodies a technology for the production of persons founded in the controlled appropriation of alterity in the context of companionship.

[INSERT: Figure 2]

The hammock's protective function, epitomized in the sonic transmission of resistance to diseases, helps to interpret comments by Urarina that the hammock is not only the baby's companion (*coriara*), but also "like its *cojoaaorain*," the avian caretaker or spiritual guardian of game animals. One informant defined the *cojoaaorain* as "one who communicates with you in order to care for your life...for your defense." The baby is emotionally as well as physically dependent on the hammock, and separation is considered highly distressing, as was first made clear to me when I once callously – and ultimately unsuccessfully – attempted to purchase a hammock still in use. The baby's involvement is further encouraged by the attachment of a series of 'toys', typically pieces of wood carved by the mother for its shadow soul (*corii*) to 'play' with. Their location behind the head and out of reach reinforces this playing's immaterial nature. The most important such 'toy' is the baby's own umbilical cord (*misi*), attached to the rattle carefully wrapped in cloth inside a tiny string bag. Treated with great respect by adults, it cannot be touched or removed from the hammock by anyone but the child itself, who will ideally dispose of or 'lose' it in the course of playing. The umbilical cord is linguistically indistinct from the placenta (also *misi*), carefully buried by the mother in the same pit into which the baby is born. Because of its enduring connection to the child, accidental contact with an animal or harmful spirit is feared to result in illness. The spirit or shadow soul is said to return to the placenta and umbilical cord after death, and their careful burial enables it to find and identify its family and birthplace, establishing a localized continuity between the womb and the afterlife. A spirit unable to find its umbilical cord and placenta is condemned to eternal wandering and discontent.

The *canaanai mitu baau* quoted above referred to the child's spirit growing in the hammock "as in the womb," and a series of additional gestures and ideas point to an implicit analogy between the hammock (with rattle) and placenta. Urarina recognize that each becomes an integral part of both the mother and child, an extension of their person, and cannot be unambiguously interpreted as belonging to either. Much like the placenta, the hammock binds a baby to its mother and mediates between them; hence the encouraging references (in lullabies and elsewhere) to the hammock as a means for prolonging their union. It must similarly be carefully protected against accidental contact with alterity due to a quasi-material connection with the baby. An empty hammock is always untied and laid on the floor, lest the spirits of deceased children enter and swing in it, inducing vomiting, diarrhea and fever. The hammock fully contains the baby in a protective and nurturing space which facilitates growth, much like the womb, and the extensive collection of hollow seeds, gourds and empty bottles on the rattle would further suggest this relation of containment. Use of the hammock in daily life effectively serves to prolong the experience of intra-uterine life. Safely inside, the baby dwells in a sonic universe circumscribed by the sounds of the rattle, and is insulated physically and symbolically from the outside world. Perhaps most importantly, the rapid swinging

motion, which ideally extends to near-horizontal, subdues the child by resisting and ultimately overriding its tentative exercise of agency. A baby in a hammock is rarely spoken to, outside the lullaby, and in this subordinate, ideally sleeping, dependent state is best protected and most receptive to the formative messages which inaugurate it as person and subject.

A Tamed Enemy: The Stone Bowl

At the other end of the life trajectory, experienced shamans wishing to increase their control over the dart-like media (*batohi*) of mystical attack engage in intimate companionships with small, naturally-occurring stone bowls known as *egaando*. Like the baby and its hammock, the two come to share a similar if asymmetrical mode of social existence in which each productively transforms the other through communication and substantive exchange. But it is here the shaman who must wield greater authority in order to utilize the *egaando* and coerce it into full personhood. Such a task is considered both difficult and dangerous, given the *egaando*'s renowned hostility and formidable abilities to ensorcel, even when lying undiscovered in rocky stretches of river bed. Babies and small children are particularly susceptible, often through the conduit of their parents' activities, and the resulting illnesses can be cured only by means of *baau* chants which, like the *canaanai mitu baau* used for preparing the child and hammock (and like the operation of the rattle itself) aim to integrate desired qualities into the child from diverse sources. A series of beings noted for their immunity to attack by *egaando* are invoked in turn:

