9

Predicates of Aesthetic Judgement: Ontology and Value in Huichol Material Representations

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The 'eye' is a product of history reproduced by education.

(Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*)

In order to get clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living. We think we have to talk about aesthetic judgements like 'This is beautiful', but we find that if we have to talk about aesthetic judgements we don't find these words at all, but a word used something like a gesture, accompanying a complicated activity.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*)

All discourse is institutionalized and historically specific. It is intimately related to particular social and economic relations at determinate phases of its existence which create and legitimate peculiar practices or techniques that reproduce both its intellectual and material conditions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Foucault, 1974). These practices and relationships confer respect and authority on the fields of knowledge which they institutionalize.

If we try to examine Huichol material representations from the perspective of an anthropological or art-historical discourse, we are confronted by a double paradox. First, the Huichol objects that are the subject of this essay do not correspond to any of the categories which ethnographic museums impose on material culture, and to consider them in such terms would bear no resemblance to their native conceptualization. Secondly, aesthetics, whether it refers to 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception' (i.e. as opposed to things thinkable or immaterial) or to 'the philosophy or theory of taste, or of the perception of the beautiful in nature and art' (*OED*), does not exist as an independent category of Huichol thought. Aesthetic judgements are predicated on a system of values, fixed, situated, and manipulated by rules which are, for the most part, culturally specific and historically determined. This view corresponds to Wittgenstein's notion that the meaning

of aesthetics can only be derived from an examination of the different language games in which it features. It is precisely the context in which specific games place aesthetic terms that accords them their meaning at any one time or place. The competence of the manipulators of such games can be measured by their familiarity with the rules governing the use of categories, which in this case also indicates the level of their appreciation.

In the *Lectures* (1970), Wittgenstein notes that 'beautiful' is seldom used in ordinary language as an expression of pure taste. Usually it occurs as an interjection which is used to mean 'good'. Although the proximity of aesthetics to ethics in the English vocabulary is based on a technical misapplication of the term, its popular acceptance justifies taking this as its current meaning. What is at stake for Wittgenstein is the meaning of a word or concept as it is used in a common or special language game. For Bourdieu (1984), on the other hand, the distinction between different usages of an identical term corresponds to differences in family socialization and educational attainment which are used as markers of social class. Whereas Wittgenstein wanted to purify language by making it more precise, Bourdieu argues that not only are the very terms of discourse themselves politicized, but language is a site of class conflict which struggles to expropriate particular terms for its own ends and to impose its own view on the world.

What I shall try to demonstrate here is not that the Huichol have no word to denote aesthetics, but that, once we abandon attempts to force indigenous categories into supposedly precise and scientific Western terms, we may be able to describe broad fields of experience which correspond to historical and cultural experiences similar to those in the history of our own civilization. It is not enough to relativize the object of our subject; the subject must itself be treated with a similar epistemological scepticism.

In what follows, I shall use the analogy of Wittgenstein's idea of language games to describe the contexts and different strategies that certain categories of Huichol objects occupy and participate in. These categories of object will be seen to reiterate certain general themes which allow us to approximate their situational meaning in Huichol life and thought. However, to appreciate the criteria on which aesthetic judgements are based, one must describe their deeper symbolic meaning, that is to say, the relationship between one set of categories and those of another, which distinguishes the metaphysical and ontological foundations of their theory of beauty. As noted above, a theory of aesthetics is based on a conceptualization of perceptual experience which is closely related to fundamental ontological categories. The cultural reproduction of perception establishes the basis on which a system of aesthetic differences is founded and legitimated. The consideration of these fields will guide us in formulating some general statements concerning Huichol concepts of beauty.

The Huichol are an indigenous society whose core area is located in the

north of what is today the State of Jalisco, the eastern part of Nayarit, and southern Zacatecas and Durango in north-west Mexico.

This essay will be primarily concerned with such traditional objects as ceremonial bowls (*xucuri*), arrows (*urú*), and woven materials (*itsari*). While among the most important, these are only some of the many objects that are used in ceremonial circumstances, and exclude such things as chairs (*uwéni*), beds (*itári*), and ceremonial capstones (*tepari*) which are also made for the use of a deity when summoned to the Huichol world. Arrows and bowls, like all traditional objects manufactured by the Huichol, have a mythical origin. The colours, patterns, decorations, and types of object which the Huichol make were originally requested by their different deities, who demanded they be given as offerings, and their power periodically renewed with libations of water and blood, in return for the deities' favours. The objects that will be discussed in the first and second sections of this essay are all used as offerings, inasmuch as they take part in acts 'of presenting something to a supernatural being' (van Baal, 1976: 161) or are used in important symbolic exchange relations between categories of people. The contexts in which such offerings are made will first be described, and there will follow an examination of the contracts so constructed between the human donor and the supernatural recipient. Section III will briefly examine the development of modern arts and crafts among the Huichol. While it will be noted that their elaboration corresponds to the overall argument concerning the loci of art production being focused at discrete junctures which mediate between distinct ontological categories, it is nevertheless important also to examine the wide differences between traditional objects and arts and crafts made for the external market, and to discuss the potentially disintegrative effects of the latter on the former.

I

Huichol deities can be divided into three categories. These are the solar deities, paramount among which are the Sun, Taweviékame; Kauyumarie, a deer person who is both trickster and culture hero, and who intercedes between man and the deities to create a communicative bridge between them; and an eagle woman, Tatei Werika Wimari, who is the guardian of the central region of the sky. The second category is composed of the water deities, senior of whom is Nakawé, Grandmother Growth, who is related to the earth; Tatei Yurianaka; and a large number of rain mothers, each associated with a cardinal direction.[1] The third category includes only the fire deity, Tatewarí. The first two of these categories are generally considered antagonistic, but because of the interdependence of the qualities each represents, all of which are required to secure the climatic variations on which agricultural activity is based, a third reconciliatory category, represented by the fire deity, is

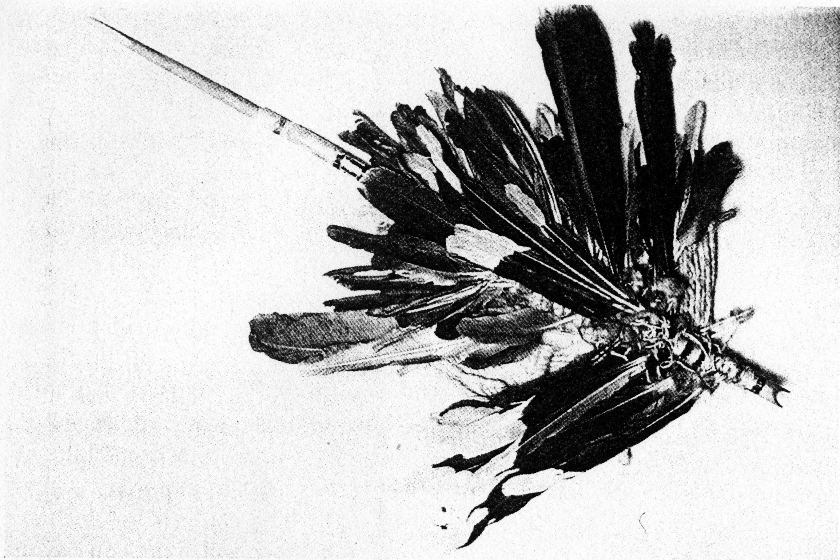

FIG. 9.1. Huichol shaman's plumes (*muvieri*); collected by T. K. Preuss at Cerro Huaco, 1905–6; feathers mounted with fibre yarn on bamboo; $18\frac{3}{4}$ in. (48 cm.) long without shaft; Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, IV Ca 38062; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson.

