Some welcoming ceremonies practised by indigenous peoples of the Amazon have been considered events that enable the establishment of a social link between potential enemies. The studies do not, however, indicate how the shift from latent hostility to a social relationship occurs. They only refer to the ‘magical act’ produced through the significant exchange during the dialogues that take place at the key moment of the ceremony. Examining the perceptual interaction of the Candoshi welcoming ceremony and not merely the text of the dialogue, this article attempts to incorporate into the analysis the intensity of the affective dimension which governs these rituals, which can help to explain how such rituals provide the participants with the confidence to initiate a social relationship.

When an anthropologist has the privilege of taking part in certain welcoming ceremonies among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, his initial impression is that of a Lévi-Straussian ‘emergence of culture’, that moment when knowledge begins to emerge from an initial symbolic exchange. The visitors, travelling from far away, finally meet their hosts. Both visitors and hosts will have spent long periods of time in isolation, rarely seeing even close family members from their own local group. Amid the vast plains of tropical vegetation – where rivers are the sole means of communication, population density is extremely low, and social conditions of such permanent hostility prevail that travel is discouraged – it is exceptional for strangers to meet. Spectacular ornaments, magnificent feather crowns, bright facial paint: the solemn character of these ceremonies indicates that they are certainly no ordinary affair. Perhaps they can be viewed as evoking the original symbolic exchange that, in keeping with the famous ‘phylogenetic moment’, represents the transition from nature to culture. For in these welcoming ceremonies language plays a crucial role because the culminating moment is the spoken dialogue; the conceptual abstraction of a social link becomes concrete at the very moment when the first words are exchanged. Of course, this comparison is a fiction. However, these ceremonies have led anthropologists working in Amazonian regions to reflect on the relationship between language and sociability through references to the nature of such notions. Thus G. Urban (1986) argues that the form taken by ceremonial dialogues in South America constitutes the sign conveyed in the ceremony: the only object of the first
symbolic exchange between two interlocutors is a message that implies and demonstrates the desire to communicate, and therefore to establish a social relationship. Crépeau (1993: 93) agrees with this view when he writes, paraphrasing U. Eco, that social consensus is reached at that moment when everyone recognizes the force, the mana of the symbol. But with reference to this same scene of the genesis of culture, it is still necessary to explain how the first sign exchanged in the ceremony is constituted. The allegory of mana rightly captures the enigmatic magical nature of this sign. But how is the sign established in the first place? What are its qualities? How does a sign, on its own, constitute a social link? In other words, how does this ceremony enable its participants to incorporate the results expected from the ritual in order to achieve sociability?

In addition to the many accounts of ceremonial dialogues in other regions, this issue was addressed by such Amazonia specialists as Tastevin (1909), and subsequently by Fock (1963) and Rivière (1971). Other notable studies include Wagley’s monograph on the ceremony known as the ‘welcome of tears’ among the Tapirapé of Central Brazil (1977) and a range of pieces which reflect a growing interest in the subject (Chernela 2001; Crépeau 1993; Erikson 2000; Gnerre 1986; Howard 1993; Lizot 1994; Schoepf 1998; Urban 1986).

First and foremost, these studies show the considerable diversity of forms of ceremonial dialogue, among which greetings, equally diverse, are a specific form. The variability of ceremonial dialogues also suggests that their performance may be rather different, which calls for caution in drawing generalizations. Nevertheless, most earlier and more recent studies agree on the existence of a link between these forms and the sociology of the group expressing them. Thus Fock (1963) states that the Waiwai use a special mode of expression in official announcements, requests, and claims called ‘Oho’, which consists of a highly formalized dialogue between two men representing two potentially conflictive social groups. This form of speech is used in marriage negotiations, trade, the organization of collective work or celebrations, and funerals. The Waiwai Oho makes no distinction in terms of social distance between participants, whereas, according to Rivière (1971), the ceremonial dialogues existing among the Trio reflect the degree of social distance between participants and the time lapsed since their previous meeting. As in the case of the Waiwai Oho, ceremonial dialogues of the Trio are highly formalized, although they are used in only three situations: greetings during visits, trade, and marital negotiations. This relationship between ritual speech and the distance between social segments, clearly formulated by Rivière, is taken up in all the recent studies mentioned above. For instance, J. Chernela (2001) shows how Wanano welcoming ceremonies are important performative events whose purpose is to negotiate group boundaries rather than to establish them by producing a whole range of categories of ‘other’, ranging from the total insider – the consanguineal sib-mate – to the extreme outsider, the enemy. This article shows how the social contract is produced and reproduced through these ceremonies.

In addition to the relationship between ceremonial dialogues and social distance, another characteristic is nearly always mentioned in these works, particularly relating to welcoming ceremonies: the climate of tension surrounding
these events, stemming from the potential conflict that might erupt, and the emotional involvement of the participants. P. Rivière (1971: 206), for example, commented on the high level of emotional tension in these encounters. He stressed that the function of the dialogue is to mediate potentially conflictual situations arising from the social distance existing between the participants in the ceremony: this dialogue reinforces solidarity and thereby moderates the tension.