In our river basin that has rocky rapids	lauri conucue cocaratiri
As his father looks at the <i>egaando</i>	begaando que nenotajina rai jojiara
With its terrifying power	ne jana rai beluna que
The <i>egaando</i> looks at his father	nenotajina rai jojiara ne jana
His blood will be dyed	rai coichana lomoritiin
By the blessed contents of this bowl	nia rai cojoachacane jana
Harm never ever befalls	unaterinachara
The offspring of the giant otter	asae aroba necoerejete

[Entire verse repeats replacing 'giant otter'/'asae aroba' successively with:]

otter chief	asisi jelai tijiain
tapir	caoacha ate cosemane
water jaguar	asae baain
water thunder people	asae araracuru
ponpon duck	jojona

At this point in time the *egaando* is little more than a hostile concentration of will and 'fearfulness' or predatory energy (*comaaori*). Although occupying a 'point of view', capable of causing harm by 'looking', its status as a person is ambiguous, diffuse and devoid of individual identity. It is not readily distinguished as an entity separate from the rocky rapid in which it rests, nor from their shared Mother or Owner, who has both spiritual and locational aspect (respectively *caratiri neba*, "mother of rocky rapids," and *nacanocari*, a kind of alligator). All are thought to collaborate in joint acts of predatory aggression. Even more significantly, the *egaando* dwells

hitherto outside the moral sphere, which over and above all else instantiates the divide between humanity and animality, or between ‘real people’ and others.

To utilize an *egaando* one must first capture and “tame” it (*irilaa*). A suitable specimen, sought out in times of low water level, is around 5-10 cm in diameter, with two depressions in its base, said to resemble the testicles of the white-lipped peccary. One woman described her late husband’s *egaando* as being “very pretty” with natural designs on it similar to those painted by women on the ceremonial ceramic jars (*baichaje*) used for storing ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*). Once found, a shaman immediately blows tobacco smoke on the bowl and places it at the foot of a toé tree (*Brugmansia sp.*), where its co-operation is gradually enlisted through forms of ritual dialogue (*cojiotaa* and *chairetaa*). The Mother of toé and the *egaando* are directly addressed in turn, in their potential capacity as subjects, with the aim of soliciting assistance, subduing the *egaando* and instigating asymmetrical relationships of companionship between the three participants, though without any recourse to external relations of transference:

Tame this <i>egaando</i> for me, toé	Ca <i>egaando</i> carai irilaa coairi
Let your greatness be with him, toé	aiyute coairi neeine necaoacha
Be at his side, accompanying	jereronia neeine
Speak to this <i>egaando</i>	ca <i>egaando</i> naainte
Our ancestors prayed to you	cojiotaaure cana inoaesuru
Do as before, that we shall replace them	charijieenteeinte aiachuruine
Yes indeed, as I drink	aiyute necocae nianone
Let’s accompany each other	canu necoca jeeune neeine
Just like this, <i>egaando</i>	cairjitocora <i>egaando</i>
You are just like this	cairjitocote
With this greatness of toé	ca coairi necaoacha aina
Be like this greatness of toé	cairjitocotee coairi necaoacha
You will accompany me, <i>egaando</i>	jereronia neeinha <i>egaando</i>

After several days at the foot of the toé tree, the bowl is transferred to a *baichaje* jar and brought inside the house. Some claim the jar should be filled with water, to be changed every few days, for if the bowl dries out it is liable to ‘run away’ or ensorcel those in its immediate proximity. In further chants addressed to the *egaando*, the shaman requests it in his new capacity as ‘owner’ to serve him obediently, to respect his family and not cause them harm, and to share its knowledge. Silent at first, the *egaando* eventually capitulates to the requests in toé visions. It is used as a vessel for drinking concentrated tobacco juice, ingested continuously in conjunction with tobacco smoke. The shaman must learn to listen to the *egaando*’s darts, which sing their songs ‘through’ him as he drinks the tobacco juice:

<i>Egaando, egaando, egaando</i>	<i>egaando egaando egaando</i>
Laying out flat	mariri mariri mariri
Emptying out <i>asara</i> darts	asara ne coberotee
You are laying your eggs <i>egaando</i>	netajetia neeine <i>egaando</i>
Reproducing, increasing in number	necalabihaca
Let us play and sing here	nenatia cute
With the tobacco drinker	tabaquero aina