necessary to mediate between them, enabling complementary relations to be established. Most of the ritual activity, at the level of household groups clustered around a district temple, is concerned with creating a balance between these two contrasting categories, which are associated with the dry season and wet season respectively: to implore the sun to soften his intensity, to supplicate the rain mothers to care for the maize, and then to restore the sun to his former condition so that the rains cease before flooding the earth's surface. Such activity is necessary for the maintenance of the agricultural cycle which is essential for the economic and social reproduction of Huichol society. The attitude of the deities towards man is summarized by Lumholtz (1902: 9):

> the gods are angry with man and begrudge him everything, particularly the rain, which is of paramount importance to the very existence of the tribe. But when the deities hear the shaman sing of their deeds, they are pleased and relent, and they liberate the clouds that they have been keeping back for themselves, and rain results.

Chants or prayers are the primary means of communication used by man to supplicate the deities, and are conveyed by means of certain paraphernalia which are invested with supernatural powers. Such objects include the shaman's plumes (*muvieri*) (Fig. 9.1), which consist of one or two small feathers attached in an upright position to a wooden shaft with longer feathers

suspended at its end (an eagle's claw, pieces of rock crystal, a snake rattle, or other attribute of the sun father may also be added), or by arrows, which may have a small embroidered or woven cloth attached to them, whose design signifies the thing or condition being requested. In place of such a small woven design, miniature snares to request luck in the deer hunt, strings of baked maize in the shape of serpents, or small sandals may be tied to their shaft (Lumholtz, 1902: 203, 205, 212). Each attachment has a specific significance intended to petition for a particular favour from the deity to whom it is addressed.[2] Different types of feather attached to *muvieri* relate them to specific deities. Macaw feathers are particularly favoured by Tatewarí, humming-bird by Kauyumarie, while hawk and eagle feathers, usually associated with the sun, may nevertheless refer to other deities as well (Negrín, 1975: 17). In the case of the water deities, half-yellow, half-white feathers are preferred by Tatei Rapaviyeme, while birds whose tail-feathers are half-white are favoured by Tatei Haramara (Mata Torres, 1980: 59). The arrow is conceptualized as a flying bird, and the designs painted on its rear shaft are described as its heart (*iyarí*). Zigzag designs signify lightning and connote the arrow's swiftness and force, while narrow straight lines refer to its path (*haye*).

The woven 'mats' (Fig. 9.2) attached to arrows are called *itári* (*náma* is the specific name given to square or rectangular 'mats'; cf. Lumholtz, 1900: 140), and serve as a resting-place for the gods. The woven or embroidered designs on these mats objectify prayers which are brought to the attention of the deities while they rest on them when visiting the localities where they have been left. A similar idea is present when small circular mirrors are tied to the arrows. These are called *nierika*, and 'are like the eyes of a deity' which enable him to see the communicant. As we shall later find, the ability to 'see' is a condition for sacred knowledge, and therefore also suggests the deity's possible awareness of the plea of the supplicant.

Arrows are offered the deities for a wide number of reasons and on many distinct occasions: as markers to identify the ground which a divinity is supposed to inhabit; to bring the rains; to request female fertility; as supplications for the increase of cattle, sheep, or other domestic animals; to cure illness; for success in weaving and embroidery; on construction of a new household building or after the renewal of a temple structure; for success in the ceremonial deer hunt; or even to cast a malignant spell on a victim. They are, therefore, the principal means through which communication is established with the deities. Together with plumes, they may be nailed to temple roofs to enable the deities to hear the prayers that are offered in their honour.

Votive bowls (Fig. 9.3) are also offered to all three categories of deity. They are made from a split gourd (*Lagenaria sisetaria*) and are decorated with beads, seeds, paper, coins, or yarn embedded in wax. The designs so produced identify the deity to whom the bowl is dedicated.[3]

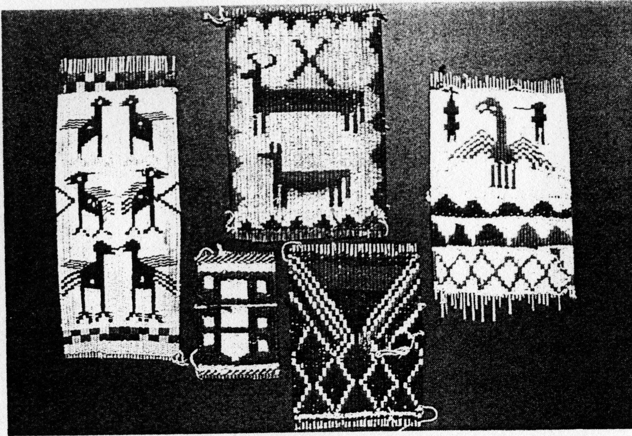

FIG. 9.2. Five Huichol prayer mats (*itári*) dedicated to Tatewarí; collected by T. K. Preuss at Santa Barbara (except far right collected at Santa Gertrudis), 1906; fibre on wood; far left: 12 × 5 in. (30.5 × 13 cm.); Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, from left to right: IV Ca 32989, 34075, 32995, 34040, 34016; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson. See also Pl. XIII.

As offerings, votive bowls may be used less frequently than arrows. Usually they are kept in the temple (*túki*) or household shrine (*ririki*), or left at sacred sites during pilgrimages. The colours of bowls associate them with particular deities; blue with Tatei Rapaviyeme, black with Tatei Haramara, and red with Wirikuta (Mata Torres, 1980: 69). There may be a tendency for votive bowls to be more closely associated with the water deities, while arrows are thought more suitable for the solar deities. Zingg (1938: 635) noted the close association of bowls with water, rain, and maize:

> Nakawé herself ordered clouds to cause the rain to fall in the votive bowls of the wet season goddesses, which leads the Huichol to say that if votive bowls are laid out evenly they will attract water from the sea. . . . Elsewhere in the mythology votive bowls are spoken of as being magically filled by water by a stream . . . gushing from a corn-ear.

In the mythology which describes the establishment of the maize ceremonies, Keamukáme planted a votive bowl in the ground and a stalk of corn sprouted from it (ibid.). Zingg also recorded that bowls are used by Nakawé to communicate with the rain mothers.

The centre of a votive bowl is often decorated with a concentric arrangement of beads, the colour of each band representing the colours most appropriate to the deity to which it is dedicated. Silver coins may be attached

FIG. 9.3. Huichol votive bowl (*xucuri*) dedicated to Samatsima; collected by T. K. Preuss at Ranchería Los Baños, 1906; gourd decorated with beads on wax; $10\frac{1}{2}$ in. (27 cm.) diameter; Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, IV Ca 32790; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson.

in a diagonal line that runs from one side to the other (bowls entirely covered by beads are usually made for commercial sale). When placed in the temple, the deity to whom the bowl is dedicated enters it at its centre and rests during the rituals for which he or she has been summoned. Both mats and bowls, therefore, are used to accommodate the deities.