Other authors have argued that the source of tension may be the potential difference in essence between hosts and guests – from an animist point of view in which certain non-humans are considered persons – rather than the social distance between them. Thus for P. Erikson, the tension surrounding Amazonian greetings – sufficiently remarkable to inspire the title of his article – derives from the uncertainty concerning the ontological quality of the visitors. To welcome is to reduce the distance – either temporal or spatial – that exists between the host and his visitors, to remove part of the threat posed by the uncertain nature of appearances. An uninhibited act of welcoming is a declaration of humanity (Erikson 2000: 117-33). Although this tension and its emotional expression have been recognized in both older and more recent studies, they have not been given much ethnographic or analytical attention, even though many Amazonian anthropologists have been taking a keen interest in issues of affect (e.g. Overing & Passes 2000). With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Basso 2000; Duranti 1992), most scholars have privileged a perspective that focuses on the text of the dialogue, disregarding non-linguistic forms of interaction. A possible means of approaching the emotional dimension of the ceremonies would be to observe one of their most remarkable features: the body language of the participants. This, however, has rarely been studied (Monod Becquelin & Erikson: 2000: 15).

This is probably related to the difficulty for anthropologists in establishing the nexus between perception and expression through body language of feelings and other sensory, poly-sensory, or synaesthetic forms of non-verbal communication, on the one hand, and articulated language, on the other. The theory of direct perception recently proposed in anthropology by T. Ingold provides us with a conceptual framework to reconcile these two aspects. Inspired by certain concepts formulated by authors interested in perception, most notably Merleau-Ponty and the psychologist J. Gibson, Ingold sees the origin of social connectedness in the involvement of subjects in a community that is committed to joint action. He argues further that this joint action stems from a common perception of their particular environment. Direct perception would therefore encompass all aspects of human activity including speech, a dimension which, from this point of view, is inseparable from other forms of interaction (Ingold 1992; 2000: 392-420). The challenge that this theory presents for concrete case analysis lies in the association of the different aspects of a given social interaction in a single analytical schema, showing how a determined sensory configuration provides for the attainment of a collective action.²

The purpose of this article is to introduce a methodological element relative to this objective, analysing the welcoming ceremony practised by the Candoshi people of the Peruvian Amazon. My concern is to identify the schema that guarantees solidarity between the ambit, on the one hand, of
perceptual interaction and, on the other, that of spoken communication, represented by the dialogue in this ritual. The emphasis on the primacy of perception, and on the notion of intensity that is inherent to it, should allow us to associate the affective dimension which is present in the ceremony with the more conceptual dimension of articulated language. The incorporation of affectivity through perception on the part of the participants in the ritual can explain the way in which the shift from latent hostility to the establishment of a social link takes place without leaving the ambit of a theory of meaning, that is, without the need to appeal to psychological arguments. In other words, this can explain how the ritual successfully wins over the participants through the incorporation of the meaning of the ritual act.

Following a brief presentation of the Candoshi and of the spaces of sociability where these rituals are inserted, there follows a translation of a fragment of welcoming dialogue. I then provide an initial analysis of this fragment in the light of the results of previous analyses, to highlight the questions that remain unresolved. To conclude, I attempt to answer these questions by taking into account the perceptual dimension of the ceremony into which the spoken dialogue is to be found.

**Who is what?**

The Candoshi are an indigenous South American society, numbering around two thousand, living along the tributaries of the Pastaza and Morona rivers to the north of the Peruvian Amazon. Daily life is organized around the single-family household; these are often polygynous. Such households are normally isolated; indeed, they may be situated several kilometres from one another, forming units that are economically autonomous and almost wholly independent in political terms. It may happen that two or three households are grouped together, and today it is possible to find a few small villages that have been set up by missionaries. Such settlements are of recent origin and very unstable, however. In some instances, the extreme isolation of the Candoshi household is offset by supra-domestic structures, formed by a dozen residences located within a relatively circumscribed space. These groupings (there are around twenty) are based on alliances between two groups of brothers and sisters who intermarry in order to create a network of solidarity. A warrior-chief of recognized authority, who shares his power with another warrior-chief, leads the group. The relationship between these local groups is one of relative hostility, which can turn into open aggressiveness. Shamanism is regulated by the same logic of aggression. Their idea of social life is therefore founded on a predatory ideology and is based on the conviction that the self is constructed at the expense of the identity of the other. In the past these ideas found their symbolic representation in the practice of head-shrinking (Surrallés 1999; 2000).³