Your forces will come to stay	cojoatojoi uureen nedareen
Sing of this	nenatia caa ne te

The theme of playing, also a feature of the baby's relation with the rattle, is emphasized here as in much shamanic discourse. Play is pivotal in the consolidation of social relationships, and references a productive, if incorporeal, interaction which generates affective closeness. My informant explained as follows: "The shaman is getting drunk with the tobacco juice, and also with the darts, he is playing with the darts, going around and around for fun...both sides are playing, together with *egaando*, they are all playing. The darts are making him sing. The darts are always singing. Wherever they are, they always have to demonstrate their manner." Said to resemble tiny worms, the darts are full of life (*ichaoha*), playful as well as lethal. The *egaando* "lays eggs" in the song in order "to have grandchildren," "to increase its numbers," and through these songs, through play, the darts are said to "empty out" into the shaman and multiply.

In exchange for the bowl's continued co-operation, the shaman submits to stringent dietary and other prohibitions. He avoids salt and animals with strong colors or designs, among other items, which cause the *egaando*'s darts to "flee in fear." He leads a solitary existence, eating and sleeping alone, approached only by others on the same diet. The material basis of his connection to the group effectively severed, he is free to "become like the *egaando*" and communicate with it more effectively. One dieting with *egaando* is said to resemble a convalescent, physically weak and incapable of hard work. The bowl is placed by his head when he sleeps, and will approach him in his dreams, interrogating his motives for seeking it out and dieting with it. He will be asked about his wife, children, and relatives, and the bowl may make clear its desire to inflict harm, to "eat the liver" of one of them, for example. The shaman must have mastered the art of dreaming in order to dissuade it and contain its aggressive instincts. One who lacks mastery of the relevant chants, or the discipline to diet properly, will similarly be unsuccessful in restraining it. One woman recalled how her father possessed an *egaando* when she was small, but was unable to tame it, and her brother became gravely ill and nearly died as a result.

Rigorous adherence to the diet becomes a form of leverage in such oneiric transactions for ensuring the bowl's continued co-operation. To the extent the shaman's family stay in good health, the *egaando* is considered to be upholding its end of the bargain, its ability to keep to its word indicating that the taming is proceeding well. After months of dieting the bowl finally enters the moral universe, respectful and obedient, sharing a close affinity with its owner. "A good *egaando* loves its owner," I was told, and "is like a teacher in the school," instructing him until he becomes a true *benane* – one with the facility to extract darts from an ensorcelled patient and redeploy them in retributive action. Such figures are the cornerstone of shamanic ideology and continue to command a sense of awe and a prominent place in everyday discourse that seems disproportionate with their now dwindling numbers. Possession of an *egaando*, the hallmark of the *benane*, is enshrouded in a kind of pseudo-secrecy, the topic of covert discussions which better promote a suitable aura of fear than any open advertisement. One informant recalled that his grandfather, after many months of dieting with *egaando*, had successfully tamed it to the point where he could communicate with it in an everyday, waking, non-ritual context. He taught his *egaando* to watch over and protect his house while he traveled upriver on hunting trips, instructing it to 'insult', in their dreams, any passing travelers tempted to sleep in the house. Persons so insulted have been known to leap up from their beds, shouting, running out of the house into the night. If they know how to dream, they will have realized that an *egaando* was responsible.

Gender and the Production of Subjects

Procedures for the fabrication and use of the hammock and *egaando* reference contrastive and complementary techniques for bringing into being determinate kinds of person. Common to both is an intimate and mutually constitutive, but ultimately asymmetrical, relationship which is valued particularly for its ability to form or enhance personal identity through the inculcation of essential skills and other qualities. Use of things to this end circumvents an egalitarian ethos according to which direct instruction by one's fellows is considered an undesirable imposition of authority. Just as the hammock's own agency necessarily exceeds that of the baby in order to effectively imbue it with the requisite qualities of a gendered, social person, the *egaando* is fully subjectivized only when and as the shaman successfully establishes his complete authority over it. As Erikson (this volume) has observed, the fact that something has a master in Amazonia does not impede its endowment with personality and intentionality. The cases developed here would even point to the former as a prerequisite of the latter, an apparent paradox which recalls recent inquiry into how "the subject is not only that which is oppressed by power but emerges himself as the product of this power" (Žižek 2000: 251). The techniques for preparing and using an *egaando*, which encapsulate an Urarina theory of subjection, will be used to explore this further.