Votive bowls have one of the most highly charged symbolic significances of any Huichol offering. Not only are they related to the growth of maize, but the rains are said to be held in them in each quadrant of the sky realm.[4] The earth itself is conceptualized as a female womb (*uriepa*), envisaged as a bowl lying on a sea of water. Special types of decorated bowl which represent the lives of the household members are looked after by the family head and kept in the domestic shrine. Bowls are thus intimately related to the earth, the rains, fertility, and life, and while they are used as offerings to both solar and water deities, their symbolism is more closely connected with the latter.

Kauyumarie was the creator of many of these religious arts. According to one story, *nierika* are said to have grown from the left antler of a sacred deer person, while *muvieri* and gourds budded from the branches of his right antler. In another version, feathers were created when the sun spat into the sea. Kauyumarie then gathered them together, took them to the four cardinal

regions, and made *muvieri* from them (Zingg, 1938: 647). Not only does Kauyumarie communicate the thoughts of the deities to men, but he also provides the instruments which allow the Huichol to reply to them. Elsewhere (Shelton, 1988) I have described the positions of and relationships between the five solar birds that govern each of the different segments of the sky and the five terrestrial deer that the sun made governors of the earth, and have illustrated how metaphorical associations between the plumage of the birds and the size and branching of antlers are used to establish relationships between the identities of the two sets of deities which occupy contiguous spatial domains. It is noteworthy that both these sets of deities belong to the solar class, and that both plumes and deer antlers, as well as the sacred paraphernalia which they gave rise to, are considered powerful instruments of communication. Thus the arrow is said to be a bird, inasmuch as it had its origin in deer antlers, which are themselves metaphorical feathers. However, the important distinction between them is that, while birds take the words of men to the gods, the deer carry the words of the gods to men.

The significance of these objects for communication between men and supernaturals is elaborated in prayer:

The flowers fly. The flowers turn.
They circle Burned Mountain.
And the deer and *itári* were born from the heart of Our Grandfather (Tatewarí).
The gods are speaking,
Yes, the gods are speaking to us and nobody can understand them.
Yet it is here you can see the arrow piercing the centre of the *itári*,
And the arrow understands the language of the gods.
Now, near to the arrow you can see the blue serpent (or humming-bird), Jaikayuave,
The interpreter of the gods, who knows the language of the arrow.
The rain is born from the *itári*, the rain is loosened
Sounding the message of the gods,
'Brothers, the time has arrived to make the arrow for the rain.'
The bowstring, Wikurra, appears to the notch of the arrow and the clouds rise again.
The gods of the four quarters take form.
They speak among themselves:
Wiricuta, Aurramanaka, Tatei Nakawé, Tatei Yurianaka, San Andrés all agree.
They rise into the air and fly around Burned Mountain.
On descending to the earth they see the arrow marking the place where the deer was born.
There lies the sacred *itári*,
Lying on the *itári* rests Our Brother Tomatz Kallaumari.

(Benítez, 1968: 137–8)

Before the Huichol were given arrows, they were unable to hear, let alone understand, the language of the deities. The arrow thus represents the

relationship between them and their ancestors, and establishes the connection between the present age and its formation in pre-Creation times. The arrow is said to pierce the resting place of the deity, the *itári*. However, it is clear that the category *itári* embraces many things apart from the votive objects that I have discussed. It includes the centre of a sacred field cultivated outside a district temple, which will be discussed later, sacred sites or shrines, and even the sky realm (Tajeima), or the clouds which are manifestations of the rain mothers. The ability of the arrow to move swiftly between terrestrial and sky worlds further accounts for its identification with birds, which also mediate between the two worlds.

Muvieri, the instrument by which the shaman communicates with the deities, are arrows with bird-feathers attached to them which may account for their communicative efficacy. Apart from their association with the sun and Kauyumarie they are related to Tatewarí who first created fire from them (Zingg, 1938: 640). Together with other instruments used by the shaman, they are kept in a small, long, matted palm box called *tacuatsi*, which is likened to the body of the deer person, Kauyumarie. The diamond pattern woven into the cover and base of such boxes is said to represent the markings found on the back of the rattlesnake (ibid. 648), a symbol of the sun, which, like the *tacuatsi*'s association with Kauyumarie, reinforces the close bonds between shamans and the solar deities. The metaphoric associations between the body of Kauyumarie and bird plumage, closely connecting the two categories of deer and birds to arrows, constitute a symbolic complex clustered around the two-way communication between man and deities.

Votive bowls and arrows are also connected with agriculture, not only metaphorically, but also as part of the essential technology which ensures successful cultivation. Agricultural techniques and seeds were given to the Huichol by the water deities and, more specifically, by the senior goddess of growth, Nakawé.[5] Not only did she advise Watákame (Kauyumarie in the account recorded by Zingg), the only survivor of the mythical race of Hewi or Hewixii, to build himself a canoe and place within it seeds of maize, squash, and beans, but she guided him to the area where he should live once the floods had subsided, and taught him how he should plant and cultivate his fields.

Agriculture is the gift of the water deities, and cultivation involves their self-sacrifice. Cultivation is conceptualized as the cutting open of the womb of Tatei Yurianaka with digging-sticks in order to impregnate her with seeds. Offerings of votive bowls and other paraphernalia are made to her in exchange for her readiness to acquiesce to this, and to ensure that her womb remains fecund. The maize mother must be persuaded to lend her daughter for planting and later, at harvest time, agree to her sacrifice. Similarly, the rain mothers are beseeched to raise themselves from the four cardinal regions to

the sky and, transformed into clouds, gather above the Huichol land before falling as rain serpents to nourish the earth. Finally, Nakawé herself must be acknowledged for the fertility she gave to the earth, and for establishing the order of agricultural process.

This cycle of production and reproduction can only be guaranteed if the deities are approached with humility and given the appropriate offerings that they stipulated in ancient times. Hence the production of votive bowls and arrows is necessary to placate their anger and win their favour, to ensure that they do not withhold the rains, and thus that agricultural activity can proceed. The very production of these objects, and the long pilgrimages undertaken to carry them to the shrines of the deities to which they are addressed, is a sign of the Huichol's continuous devotion to the rules of the world ordained by them. They constitute the instruments of a symbolic technology which is no less significant in achieving a prosperous harvest than the physical activities involved in cultivation. Bowls and arrows are therefore manufactured to be exchanged with the deities in return for the climatic conditions associated with the process of fertility necessary to benefit man.

The form, designs, and associations of Huichol arrows and bowls become clear when they are related to the symbolic technology on which the agricultural process is based. The votive bowl symbolizes the earth's womb which nurtures the maize and other seeds implanted in it. The metaphorical relation between the mythical bowl, and the maize that first sprouted from it, and the earth implanted with seed is explicitly recognized in the ceremony connected with sowing, Namawita Neirrara. As part of this ceremony, a bowl is placed in the centre of the sacred field (*naxa*),[6] to attract the gods so that they will care for the newly sown maize. A Huichol prayer describes the relation in the following way: 'In the place of the offerings is found the heart of the gods, the force of the gods, the words that contain the knowledge that the human mind could not have' (Mata Torres, 1974: 23).