According to the Candoshi, all entities possess a form of subjectivity. General ‘animism’ results from this perspective, where stars, vegetation, and animals perceive the world as subjects, with their own relative perspectives. However, even if every entity has its own subjectivity, communication between humans and non-humans is not always possible: it depends on the connec-
tions and the incompatibilities between the respective faculties of perception that the entities are believed to possess (language, will, vision, and so on). An hierarchy is thus created, based on the type of interaction which is made possible by these connections. Entities that have a particularly strong presence called vani (this term is translated as ‘soul’ by the missionaries) are at the top of the hierarchy. Such entities include toothed animals, in particular large predators; various humanoid forms; and, of course, human beings. This community of ‘people’ (tpoots) forms the social space beyond humanity. However, among all the entities that shape this heterogeneous society there are those who are known as kadoazi, beings of considerable importance for the issue with which we are dealing. Who are they?

The Candoshi usually refer to themselves as kadoazi, the term from which the name of the ethnic group is derived. Kadoazi also designates a type of yellow-crowned parrot (Amazona ochrocephala). It is also a common name, and it is possible that this name has its origin in the title of a Great Warrior of the past, just as local groups today take the name of their chief. If kadoazi is employed as a synonym for ‘human being’, then other ethnic groups are not necessarily included. As they lack a notion of universal humankind, the Candoshi represent the human condition through their own particular experience of humanity. As a consequence, kadoazi refers primarily to the Candoshi themselves. Thus the most accurate translation of the term would be ‘we and the people like us’.

Even if this tautological definition is far from satisfactory, it nevertheless underlines the non-substantialist nature of the Candoshi notion of identity. In fact, kadoazi, when understood as ‘human being’, can take on many meanings which vary both according to the position of the speaker and to the speech context. For example, the meaning of kadoazi in a conversation among Candoshi is different from the meaning that it would have in a dialogue between a Candoshi and an Achuar. Thus the meaning of kadoazi can range from ‘we’, as the local group, along with the wide circle of relatives living on the same stretch of river, to ‘we’ as indigenous people who share the same values and way of life as opposed to the Spanish-speaking river-dwellers found south of the territory. Between these two extremes, kadoazi refers to the ethnic group, also a rather vague concept, but which could be defined as the community with which a feeling of belonging is shared – forged, among other things, by the historical memory of inter-ethnic confrontations which have been perpetuated until today. The antonym of kadoazi is tonari. Depending on the context, tonari can refer to a non-relative, a non-indigenous person, an unknown person and even an enemy. In fact, all these uses of the term carry strong connotations of existing or potential enmity.

The character of the system of collective denomination suggests that the Candoshi do not perceive their surroundings as a space of peace and quiet. In their view, when two people meet in the Candoshi social landscape, it is by no means coincidental. Hostility between local groups is endemic, settlements are isolated, and conditions of transport within tropical forest marshlands of low population density (0.16 per km²) are difficult. In such circumstances, visits are rare, and a household may spend long periods of time without any social contact outside the local group. Like many other Amerindian societies, the Candoshi seek to overcome this isolation through schemes of formal visitation between households settlements. These visits are
inaugurated by long welcoming ceremonies which are referred to as *tasànomaama* in Candoshi, a verbal form which literally means ‘to be face to face’ and comes from the words *tasàsàavo*, meaning ‘in front’, or *tashi*, meaning ‘face’.

**Who is who?**

Essentially, the *tasànomaama* ceremony consists of a dialogue involving only adult males. It involves the residents of a household, on the one hand, and very occasional visitors from distant locations, on the other. The latter may belong to local groups located farther away than the neighbouring local groups or those living on the same river-bank. Among the residents, the head of the family, his grown-up sons and sons-in-law who may live there (because of uxorilocal post-marital residence) or only be passing through, take part in the dialogue. The visiting group of adult males who participate in the dialogue may consist of a father and a few of his sons and/or sons-in-law, or simply two or three brothers, or two brothers-in-law travelling together. Hosts and visitors may be relatives, but very distant relatives.

Visitors announce their arrival by blowing a horn or by blowing down the barrel of an open shotgun. If they come by canoe, the visitors remain in the canoe in the river in front of the house, pretending to row backwards, waiting for a sign of invitation. When the sign is given, the male visitors enter first, but go no further than the part of the house that is reserved for them. They enter in single file and in order of rank (based essentially on a combination of personal reputation and age); the entire ceremony is carried out in a highly formal and sombre manner. On entering the house, the highest-ranking male of the visitors, wearing facial paint and a crown of feathers, and armed with a loaded gun, offers the first words of greeting. The head of the receiving household, himself armed with a gun, replies to the greeting of the visitor, signalling where the visitor should be seated. The visiting women and children, as well as the host women and children, remain outside, sometimes hidden. Once the male visitors are seated in the designated place, the master of the household asks his wife, sister, or daughter to offer a bowl of manioc beer to the guests. In the meantime, the host, still armed, finishes his own facial painting while sitting on a high stool between the male and the female sections of the house. The tense silence is finally broken when, after all eye-contact had been carefully avoided, the master of the house suddenly looks at the leader of the visitors and begins to speak. The ceremony begins with a few preliminary sentences concerning good manners and tradition. He then improvises variations on stereotyped formulas, in a vigorous manner. After his intervention, the host asks the chief of the visitors to respond in similar fashion. The master of the household asks each of the male visitors to speak with him. He chooses the speakers in order of rank, and delivers his own speech at the end of every intervention. If other male adults are present within the household, they also carry out a series of ceremonial dialogues with the visitors. The ceremony can last for several hours.