The *egaando*'s progression from an unpredictable predatory force to a pet-like subordinate imbued with personality and a moral conscience is glossed by Urarina as the outcome of *irilaa*, a term used to mean "taming" or "raising," for example pets or orphans. Several authors have related taming to the conversion of affinity into consanguinity, and encompassed it within the structural logic of predation (e.g. Fausto 2000, 2007; Taylor 2001; Descola 1997). Yet there is little to suggest the *egaando*'s initial status as an affine, while its eventual relation to its owner was articulated in terms of the two being not like kin, but "like neighbors," and sharing not bodily substance, but mutual respect. Ideologies of predation and, especially, warfare are moreover far from salient in Urarina thought and practice, which emphasise peacefulness and passive forms of resistance over bellicose action. They figure as themes primarily in historical accounts of themselves as the innocent victims of Jivaroan raiding parties. Whilst concurring with Fausto (2000: 938) that "adoptive filiation" references prototypical relations of symbolic control in Amazonia, I suggest that taming can here be largely dissociated from warfare and predation and instead incorporated within a broader matrix of subjection, implying the simultaneous subordination and forming of subjects.

Taming comprises firstly the deployment of ritual discourse which demands the *egaando*'s co-operation. Working in alliance with the Mother of toé, revered for its unrivalled power, the shaman occupies an clear position of authority. The *egaando*'s eventual response is said to be a kind of capitulation, a recognition of the power of those who call it. We might say that it is hailed or *interpellated* into existence as a subject². In aligning itself with authority and responding to its demands, the *egaando* is endowed with a moral conscience. It agrees to teach the shaman and promises not to harm his family, despite its desire to do so, and the shaman in return undertakes to diet. Demonstrating an ability to keep to its word is highly significant in the construal of the *egaando* as a moral person, rather than a mere concentration of dangerous predatory energy. As Nietzsche (1956:190) pointed out, one who promises must be able to forge a continuity between an original determination and the actual performance of the thing willed, or between a statement and an act, across a time gap in which various other, competing circumstances or temptations might threaten

to intervene. This protracted will enables the promising being to stand for itself through time. The deal struck with the *egaando* demands the suppression of its instinct to inflict harm and the adoption of social norms, such as respect for others and personal responsibility. It is this good moral sense that makes the *egaando* most like a “true person” (*cacha*). From an Urarina point of view, it would seem that its newfound “consciousness”, as represented by its ability to enter into increasingly coherent dialogues, is not somehow transferred or “captured” from its owner (cf. Gell 1998), but is rather the form its own will takes, its innate hostility or predatory force, when prevented from simple expression as a deed. It is an aggression turned inward and back on itself, an internalization which creates an autonomous, internal space, producing conscience and the conditions for reflexivity.

Urarina claim that a tamed *egaando* is not only possessed of moral sensibilities, and able to cooperate with others, but is highly dependent on, and fiercely loyal to, even “loving”, its owner and master. What might be the significance of this newfound emotional bond? If the *egaando*’s identity as a person or subject was, from the very beginning, founded in a kind of “recognition” by and submission to an authority figure on whom it depended in every sense, then to embrace that submission, to form a “passionate attachment” to subjection (Butler 1997), is equivalent to embracing the very conditions of its continued existence. The situation of the baby in its hammock, though admittedly a more complex case, does not necessarily differ in general outline from this scenario. The baby experiences its physical dependency on the hammock as an intense emotional bond. Only specialized chants (*cojiotaa*) can placate a crying baby estranged from its hammock. The rattle’s gentle messages, which shape and condition its new, human identity, are similarly from a protective authority who offers personalized recognition, but to whom submission is mandatory. The skills for achieving personal autonomy later in life can only be acquired through a kind of founding submission to a situation of dependency and attachment.