Votive bowls and prayer arrows, as the products of artistic production, and rain, fertility, and light, as expressions of the agricultural process, therefore, are linked by a series of reciprocal relations that express the contract between the world of the ancestral deities and the domain of the Huichol. The creators of cultural products exchange their arts for the natural elements and processes which are in the keeping of their deities.

II

Decorated or ritual objects are not, however, restricted to exchange relations between human and supernatural beings. They also form part of an exchange of goods between wife-givers and wife-takers during traditional marriage ceremonies. Again, they intervene in a situation where a complementary communication is desired between distinct and potentially conflicting qualities.

During the pre-marital negotiations between the fathers of a boy and girl, and at the wedding ceremony itself, gifts are exchanged between the two families. The bride makes gifts of woollen belts (*xuyame*) and woven shoulder-bags (*kutsuli*) (Fig. 9.4.) while the groom responded traditionally with prestations of agave liquor, a votive candle dedicated to Nakawé (Benítez, 1968: 319), grey squirrel, or fish (Lumholtz, 1902: 93).[7]

Residence is usually uxorilocal, and the husband will often live in or near his wife's parents' home and contribute his labour to that productive unit during the first years of marriage. Later he may establish a household of his own near that of his family, or build his own house within its compound. An elder brother will eventually reside at his household of origin, and assume leadership of it on the death of his father.

The exchange that takes place between the families of wife-givers and wife-takers involves the transfer of fine weavings from the woman's side to the man's, while the candle and squirrel which are given to the wife-giver's family represent the man's abilities as a cultivator in transforming wild land (*ací*) into agricultural land. The votive candle and grey squirrel were offerings made by the first cultivator, Watákame, to Nakawé in appreciation of her teaching him the art of agriculture. These gifts express the man's relations with the solar deities, as the woman's weavings associate her with the rain deities.[8]

The long woollen sashes that the girl gives her future husband were traditionally woven in brown and white wool, although some coloured yarns are now also used, and commonly feature zigzag designs which have a polyvalent symbolism relating them to serpents, lightning, and rain. Like similar geometric designs, this motif acts as a prayer for rain (Lumholtz, 1902: 234). The designs on the shoulder-bags (Fig. 9.4), which the future bride also gives the man at this time, are much more varied, and include important solar symbols as well as others related to the water deities. I shall return to these later. By offering her future husband this apparel, the girl expresses her affiliation to the water deities, and thereby draws attention to her procreative qualities. Conversely, the prestations made by the husband's family to that of the wife-givers represent the son's agricultural labour which is temporarily placed at their service. Thus, the relationship between different gender categories in the social domain, and that which pertains between the solar and water deities and their human supplicant, are both marked by the exchange of distinct categories of object between the various contractees.

The complementarity achieved in the division of labour between men and women, symbolically stated in the prestations accompanying marriage, and between the human and supernatural domains, is reiterated in the manufacture of art. Women usually decorate votive bowls and make bracelets (Fig. 9.5), necklace pendants, rings, and other beadwork decorations, as well as monopolizing weaving. All these activities were bequeathed them by

FIG. 9.4. Six Huichol shoulder-bags (*kutsuli*); collected by T. K. Preuss, 1905–6, provenance unknown; wool; Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson. These bags illustrate the use of stylized peyote and *toto* flower motifs to represent the four directions and the centre region. Note also the double-headed eagle, Tatei Wirika Wimari, depicted with a heart of peyote. See also Pl. XIV.

the water deities, and further create symbolic bonds between them. This theme is clearly present in the myth which relates the origin of weaving and embroidery.

In ancient times, the first Huichol woman, Wenima, did not know how to draw, weave, or embroider. She asked the advice of her father, who suggested that he take her to see the snake, Simalakoa, who might be willing to teach her.

Wenima followed her father into a dangerous and terrible part of the sierra, where he made a fork out of a branch. On approaching Simalakoa, he pinned her to the ground by capturing her head between the prongs of his fork. He then instructed his daughter to place needles into each of the five frets of the pattern that decorated the serpent's body. Then he told his daughter to spin the wool which she had brought with her around each needle and to remove the whorls and place them in her plain cotton bag.

The father then took Simalakoa in his hands and passed her over each part of Wenima's body which one day would be decorated by jewellery and textiles, saying: 'I pass you, Simalakoa, by the waist so that you teach her to make belts. I pass you over the neck so you will make necklaces. I pass you over the shoulders so you will make the straps of the bags. I pass you over the hips to make the *juiwamete* [small embroidered pouches worn over the belt]. I pass you over the wrists so you may make bracelets. I pass you over the fingers so that you can make rings, and I pass you over the head so you can make *kushira* [a thin headband]. Now look well at the frets painted on the body of Simalakoa, for they will teach you to weave the frets of the textiles.

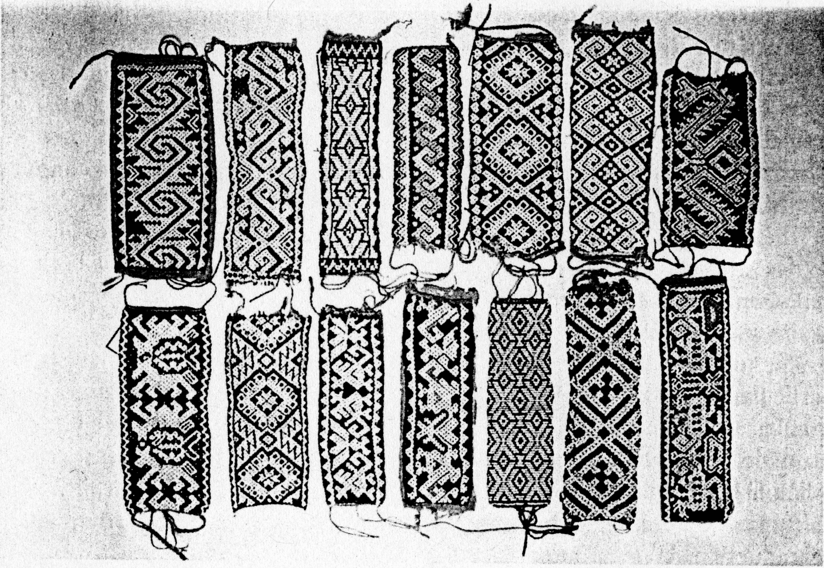

FIG. 9.5. Fourteen Huichol bracelets; collected by T. K. Preuss, 1905–6, provenance unknown; wool; Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson. Amongst the patterns here are lightning motifs, serpents, horses, birds, and stylized floral motifs representing the four cardinal directions.

When the man and his daughter returned home, they left the balls of wool in the temple and that night Simalakoa spoke to her and made her dream of the designs that she had seen. Simalakoa instructed her to ask her father to make two looms of brazil wood—a material sacred to the sun, a simple one, *teusika*, and a double loom, *imame*. In addition, she was told to ask him to make her a back-stitcher, *taushame*, and a spindle, *utzikiu*. When her father had completed making them, the girl fasted for ten days.