The following text is a free translation of the speech given by Zoba in a *tasànomaama* that took place on the Upper Nucuray in January 1993, on the
arrival of visitors from the River Huitoyaco. Between the Candoshi of the Upper Nucuray river and those of the Huitoyaco there are distant ties of kinship and alliance, but visits between them are not very frequent as the journey from one to the other takes about a week by canoe. In this case, the relationship between Zoba and his interlocutor is quite distant and could be described as brothers-in-law of brothers-in-law. While the host speaks, the visitors intervene with words of approval – such as ‘of course’, ‘it is true’, ‘there you are right’ – that have not been transcribed. It is important to add that, in spite of its length, this speech is relatively short, as on some occasions such a speech may continue for half an hour for each participant.

[1] Brother you have come to visit me at home
Here, I live here
You, you have come, you have come
You have come to my home to walk around
As you are still alive, you have come to visit me
You can come when you want
You have come to visit me
You, you
You can come when you want because you belong to my family
‘I myself, I have already been to your home’
You can say this with confidence
You wanted to visit me, brother
You come to visit me
You, you have come, you have come
Come and visit me at my home
I am always here, at home, waiting for you

[2] When we want to visit, we always visit
I am always here, I am always here
I have not left, I have not left
You cannot say that the house was silent
I always live at home
It is for this reason that I always stay, brother
I cannot abandon my house
I am always at home
‘He has left to take a walk, he has left to take a walk’
We cannot say this
Because I am always at home
It is for this that I am here

[3] Brother, brother, when we want to visit our family,
we can do so, even if they live far away
It is our obligation to go and visit
When someone is ill with naira, he cannot visit
If this happens, then I will not be there
When a member of the family is ill with naira, he cannot speak
Brother, ‘I am speaking to you brother’
You can say this with assurance
You can say this with assurance
Now I am still alive
Today is another day when I am still alive
It is for this reason that I am here

[4] Brother, you must come to visit us
We always visit those who visit us
The visit will come to an end, and you, you can then leave
When the visit is over, you, you can leave when you want to
When the visit is over, you can leave when you want to
When I want to visit you, I will be calm
When you are in your home, I will visit you
I will visit you
Brother, I will then say, ‘Like you, you have come to visit me, I
am now in your home’
You, you want to visit me?
You, you say, you, you say
You, you can say, you, you can say
When I want to visit someone, I take my belongings and I go
When one does not want to make a visit, one cannot
It is for this that I am here
[5] When I was thinking of you, you came
When I was not thinking of you, you came
It is for this that you come
We men, we always visit when we want to visit
I will always be here
It is for this that I look at you with my eyes
I was looking at who came to my home
If we go to visit the Cocamilla, why not visit within our own group?
Visits are better within our own group
Within our own group we can speak
It is for this that we visit within our own group
[6] I am always here
We will not be able to visit each other when we live above, but now we
live below
When we travel, we can always visit and then go home
Sometimes there is no food
But you can always visit us
Even if you come all alone and not with other brothers
I am never without drink, I always have manioc beer
It is for this that I wait
Here, I always have manioc beer
Here, manioc beer is never wanting
It is for this that I am here
Come, brother, come and visit me
That is all, that is all, right
(speech by Zoba, a man of the Upper Nucuray, January 1993)

Zoba’s speech is divided into six parts, each of which ends with a refrain affirming that Zoba was at home when the visitors arrived. At the end of each part, the orator quickly takes a breath. The interlocutor takes advantage of this pause to show his agreement with the speaker and to encourage him. The first part places the emphasis on the visitor. The personal pronoun, shiya (‘you’), dominates in this first part. The only message communicated is the recognition of a zovalli family tie that, in this context, acts as a sign of ami-
ability and can be translated as ‘brother’.