Such an account of the journey of the subject, although somewhat stylized, is at variance with perspectivist assumptions. *Egaando* are indeed considered to be alive, to possess animal or vegetal souls (or both), and a Mother/Owner, yet such attributions would seem almost incidental to their gradual positioning as subjects. The ability to occupy a ‘point of view’ does not guarantee or index personhood, and their changing subjectivity relies not on a soul or body but on shifting relations to its Owners and Masters. This opens up important questions of variation foreclosed by the perspectivist recourse to overarching inversions: how and why, for example, animism and perspectivism are not unilaterally applied to nonhumans and may often be restricted to particular species, “those which perform a key symbolic and practical role” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471). This in turn suggests an alternative conceptualization of the Mother/Owner figure, whom Viveiros de Castro has claimed functions as a hypostatization of the species with which it is associated, creating an “intersubjective field for human-animal relations” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471; see also Fausto 2007). Such a formulation conflates rather than problematizes the relation between the individual, its species and their Mother or Owner. If the *egaando* and its Mother/Owner are referred to interchangeably when the former is still in the river, this is patently not the case once it is extracted, where the *egaando* alone is addressed directly.

In Urarina thought, anything with ‘power’ or ‘force’ of some kind, whether to smell sweetly or burn fiercely, cause harm or inebriate, typically has a Mother or Owner with which this power is principally associated or identified. But despite this ostensibly offensive role, the Mother/Owner is often described as an entity’s ‘defense’, the power on which it depends for continued existence. It might more accurately be figured as a hypostatization of at once the power or ‘voice’ of authority which is the *condition* of subjectivity, constituted in relationship, and an individual’s incipient

conscience, for these are at first necessarily indistinguishable.³ The taming of the *egaando* is the occasion for the definitive conversion of the former into the latter, as the shaman assumes full control and ownership. The category of the subject emerges here as less a location or ‘point of view’, than a kind of ‘transfer point’ of attachments and dependencies. Shifts in these - often, though not always, expressed in bodily modifications or transformations - would account for the variable and sometimes transient nature of subjectivity. The Amazonian concern with establishing individual rights of ownership over everything - including their “quest for non-overlapping mastership” (Erikson, this volume) is evidently bound up in the equally characteristic “radical subjectivization” (García Hierro & Surrallés 2004: 15) of non-humans, and each in a sense implies the other.⁴

A few observations concerning gender are apposite here. Insofar as the hammock and *egaando* are conceived by Urarina as agents for the instruction and transformation of humans, this agency manifests itself as feminine and masculine respectively. The hammock materializes a mother’s love for her baby, along with her relations with female kin and their collective desires for its future identity, and connects the two in a manner reminiscent of the placenta. Through the assembly of items of diverse origin into a single, harmonious whole, its use ‘normalizes’ the child and incorporates it into social life. Women’s labor is often similarly integrative in nature, and women themselves play an integrative role in the uxori-local structure of Urarina society, consolidating the domestic unit and incorporating incoming men into the household. The hammock assumes a motherly and caring role, literally forming the child’s body as it nurtures, protects and regulates. Its use emphasizes the importance of integrative change in the establishment of social relations, of proximity and mutual dependency over individuality and hierarchy, and reproduces the authority of women in the domestic spheres of bodily and child care. Men rarely touch let alone swing a hammock, and claim to have little or no knowledge of their own child’s rattle or its origins, deferring all questions on the matter to their wives.