After five days she took a blue yarn, *yoakatzi*, and sat in front of the loom which was fastened to the ground, and wondered which of the frets that she had seen on the serpent's body she should weave first. Finally, she decided to begin with the fret nearest the head, and completed one of the frets every day until all five had been copied. Each night, Simalakoa appeared in her dreams to teach and advise her on her work. When the girl had finished the belt, Simalakoa asked if she might have it, so the girl's father tracked her down and tied it around her neck, while the girl thanked her.

(Benítez, 1968: 459–60)

Girls are taught to weave by their mothers, and the designs traditionally belonged to individual families. However, some women claim to have also dreamt their designs after fasting and having made offerings to a serpent deity with whom they have a special relationship, as in the story recounted above.

Women are ascribed their feminine identity by many of the activities and qualities that they share with the water deities.

Similarly, the male is connected with the manufacture of arrows and certain types of *itári*, such as gods' chairs and the sacred circular stones on which animals associated with a particular deity are carved. These techniques were inherited from the solar deity, Kauyumarie. Moreover, men are connected with the sacred fields attached to district temples. Cultivation of these fields by the temple authorities charged with caring for the votive bowls of the deities strongly characterizes the male domain. The dedication of both men and women to their particular art-forms is considered a sign of their devotion to the ancestral deities.

The different activities connected with the sexes also distinguish their particular qualities. Implicit in the division of labour between men and women, and between humans and deities, is that no one gender could maintain itself without reciprocal relations with the other. In this, too, the relation between solar and water deities concerned with the fertility of the earth is similar to that between males and females with regard to human reproduction. Women and water deities share similar transformative powers. These include transforming raw food into cooked, and creating weavings from raw material.

In the context of birth, Tatei Werika Wimari, one of the rain mothers, gradually moulds the foetus into a human form within the womb of the woman, just as maize grows from the womb of the earth. The later relationship between mother and child is also similar to that between the maize mother and the maize.

Transformatory qualities are also present in the myth which recounts the origin of women. The first Huichol woman had the ability to transform herself into a black dog. Only when the dog's master discovered the coat that she left behind after she had gone down to the river, and burnt it, did she lose this power and remain a woman. However, perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation is found among the water goddesses who, as part of the agricultural process, rise from their earthly lakes to become cloud serpents. The serpents cross the sky as lightning bolts which become entangled, causing them to fall to the earth as rain, and thus allowing them to return to their homes along the rivers, conceptualized as the earth's veins. These spectacular abilities of transformation distinguish women and the rain deities from men and the solar deities.

In contrast to the rain deities and women, the solar deities and men are related to the establishment of the social order and its governance. The sun assigned the deer gods to each of the earth's quadrants over which they hold governorship, while in the post-contact period Kauyumarie distributed the saints to their respective regions and defined their relationships with the Huichol by writing down the honours and offerings appropriate to each.

Huichol political and religious offices are reserved for men, and their authority derives directly from the solar deities.

These instances are sufficient to confirm the association of feminine categories with creativity and transformation, and the relationship of male attributes with the permanent and static domain of the solar deities. Men elaborate social institutions and materials but they do not fundamentally create them. Huichol cosmology, then, seems to embrace a dual metaphysic that will be the subject of section IV.

In the first two sections I have sought to explicate two domains in which certain objects participate. The use of arrows and votive bowls in exchange relations between the supernatural and human domains parallels that of the exchange of woven goods for candles, particular animals, and alcohol which occurs between females and males before marriage.

The objects and materials exchanged in each of these distinct contexts have similar symbolic meanings. The Huichol make offerings to the deities to procure the reproductive rains before they engage in production. Huichol women traditionally make prestations to men which symbolize their fecundity, and men make gifts to women and their families which signify their productive roles. The similarity between these two domains is, in very general terms, another example of what the comparativist Raglan (1964) called 'the marriage of earth and heaven', where the relations signified by the exchange of goods between categories of one domain closely parallel those of the other. These objects act as instruments of a symbolic technology which reaffirms the contracts between different categories and establishes complementary and reciprocal relations between unlike terms. They are a type of what Rivière (1969: 157) has called 'energy transformers'.

III

Huichol art and society are not impervious to changing historical contingencies which have their origin both within and outside the core area. Internal changes have modified the traditional wedding ceremony considerably since the time when it was first described by Lumholtz, but while the exchanges described in the last section are no longer made with the same frequency and regularity, the ideas which they represent still persist. More importantly, the Huichol have participated in many of the violent struggles that at times have dominated modern Mexican history, and which have sometimes been used as the pretext for land invasions by other groups, the break-up and forced abandonment of communities, attempts to concentrate the population in villages (often centred on a mission), and efforts to modify traditional forms of government and integrate them within the municipal system of local administration and authority.

A further source of change has been the policies of the Instituto Nacional

FIG. 9.6. Modern Huichol yarn painting depicting the story of the flood; 1981; yarn embedded in beeswax on wooden board; 24 × 24 in. (60.9 × 60.9 cm.); ex-collection Anthony Shelton; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson. In the centre is Nakawé, while the oval shape beneath her is the canoe that she told Watakame to build. Inside the canoe is Watakame himself, his female dog who was later transformed into the first woman, a snake, the bird that first spotted land once the waters started to subside, and the domesticated plants which Nakawé told Watakame to take with him. Beneath the canoe are a large fish and serpent. The picture is framed by an arched rain serpent whose body shed the rain which inundated the earth. See also Pl. XV.

Indigenista (INI), which established its presence in the area in 1960 and, between 1970 and 1974, administered 'Plan Huicot', a comprehensive development project designed to open up and transform the insular economy of the region. Although abandoned in 1974, the project and the INI's independent initiative have been sufficient to stimulate the development of a money economy in the Huichol area. Increasing regularization of land tenancy, the introduction of better strains of maize, the use of fertilizers and insecticides, the replacement of indigenous cattle by better breeds, and a successful campaign of vaccination have all encouraged the rural development banks to make loans to Huichol communities to help develop more efficient farming techniques aimed at producing a surplus for the external market. The growing dependence on outside agencies for loans, and the need to develop production for external markets in order to service them, has ended the region's economic and cultural autonomy in relation to metropolitan society. The flow of migrants to work permanently outside the core area has increased markedly during the past twenty years, and families are becoming increasingly dependent on seasonal work in the insalubrious tobacco, cotton, and citrus plantations of coastal Nayarit. The penetration of Western capital into the

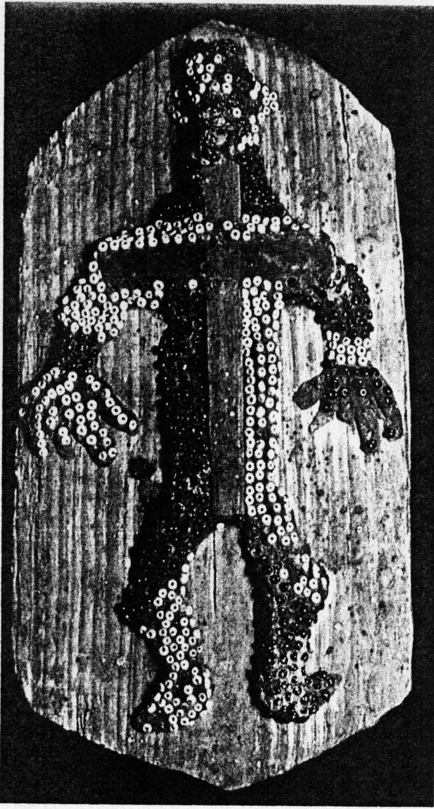

FIG. 9.7. Tatei Otuanaka (Maize Mother); collected 1906 by T. K. Preuss from a shrine dedicated to Narihuama at Ranchería Las Guayabas; beads embedded in wax and mounted on wood; $5\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ in. (13.5 × 7.0 cm.); Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, IV Ca 32636; photograph courtesy of Arnold T. Nelson. The cross running along the centre of the figure's body represents the four directions and the centre region.