The second part, however, refers to the orator himself. Zoba insists on the fact that he was there when the visitor arrived by repeating the pattern ‘I am always here’ in the refrain. In Candoshi etiquette, the chief’s absence from his home is never considered a fortuitous event. Absence is interpreted as a sign of refusal to receive a visitor. A guest’s unexpected arrival cannot be considered an acceptable excuse for the host’s absence, since claps of thunder and other portents from the environment are believed to announce the arrival of
an important man; they also signal his origin and therefore his identity as well. Absence is a sign of fear or mistrust of approaching visitors. At the same time, however, these signs draw attention to the host’s sense of guilt, and arouse great suspicion in the mind of the visitor. Consequently, visitors avoid arriving during the day, when the masters of the household are out hunting, preferring to make their visit at the end of the afternoon. In this second part, the expression ‘the house [is] was silent’ refers to the absence of a person who is authorized to receive guests, in other words, a male adult. In this case, the visitor considers the house to be empty, even if there are women and children, since they are invisible to him. Only the strong-willed wives of great men are considered an exception, and are even allowed to serve manioc beer in the absence of their husbands.

Unlike the second part, the third part is dominated by the pronoun ‘we’, a translation of the term, kadoazi. Kadoazi appears here in a part where the orator stresses two of the fundamental principles of civility of Candoshi society: the obligation to make a visit, and the prohibition against making a visit when someone is afflicted by vaira, a pathological condition that is believed to be contagious. The reference to communication is made again. Finally, in the last two lines of this part, the theme of the ephemeral happiness of life in the face of time’s passing is touched upon, drawing attention to the existential grief that is characteristic of all Candoshi songs.

The fourth part insists on the social obligation both to make and to return a visit. In this paragraph, the ‘we’ is less frequent than in the preceding part, giving way to the ‘I’ and ‘you’ of the first two sections. The fourth part is the part of ‘within our own group’. On several occasions the emphasis is placed on security. The message is that there is no reason to hesitate to visit ‘within our own group’ because nothing untoward will happen.

The tone of the fifth part reveals far more pride than that of the previous part. It marks the climax of the monologue. The words of this fifth part are a reference to the demands of masculinity with the term, kamozichi (‘we men’), and to the importance of the gaze of the host, whose eyes are not lowered in front of the visitor, representing a sign of the warrior’s power. This part continues with the affirmation of an ethnic identity that is defined in opposition to that of the Kokamish (the Cocamilla, an ethnic group that belongs to the Tupi-Guarani family and is the southern neighbour of the Candoshi of the Nucuray). In fact, the fifth part is the part of ‘we against the others’, in contrast to the preceding part. And in the final analysis, this ‘we’ is defined as a community based on linguistic intelligibility: ‘within our own group we can speak’.

The final part is the denouement of the intervention. It begins with a reference to the ephemeral nature of existence. Then Zoba, in his capacity as host, excuses himself in advance for the lack of food, a common problem when a household suddenly finds itself with additional mouths to feed. Zoba ends his intervention by offering his visitors manioc beer, plenty of which is available, the sign of hospitality and conviviality par excellence.

What is what?

A detailed analysis of the monologue suggests that the tasànomaama primarily breaks the strong tensions that are created by the invariably difficult meeting
between strangers. It is in this sense that the constant references to security and serenity should be understood. Doubts about the exact nature of the strangers is the primary concern, for the notion of humanity is precarious from an ‘animist’ perspective. As the visitors come from deep within the forest where ‘non-humans’ dwell, it is necessary to ensure their ontological status. It would be impossible to establish such a dialogue with anyone other than a Candoshi, whether human or not. Anyone with whom one can enter into dialogue must be Candoshi; it is assumed that impostors will certainly be unmasked if the exchange is sustained for any length of time. Even if the host is convinced that the visitors are really Candoshi, tension may still persist. Given their isolated residential patterns, visits between Candoshi households are very rare. Tension increases when visitors travel from far away, or when they are distant kin. Misinterpretation of the reasons for these visits tends to increase tension, an understandable fact in a society where vendettas are common. Moreover, distance does not favour the faithful transmission of news, and multiple misunderstandings arise very frequently. In these circumstances, the ceremony becomes more intense and consequently lasts longer.

Thus the segment of dialogue transcribed above defines social limits by providing a notion of identity. The latter is constructed in a sequential way throughout the whole welcoming speech: first of all ‘you’, then its opposite ‘I’, and, finally, the synthesis ‘we’ that allows the formation of a basis for identity. This identity-base is delimited by the opposition between ‘within our own group’ and ‘against the others’. The structural definition of identity is then completed by a notion of mutual understanding: given that communication is perfect between the Candoshi, as shown by the rhetorical virtuosity of the tasānomaama, effective sociability is only possible within the Candoshi group itself. As shown earlier, the monologue is almost devoid of content: the role of this ceremony, even if it lasts several hours, is not to exchange information. What it shows instead is pure formal mastery of a code, the sharing of which provides a sign of the reciprocal recognition of identity.