Use of the *egaando* implies techniques of empowerment of a masculine nature. It is not manufactured or assembled, but found fully formed, in the shape of peccary testicles, albeit in a ‘wild’ state and in need of taming. Men are said to have to ‘tame’ their wives at the outset of marriage, in order that they assume a new, domestic identity as a wife - a task further assisted, on occasion, by forms of ritual discourse. The *egaando* emphasizes relations with alterity over domesticity, the power of change through discipline and internal transformation, and is individuating and differentiating in nature, enhancing a man’s social status and promoting the singularity proper to shamans and to men in general. Through ways of dressing, naming practices, forms of address, and a variety of behavioral norms, women are symbolically homogenized in daily life, whereas men actively differentiate themselves. Urarina theories of gestation state that men contribute the ‘uniqueness’ of a fetus, those features which distinguish it from others, while women provide the vessel for growth and formation. In short, the two objects are implicitly gendered as they are socialized. This suggests possible limits to the perspectivist definition of humanity solely in contradistinction to animality, which fails to differentiate between the male and female person (Rival 2007). Of course, gender is also an indispensable conceptual and analogic tool for imagining other forms of relation (Hugh-Jones, this volume; Strathern 2001). The gendered agentivity of these two things, which captures or reiterates that of its makers or owners, further highlights the intimate connection between autonomy and dependency, or between the power that acts on a subject and brings it into being, and that which the subject in turn enacts.

Notions of personhood form part of the ways by which actors legitimize their own actions in relation to others (Conklin & Morgan 1996: 658). As vested interests inform the full or partial

recognition as persons of things in specific contexts, use of the hammock and *egaando* serve to further the authority of women and men in distinct spheres of action. They may be understood as partaking in, and promoting, contrastive and co-existing models of personhood and agency. The selective application of such models to non-humans recalls the concept of ‘nature regimes’ (Escobar 1999), which are further articulated in opposition to the naturalistic and capitalist ‘natures’ imported from elsewhere. Yet beneath these differences lie significant commonalities, and each model demonstrates above all the importance assigned to things in the work of producing persons. Things, like persons, may inhabit an autonomy born of dependency, an often ambiguous form of relationality perfectly encapsulated by the image of the hammock as placenta. This is envisaged, not as a property of the body, but as a potential of the spirit or shadow soul. What is being strived for, it seems, is not the identity of kinship but a kind of similarity or proximity, dyadic in nature, grounded in irreducible difference. While the Urarina theory of materiality manifests a sense of ownership or mastery as being of central importance in relations with things, it simultaneously holds that fabrication, even when symbolically equated with filiation (Lagrou, this volume), is not the only means for its establishment, nor that of an equally important intimacy. Neither the baby nor the shaman themselves manufacture the objects with which they become entangled, though they are deeply involved in their creation as person-like companions. Things and persons may be mutually constituted, but it is through subjection, so often under the guise of companionship, that subjects form and endure.

Notes

1. Foreign goods such as radios or shotguns are not exempt from this logic, though they are sharply distinguished from locally manufactured items in at least one aspect: their Mother and Owner, source and ultimate destiny is *Moconajaera*, a figure today equated by Urarina with the devil, and who is said to burn souls in the celestial fire in order to purge them of sins and in accordance with the quantities consumed of ‘his’ goods.
2. In Althusser’s (1971) well-known, allegorical example, a policeman hails a passerby on the street, calling, “Hey, you!”. As the passerby turns, in that instant recognizing himself as the one who is addressed, interpellation – the discursive production of the social subject – takes place. Recognition by the Law is proffered and accepted, and an identity is won by accepting the subordination and normalization effected by that ‘voice’ (see also Butler 1997).
3. As Butler (1997) has pointed out, there must be an irreducible ambiguity between the ‘voice’ of conscience and the ‘voice’ of the law if models of ideological interpellation are to avoid assumptions of any prior subject who performs the allegorical ‘turn’ towards the voice which hails it. A antecedent complicity with authority – such as that potentially encapsulated in the Mother/Owner figure - is needed to explain why the individual responds at all.
4. Urarina are, of course, both masters and subjects in this matrix of symbolic control. Incidentally, one Urarina word for Mother/Owner, *ijiaene*, is virtually identical to that for mestizo, *ijiaen*, a

mutually reinforcing assimilation which may reflect not simply an earlier sense of mestizos as spirits, but their originary and continuing presence in Urarina territory in structural positions of authority and ownership. It is tempting to speculate that the continuing and often seemingly voluntary assumption by Urarina of subordinate roles in relation to mestizos – in the still-pervasive system of *habilitación*, for example – further reflects not merely force of habit but yet another “passionate attachment” to subjection.

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Figure 1: Woman oversees baby in hammock



Figure 2: Rattle comprising seeds and gourds woven together with miscellaneous animal parts and foreign goods