Huichol homeland, and their increasing dependence on seasonal wage labour outside of it, has created a dual economy which threatens traditional subsistence patterns and the cultural forms elaborated around them. The partial incorporation and marginalization of the Huichol into the national and international market, together with the concomitant erosion of their cultural patrimony, has fostered the adoption of new attitudes, values, and tastes which have contributed to the rise of craft production as another means to achieve the satisfaction of those aspirations.

The best-known, and culturally most important, craft objects made by men outside the Huichol area are yarn paintings (*cuadros de estambre*, also known simply as *tablas*) (Fig. 9.6). These consist of brightly coloured, commercially produced yarns embedded in beeswax which has been spread over a plywood or fibre-board base. There has been a tendency to regard these tableaux as either a traditional art-form or as having evolved from a traditional form.

While the technique of attaching objects to the surface of other materials by embedding them in wax was and is well known, and is used to decorate votive bowls and small, square, or rectangular offerings with a wooden base (*nama*) (Fig. 9.7), I have been unable to trace any organic principle of evolution which would suggest a direct development from these older forms. The art discussed in the last two sections is quite distinct from the tableau work on at least four counts: materials, context of production, demand or market, and significance. While I hope to discuss Huichol crafts in more detail elsewhere, I shall nevertheless briefly describe these differences here in order to relate them better to the other domains of indigenous arts already discussed, and to extend my argument concerning the foci of artistic expression in this society.

Not all the materials employed in the manufacture of tableaux are used to make traditional religious or ritual objects, nor are they even found in the Huichol homeland. Neither plywood nor the more recently adopted and more commonly used fibre-board can be obtained in the sierra, and the yarns, although used for weaving, are only occasionally found as decoration on votive bowls. In most cases, wax is used to attach things such as beads, grains of maize, or coins to bowls or *nierika*, or sometimes, when shaped into small animals, is used as a decoration itself. Material for the external market and that for indigenous use are produced according to two different scales. Most objects intended for offerings are small, while tableaux are much larger and command a more extensive field which can be viewed and appreciated from a distance. Objects for external consumption are much more elaborately decorated than the ones used traditionally. Unlike tableaux, many votive bowls or *nierika* would only be sparingly decorated. This refinement is obviously aimed at attracting the external market, although if the elaborately decorated tableaux are compared with textiles in traditional use, it will be seen that the love of embellishment is not foreign to Huichol culture.

While votive offerings and objects for use in ritual are made in the sierra, tableaux are produced in urban areas such as Tepic, Guadalajara, and Mexico City, or along the coastal area of Nayarit. Because crafts are produced outside their mountainous homeland—the sierra, the sacred land created by the sacrifice of the Huichol deities, protected by and ruled over by them and embodying the ancestral knowledge that they bequeathed their people—it could be argued that they can never possess the same immanence or sacred character as the objects made of native materials within the sierra.

The first tableaux date from about 1951, when Alfonso Sota Soria exhibited a selection in Guadalajara (Negrín, 1979: 26). Since then, Miguel Palafox Vargas in Tepic and Juan Negrín in Guadalajara, as well as other anthropologists, have encouraged the development of the art, sometimes providing workshops where a master could train appentices. In the early 1970s, in an attempt to stimulate a rural economy, the INI encouraged craft production in the sierra, providing materials and a guaranteed (but low) price for finished

products, which were then marketed through Government-sponsored craft stores. While this met with little enthusiasm and was soon abandoned because of lack of funds, the Franciscan missions successfully operate a similar system, and have their own shop in Zapopan on the outskirts of Guadalajara. A number of middlemen emerged in Tepic to commission particularly gifted artists to work for them and attempt to ensure a monopoly over their productions. Most tableaux fall into one of three categories; they either use foreign styles to depict non-Huichol subjects (e.g. portraits of Che Guevara and Zapata), use an indigenous style to create compositions which are nevertheless meaningless juxtapositions of Huichol symbols, or increasingly make narrative-style compositions which closely parallel Huichol myths collected by earlier anthropologists. This last category has been developed into a high art-form by sponsors who have encouraged individual Huichols to develop their own particular styles and identify their work by signing it, and to make repeated trips back to the sierra to keep in contact with the traditions that they are said to represent. This work has been marketed through national and international exhibitions, often staged in fine-arts museums rather than in ethnographic or natural-history museums.

While tableaux have been called *nierika* by various authors, like certain examples of traditional art, they have none of the religious uses of votive arts, nor are they part of the same religious economy. Their use is entirely defined by the market that has encouraged and developed their production. This market is quite unlike the internal religious economy which prescribes the rules for the offerings of votive arts, or its ethical counterpart, which is dependent on it and regulates marriage prestations, since the former is controlled from the outside. Nevertheless, as in the other two domains of objects previously described, tableaux and crafts are used in exchange relations which identify a particular ontological juncture which, in this case, mark the boundary between what, to the Huichol, is indigenous and non-indigenous society. They may serve both defensive and offensive ends. On the one hand, they promote a certain collective image of the Huichol by insisting on the continuum between rural and urban peoples and annulling their different economic conditions and ethical values by the projection of their religous system as a detached, homogeneous, and generalized abstract philosophy expressed through this art. The artistic products that contain this cultural fetishization, on the other hand, are made for external use and projected outside the indigenous community to confront the cultural symbolizations of the dominant society, thus reproducing and asserting the new values of the marginalized, urban Huichol. While some tableaux represent episodes from Huichol life, such as ceremonies or stages in the cycle of life and death (notably those by Ramon Medina), most of the narrative representations are focused on the creation of the world by the ancestral deities (as in the works of José Benítez Sánchez, Tutukila Carrillo Carrillo, Juan Ríos

Martínez, and Guadalupe González Ríos). The tableaux therefore assert the presence of the past in the present, and reproduce a particularly Huichol world paradigm. The meaning and significance of this paradigm may reasonably be expected to diverge significantly from that found in the core communities on at least four counts. First, the tableau is produced for circulation in a cultural milieu external to that of the Huichol, which has a radically distinct theory of knowledge (one which favours description and explanation rather than experience) and way of 'seeing' (which commonly emphasizes appearance rather than the underlying essence of a phenomenon). Furthermore, the metropolitan culture for which the tableau is intended possesses different criteria of evaluation, based on formal aesthetic principles distinct from Huichol concerns, which include making explicit the implicit reality behind their world. Second, the tableau represents a translation of experience from its normal expression through oral narrative to pictorial representation. Since the presentation of oral literature or written narrative is necessarily linear, and lends itself most easily to causally structured discourse, while pictorial representation permits linearity to be circumvented and the multiple and simultaneous relations of a field to be presented to consciousness, each mode of representation implies a specific style and allows the expression of a particular structure of events. Third, tableaux are exchanged in asymmetrical relationships rather than through a generalized and symmetrical reciprocity such as characterizes the other two categories of object which circulate internally. No permanent bonds are established between the producer and patron, and the artist is alienated from the final use to which his work will be put, and from the significance it will assume during its circulation in its new cultural network. Finally, and related to this last consideration, all Huichol crafts, and particularly tableaux, are luxury items made for conspicuous consumption. The values underlying such behaviour are foreign to the Huichol themselves, and conflict with their emphasis on humility and religious introspection. Consequently, tableaux would never be purchased by traditional Huichols.