This initial analysis of the dialogue apparently coincides with other analyses of similar dialogues carried out among other lowland South American groups. Inspired by the discourse-centred approach to culture (see Sherzer 1987; Sherzer & Urban 1986; Urban 1991) and the related notion of culture as performance (see Bauman & Briggs 1990; Schieffelin 1985), these analyses consider that in contexts where social solidarity is a key problem, welcoming ceremonies focus attention on the frontier of identity, the principles that rule social life, and the possibility – through the co-ordination of certain acts – of reaching an agreement. From this point of view, the absence of any concrete content in the Achuar auijmatin dialogue was interpreted by R. Crépeau (1993)6 in terms of the distinction between an ‘ordinary or semantic dialogue’ and a ‘pragmatic dialogue’ (Sherzer & Urban 1986: 371). For Crépeau, the Achuar auijmatin is an example of a ‘pragmatic dialogue’ because it is characterized by the importance of the phatic function, especially in the stereotypical responses of the interlocutor (back channel responses) that are completely devoid of any content. Therefore, according to Crépeau, if the auijmatin expresses the participants’ desire to communicate, it must logically precede the second part of the ceremony where the participants ‘really’ communicate through a ‘semantic dialogue’. In fact, Crépeau affirms that the auijmatin leads
on to a ceremony where gayusa is reached, that is, where conversations cover real subjects of common interest, notably the establishment of alliances (1993: 91). This interpretation agrees with the conclusions drawn by Urban in his comparative analyses of ceremonial dialogues in South America. For Urban, the form of a ceremony constitutes its sign. The absence of specific content may be explained by the fact that linguistic interaction is in itself significative: signification is expressed in communicative pragmatics. For these authors, the function of welcoming ceremonies among South American indigenous peoples is to draw attention to the process of social co-ordination necessary for the development of solidarity and, once this solidarity has been achieved, for the creation of semantic language communication (Urban 1986: 384). The object of the ceremony is not to exchange a ‘message’, in the way that this term is used in classical communication theory, but to demonstrate a desire to communicate among the interlocutors, through the mutual respect of certain socially recognized rules (Crépeau 1993: 93).

However, even though the analyses of Urban and Crépeau explain an aspect of this ritual, they do not answer certain fundamental questions. First, if the object of the ceremony is simply to demonstrate a will to communicate, why do the participants speak for so long about so little? Secondly, there is an apparent paradox in the argument that the ceremony in itself is significant, and that the object of the ceremony is to create the conditions for significative exchange. Finally, if the object of the dialogue is to demonstrate a desire to talk, the dramatic nature of the ceremony still needs to be explained. Is it simply a farce? Nevertheless, all the above-mentioned authors refer to the tacit hostility among participants when the dialogue begins, and then to the soothing effect of the dialogue on the latent tension created by any meeting between strangers in Jivaro societies. Why, though, is there such aggressiveness at the start of the ceremony? And how can the emergence of a sign, on its own, explain the disappearance, or at least the easing, of such tension at the end of the dialogue?

The quasi-absence of any particular content within the dialogue indicates that the most important action of the ceremony is perhaps not that of the spoken words exchanged. In fact, the responses of Candoshi people to this question reveal that speech is not considered to be the fundamental part of the ceremony. What they see as fundamentally important is the total aesthesis of a ‘face-to-face’ meeting. Note also that the title of the ceremony does not refer to ‘speech’. As explained above, tasànomaama literally means ‘to be face to face’. The Candoshi do not come together to ‘dialogue’, for if they did they would certainly refer to their ceremonies in a different way. What else, then, happens in the ceremony for it to be characterized as a ‘face to face’?

Any response must begin with the moments that precede the dialogue. Those Candoshi whom I asked about this gave particular emphasis to the perceptual dimension of these exchanges. When the visitors arrive, they and the hosts (if the latter have been warned of the visit) are decorated with facial paint and dressed with ornaments. The red facial paint (Bixa orellana) must make a striking impact, not by the abstract form of the design or by the iconographic message it may suggest, but by its capacity to impress: the intense presence of red, and the way in which this colour is used to accentuate facial
features, especially the mouth. The ornaments are also very important and effective: necklaces of enormous jaguar or caiman teeth, feline skins, beaks of large birds, horns, beetle-wings – all the most impressive features of the local fauna that can be transformed into human decorations. The feather crowns, called xarpamashi, can shock by the sheer size and density of the toucan feathers, also red, that the wind ruffles, producing bright and attractive hues. If the crown is made of macaw wings, then the front part of the head-dress holds long feathers that move with the participant when he delivers his speech in the ceremony, producing a slightly hypnotic effect on his audience. Similar observations may be made with regard to the other attributes of the Candoshi man: his long, dark black hair, a sign of vital force; the large necklace, called morobshi, made up of thousands of seeds from the plant of the same name. Moreover, his weapons, swords, or guns must be the focus of attention, especially when they are well maintained, with the laminated blade casting rays of silver light; his skirt, called tipo, with brightly coloured stripes on a white background, is radiant; and on the occasion of a visit, the men are more likely to wear a vividly coloured shirt and a well-displayed watch. In other words, if there is tension when strangers meet, it can hardly be said that the Candoshi attempt to minimize this tension through their dress. On the contrary, the ornaments raise concern about the identity of the visitors. In brief, the participants position themselves in the ceremonial discourse through a strongly intense presence.