Commercial arts and crafts are antipathetic to traditional Huichol values in other ways too. Because they are almost always more elaborate than traditional objects in indigenous use, the art objects made for foreign consumption may be thought of, even in indigenous terms, as more beautiful than those reserved as offerings for the gods. In a sense, therefore, as long as there is no enrichment of traditional arts (although some religious ceremonies are probably becoming more complex), the more elaborate the crafts for external use become, the more impoverished become the Huichol deities. If this argument can be sustained—and it is here only a suggestion—the impoverishment of the gods means a decline in their power and influence over the destiny of the Huichol world and its abandonment to the caprice of capitalist economy. The growing success of the few in producing art for art's

sake, therefore, may coincide with successive stages of the general alienation of Huichol art from its subject, and the usurpation of the authority of the indigenous gods by some of their most avowed devotees.

At a less abstract level, craft production serves none of the integrative purposes of traditional art. The production of ritual objects and offerings for deities, and the use of textiles in prestations accompanying traditional marriage ceremonies, serves fundamentally integrative functions within the society, expressing and effecting the reconciliation of categories which were previously incompatible and contradictory. Craft production, however, while expressing another juncture, one that mediates between two radically different and culturally determined market situations, is (as we have seen) disintegrative, since it is controlled by an external value system. It represents a commoditization of Huichol culture according to terms foreign to it by a culture whose overpowering dominance assures the asymmetry of the exchange relationship in favour of the external market.

IV

Aesthetic judgements are based on values that may only be understood in the context of their relations to particular concepts of nature.[9] In the case of the Huichol, these are deeply embedded in the ontology that shapes their world view. Aesthetics concerns the judgement of a perceptual condition by the values particular to a society. Before examining these values themselves, we shall first describe some of the underlying concepts, to appreciate better the matrix of ideas on which they are founded, and which lies behind the inspiration of the objects which were discussed in the first and second sections of this essay.

In section II, it was suggested that the Huichol apprehend the world according to two divergent concepts of 'nature' demonstrated by the qualities and activities associated with men and women, and those connected with deities and humans. This is not unique to the Huichol; it is also found among indigenous peoples of the American south-west. For example, in his account of Navajo language and art Witherspoon (1977: 163–4) describes how females are associated with change, while males are related to a regularized cyclical quality held in stasis and representative of an unchanging 'reality'. Witherspoon has argued that the combination of these two diverse qualities which are represented by men and women in Navajo art 'seems to be able to combine the emphasis of order and balance found in classicism with the forcefulness, energy and expressiveness found in romanticism' (ibid. 173). Differences in the socially constructed characteristics of gender relationships manifest themselves not only in the materials but also in the pattern and stylistic conventions used in Huichol and Navajo art.

A common motif woven on shoulder-bags is the star-like design of the *toto*

flower (*Dasyirion wheeleri*) or peyote (*Lophophora williamsi*), which is represented radiating from a static centre in an increasingly complex, colourful, and dynamic repetitious design. A similar combination of static and dynamic elements is also found in the designs on votive bowls. The centre, the emergence point of the deity to whom it is dedicated, is always the focus of the design, around which other more complex and flowing motifs are arranged. This balance is absent in the commercially produced tableaux in which motifs are rarely clustered around a central design but have, instead, a more fluid and dynamic quality with fewer formal elements.[10]

The presence of these two qualities reiterates the dichotomous picture of nature already noted. It is detectable not only in the qualitative attributes assigned to men and women, and represented by the centre/periphery elements of motifs in textiles and votive bowls, but also in the significance given to directional orientations, particularly in the opposition between east and west.

The east is the birthplace of the sun and the direction of the mythical land of the ancestors, Wirikuta, to where the peyote pilgrimage is made. Peyote was 'born' in the footsteps left by the sacred deer in the first times, and is identified with the heart of the animal. It is the food that sustains the interior life of the Huichol and enables them to see and communicate with their deities. It is the hallucinogenic peyote, their spiritual food, which enables the Huichol to perceive the world of essences which lies hidden behind the material appearances of everyday 'reality'. Conversely, to the west runs the path to the sea and the water deity Tatei Haramara, who is sometimes identified as the mother of the maize children and is supplicated to bring the rains to ensure their maturation. Maize is the food of the physical body, that which is material and impermanent. The west is also the place where the senior water deity, Nakawé, the goddess of growth, is said to have dismembered herself to become transformed into wild fruits and vegetation.

As peyote is associated with the solar deities of the arid lands of the east, maize is conceptualized as the daughter of a female water deity of the west. In regard to this strict polarity, it is notable that communion with the deities in preparation for, and during, the principal pilgrimage to the eastern land of Wirikuta can only be achieved by denying the alimentary needs of the physical body. Sexual abstinence, long fasts, and restrictions on the consumption of salt and drinking of water precede the ingestion of peyote, marking the transition from one ontological state to the other.

The polarity between these diametrically opposed regions clearly identifies the east as the land associated with the interior essence of the objects which present themselves to vision and which contain the kernel of reality underlying the object world. The west is the converse: it is associated with the appearance of the world, the phenomenal world amenable to the untutored senses.

The articulation of these two orders according to a spatial structure includes the concomitant relations already described. The east is associated with the male sun deity; it is the area from where the food of the heart, *iyári*, is derived, food which enables the pilgrim to find the truth hidden behind object reality. This knowledge is considered eternal and absolute, planted there by the ancestral deities to inform the Huichol of the correct life-path they should follow. The west encompasses the contrary qualities. It is associated with the female water deities such as Nakawé or Tatei Haramara and evokes their transformatory nature. It is changeable, dynamic, related to procreation, birth, and the fertility that nurtures the maize to satisfy the body and sustain people in the phenomenal world.

The qualitative opposition between the east and the west, and the dualism it expresses between essence and appearance, is further elaborated in the concept of *iyári*. The Huichol translate *iyári* into Spanish as *corazón* which corresponds to the English 'heart'. This gloss, however, fails to give the full significance of this complex concept. It is used to refer to an essence inherent in all human beings which is considered essential to life, and which is present also within physical non-organic forms of phenomenal objects. *Iyári* is a component of the ancient fire deity Tatewarí, who is closely associated with shamanistic knowledge and who is the model for the Huichol shaman (*mara'akame*), who derives his powers from the deity. Both act as mediators, the first between the solar and water deities and the second between the world of the Huichol and that of their deities. The *iyári* of the fire deity is made of tobacco (*awákame*), a sacred substance restricted to ceremonial use which I shall return to shortly. *Iyári* also means 'sacred words' or knowledge, that is to say, knowledge of a distinct epistemological status which is largely restricted to shamans. The heart of the Huichol and the tobacco heart of Tatewarí should, therefore, be seen as expressions of occult knowledge. Consideration will first be given to the significance of this concept as it manifests itself in the physical body.