Once the hosts and visitors have seated themselves, face to face, in the part of the house reserved for the ceremony, they make eye-contact. Vision is an important aspect of Candoshi human relations, and eye-contact is an essential element in ceremonial interaction. Excellent studies by A.C. Taylor (1993a; 1993b) have revealed the importance attached by the Jivaro to the senses, and in particular to visual perception, in recognizing the nature of other entities (both human and non-human) and in the relations that one entity wishes to establish with another. Taylor also shows that the absence of relational senses signifies someone's death, in contrast to the physiological expiration that marks death in the West. Vision is therefore the expression of presence, and thus lies at the essence of the Candoshi notion of the person – the paradoxical fusion between the killer and his prey, characteristic of many Amazonian groups sharing a predatory social philosophy (Taylor 2000; Viveiros de Castro 1992), which presupposes a social relationship that is both cannibalistic and seductive. Hence, eye-contact between men is generally avoided in ordinary circumstances because it may be understood as a challenge. Male visitors likewise avoid exchanging glances with the women of the host's house, but for opposite reasons – unless, of course, they are seeking a love affair. But the ceremony obliges the participants to look at each other. It is therefore important to imagine the shock created by what is both a sign of challenge and of seduction. It is at this very moment of making eye-contact, when the Candoshi become aware of the presence of others, that the ceremony reaches its highest intensity.

This, then, is the point at which we can consider the actual dialogue to have begun. The actual words should be understood as existing principally for the purpose of being sung. Unlike those involved in ordinary conversation, those taking part in the ceremony engage in what is really a form of musical interpretation. The dialogue has a melodic structure, with a binary rhythm and
a specific vocal timbre. Therefore, when the participants were asked to discuss the ceremonies they rarely spoke of the words used, and even less of the content of their message. In fact, what they appreciated most were the aesthetic qualities of the highly rhythmic sequence of melodic phrases. At this moment of the song, the physical involvement of the participants is absolute. Such involvement constitutes a distinctive aspect of the ceremony, perceived as such by the participants. They invest considerable energy in keeping up the rhythm and vocal intensity that reflect the determination of the participant. This physical investment has to arouse the admiration of the other participants and secure the conviction of the participant’s partner, who then tells him to stop singing by means of the ‘back channel response’. A latent form of violence underpins the discourse, simultaneously vehement and formal, and thus cold in emotional tone. This is indicated through the use of the term tsiyantámaama. This word means political talks in general, in the masculine section of the house, the root of which, tsiyanni, means ‘anger’. The ceremony is the paradigm of the ‘anger-speech’.

The intensity and physical involvement with which a participant begins to sing slowly dies down as he becomes tired. In fact, the dialogue is played out so as to try to maintain this initial intensity. Each participant must prolong his song until his interlocutor is satisfied. The interlocutor will then tell the speaker to stop singing before he himself takes up the song and in turn becomes tired. The pronominal switching that takes place as different participants enter the dialogue constitutes the first instance of categorization through recognition of the other, and of the social topography of the identity and alterity of the participants. What therefore happens is a progression from an extremely condensed, intense, and emotionally powerful confrontation to a more diffuse situation. The ceremony follows a process that begins with the adoption of a dramatic position, and continues with the cognitive exploitation of this first position. This is a pattern where the initial intensity decreases over time, and gradually leads to a cognitive détente.

With this description, it is now possible to answer the questions raised above. The absence of any concrete content in the words exchanged during the dialogue may be explained by the fact that the ceremony is not focused on signification but on the preconditions of signification: that is to say, the ceremony occupies a spectrum that extends from the perception of the presence of others to the first instances of categorization, those of identity and alterity of the participants. With regard to the latent tension and the restrained forms of violence, it may be argued that these are the result of a quest for maximum intensity at the beginning of the meeting, reaching a paroxysm through the participants’ dress and their meeting of each other’s gaze. Throughout the duration of the dialogue, this tension gradually becomes more diffuse, leading to the reduced tension at the end of the ceremony – a fact that other studies have recognized but failed to explain. This explains why, once the dialogue is over, a climate of relative trust has been generated, making the visitors feel welcome. The celebration held in their honour can begin, with abundant manioc beer.

The discourse-centred approach tends to consider these perceptual interactions between participants as a mere ‘context’, performing the same function
as any other pragmatic feature of a text. In the most recent study written from this perspective, that of J. Hendricks (1993) on the Shuar (another Jivaro group) narrative, perceptual interactions, such as eye-contact, are considered to be paralinguistic features and are dealt with simultaneously in the final chapter, as background music to the text. By contrast, my study proposes that meaning and action are produced at the level of the senses. Perceptual interactions do not merely accompany forms of discourse at a secondary level, but are in fact the precondition for their appearance. Instead of actors reciting a script whose strategy is predefined, the primacy of perception highlights the sentient bodies of the participants and their full involvement in the event. In other words, although the performative nature of speech has been demonstrated by the discourse-centred approach, this article emphasizes the affective foundation which precedes speech and which must give rise to the performative ability of the discourse.

Conclusion

I began this article by evoking the Lévi-Straussian transition to social life stemming from the first significant exchange. I sought to establish a parallel between this mythical transition and the moves made by the Candoshi when, like other Amazonian peoples, they initiate a social relationship through the welcoming ceremony. Earlier studies of this ceremony which have followed the tradition of Lévi-Strauss have assumed that the presence of the sign is all that is required to commit those present at the ceremony to the constitution of the social link through the art of magic, like mana. The analysis presented here, by contrast, has attempted to consider the sensory preconditions of meaning, shown by the emphasis placed on the primacy of perception and the intensive dimension that is inherent to it, the manner in which the meaning of the ceremony is embodied by the participants, enabling them to believe in the social link just established. This allows us to speculate, by way of conclusion, on the vexed question of the relationship between language and society. The articulation of language in itself does not bring about the emergence of the social, as is reasonable in the framework of animist ontology where social space extends beyond the circle of human speakers. It must be remembered, however, that command of the Candoshi language, as the welcoming ceremony demonstrates, is for its speakers a fundamental criterion for their definition of identity. Bearing this in mind, I suggest that if language does not shape society, it at least shapes civility, both being aspects of the same united and gradual continuum.

NOTES

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In the introduction to Marcel Mauss’s work, Lévi-Strauss wrote:

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance in the ascent of animal life, language can only have arisen all at once. Things cannot have begun to signify gradually. In the wake of a transformation which is not a subject of study for the social sciences, but for biology and psychology, a shift occurred from a stage when nothing had a meaning to another stage when everything had meaning. Actually, that apparently banal remark is important, because that radical change has no counterpart in the field of knowledge, which develops slowly and progressively. In other words, at the moment when the entire universe all at once became significant, it was none the better known for being so, even if it is true that the emergence of language must have hastened the rhythm of the development of knowledge. So there is a fundamental opposition, in the history of the human mind, between symbolism, which is characteristically discontinuous, and knowledge, characterized by continuity. Let us consider what follows from that. It follows that the two categories of the signifier and the signified came to be constituted simultaneously and interdependently, as complementary units; whereas knowledge, that is, the intellectual process which enables us to identify certain aspects of the signifier and certain aspects of the signified, one by reference to the other – we could even say the process which enables us to choose, from the entirety of the signifier and from the entirety of the signified, those parts which present the most satisfying relations of mutual agreement – only got started very slowly (1987 [1950]: 59-60).


A number of recent studies of lowland South America has shown the existence of these ideologies orientating the praxis of the most diverse societies – and in this respect the Candoshi are no exception. Even beyond the Amazon region, the predominance of ‘predation’ in indigenous America, along with its associated cannibalistic practices, suggests that predation is a general feature of the culture of the continent (Fausto 2000; Viveiros de Castro 1993: 184). Predation is definitely well established among the different Jivaro ethnic groups (Descola 1992; 1993a; 1993b; Taylor 1994) to which the Candoshi belong (Taylor 1985; 1998; Surrallés 1992; 1999).

The term kadoshi is translated here as ‘we’, even though the personal pronoun of the first person plural takes the form kadoshi iya.

There is a similar form of discourse in other Jivaro ethnic groups and it has been described and analysed in detail by Descola (1986: 158-9; 1993: 188-95), Gnerre (1986), and Crépeau (1993).

This absence was pointed out by Descola (1993: 190) and Gnerre (1986) with regard to the Achuar and Shuar ceremonies.

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Face à face : signification, sensation et perception dans les cérémonies d’accueil amazoniennes

Résumé

 Certaines cérémonies d’accueil pratiquées par les peuples indigènes d’Amazonie ont été considérées comme des événements permettant d’établir un lien social entre ennemis potentiels, sans que l’on ait su montrer comment se produit le passage d’une hostilité latente à une relation sociale : les études se bornent à évoquer un « acte magique », produit par un échange significatif au cours des dialogues qui marquent un temps fort de la cérémonie. Par l’étude des interactions perceptuelles, et non pas seulement du texte du dialogue, au cours de la cérémonie d’accueil des Candoshi, l’auteur tente d’intégrer à l’analyse l’intensité de la dimension affective régissant ces rituels, qui peut contribuer à expliquer comment ceux-ci apparaissent aux participants la confiance nécessaire pour établir un début de relation sociale.

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale, Collège de France, 52 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, 75,005 Paris, France. alexandre.surralles@ehess.fr