Iyári is an essence that is fixed inside the human being at birth and held in place by a sacred arrow. It comprises knowledge of the works of the ancestral deities in creating the world, their nature and relation to man, and the significance of the world and man's obligations in it. Such knowledge is not created or derived from experience and does not possess a human origin. It is the original wisdom of the deities. It is sometimes described as the 'thoughts' of the deities which were collected by the eagle mother, Tatei Werika Wimari, when they sacrificed their physical bodies to establish earth and sky and endow them with their features and the elements necessary to sustain life. Tatei Werika Wimari transmits this knowledge to the Huichol to enable them to know the way of their ancestors and remain loyal to them. However, although *iyári* is fixed into the bodies of Huichol children before birth, it is only through nurturing it by the ingestion of peyote (*hicuri*) and the denial of

the physical necessities of existence that one becomes aware of it. These activities cause the growth and recognition of ancestral knowledge, and thus stimulate revelation of the 'true' nature of the world which lies hidden within material appearances: the order of the deities within the form of phenomenal objects. *Iyári* appears to have a different but related meaning when it is used to refer to non-organic phenomena such as mountains, cliffs, rocks, rivers, or lakes. Again, it refers to the real essence which underlies the appearance of an object, and is sometimes described as assuming the appearance of a serpent at its centre. This corresponds to the original appearance of the water-related deities who make up many terrestrial features.

The quality shared by both these uses of the concept—as a component of the essential life force of humans and as a true and intransmutable essence which lies at the centre of non-organic phenomena—is its absoluteness. In both contexts, such knowledge or essence is inherited from a world which pre-dates the formation of the present age in which the Huichol live. It constantly and surreptitiously conveys the past into the present, both to regulate the shape of experience and to renew it by applying traditional categories to new historical phenomena. In this way it extends its authority, and provides the means by which the deities intervene in the present. Furthermore, when activated in the Huichol adept it becomes the means by which material appearances can be penetrated to reveal the 'true' reality which lies at their heart. This covert reality, hidden within the material presentation of the objective world in which the Huichol live, is the supernatural world of the ancestral deities. The present order of appearance is itself patterned by an ancestral order of intransmutable essences whose conceptualization strikes the imprint of the past forever on the perception of the present. Peyote, nurturing the *iyári* inherent in each human being, provides a means by which the Huichol can communicate with their deities despite the intransigence of their historical remoteness. In a certain sense these deities still live among the Huichol, at the centre of the mountains, rocks, rivers, and vegetation which surround them and in the force of the natural elements to which they are beholden.[11]

Tobacco, the heart of Tatewarí, may be considered the original manifestation of *iyári*. Fire can be conceived as a form of prayer. When the Huichol burn large areas of grassland and other areas of secondary growth, the smoke is described as a prayer for rain. The smoke is likened to clouds which cross the sky to the homes of the water deities, while the crackling of the fire is described as the voice of Tatewarí. As the rain is the message of the deities carrying their benediction in its fructifying action, smoke represents another form of communication, not from the deities to man, but a supplication from man to the deities. The significance of tobacco lies in its similar ability to produce voluminous smoke clouds when burnt, which may be thought of as the materialization of the ancestral thoughts of the fire deity, the original

shaman who is the source of the Huichol shaman's power. Prayer as communication is not distinct from the object to which it is guided. Clouds and smoke can be *iyári* while, as we have already seen, material objects like bowls and arrows can be the depositories of rain and fertility and its manifestation as it pounds the earth.

The notion of *iyári* is closely related to the conception of sight (*irumari*). Ordinary sight, the perception of the world by untutored sense, has no depth and little meaning for the Huichol, since it is unable to penetrate appearance and reveal the essence which lies at the heart of the object. I have already described how sight is attained through the ingestion of peyote, but it is also sustained and effected through the aid of various external objects which are collectively called *nierika*. It is said that '*nierika* is like what we see in our mind and our mind is like Watetuapa' (Negrín, 1975: 33). Watetuapa is the pre-Creation world which the deities originally inhabited before they created the present world through their self-sacrifice. It exists today as the cavernous nether region inhabited by the ghoul Tukákame. The comparison of the mind with the ancestral world corroborates the relationships between *iyári* and ancestral thought and between *nierika* and ancestral vision. The similarity of the functions of *nierika* and peyote are also confirmed by their common origin. It will be recalled that the first *nierika* budded from the antlers of Kauyumarie, the same deity whose heart is peyote. *Nierika* include mirrors which are usually circular, and may be either attached to arrows or simply stored in the shaman's palm box, along with other sacred instruments, gods' eyes (*tsikuri*), which are made of rhombohedrons woven from different coloured yarns and mounted at the points and centre of two sticks made into a cross, and the circular or rectangular wooden or stone tablets decorated with yarn or beads embedded in wax representing deities. They are also known as 'faces of the gods' (*itari*), and represent the aspect of the object that they enable to be seen. As a category of objects, *nierika* have as their most inclusive attribute the ability to make visible those things which are usually hidden from sensory perception. They share with *iyári* the ability to secure revealed knowledge, but only in the more limited sense of providing a means for the appearance of a supernatural being.[12] The criteria of aesthetic judgements are derived from the realm of essences to which *iyári* is directed and which *nierika* makes visible.

More than simply devotional expressions or instruments for signifying the immanence of the sacred realm of the gods, the objects that we have discussed and their associated representational systems are also sources of power.[13] I have already described how certain objects are considered sacred, and how they are used in exchange relationships between men and deities to affirm a primordial contract which enshrines the reciprocal and mutual obligations between them. The exchange of objects compels both supplicant and the supplicated to comply with the terms of such contracts, which, if broken,

threaten harsh sanctions, depriving the gods of their offerings and blood sacrifices and the Huichol of their sustenance. In the parallel situation of exchanges between wife-givers and wife-takers, objects encode the mutual obligations between the two partners sanctioned by district and community authorities.

While access to shamanistic office is open to all, mastery of the higher orders of shamanistic knowledge involves a long and arduous apprenticeship. This allows the control of sacred knowledge, which is considered necessary for all aspects of Huichol life, to be monopolized by a more restricted group of shamans who occupy senior positions. However, the shaman's power is potential rather than actual and is not overly exploited. While millenarian activity incited by shamans is not unknown in the area, most attempts by a shaman to exploit his power for his individual gain would be regarded as incompatible with devotion to the ancestral deities, and would encourage witchcraft accusations against him. Since, traditionally, design motifs and their combinations were taught to the Huichol by their deities and represent recognizable aspects of their 'thoughts', as well as manifestations of their presence and authority, invention and innovation are limited. Although few formal constraints are placed on the use of design motifs, sanctions strongly limit the behaviour of the artist and the uses to which his products are put. Transgression of these sanctions results in the pre-emption of the value and significance with which the Huichol would otherwise invest them. If the artefacts are not made sufficiently well, their maker may invite ridicule or punishment from the deity to whom they are dedicated. At the very least, he would certainly not be considered versed in sacred knowledge, and his work would be devoid of power.

For the Huichol, therefore, the source of inspiration lies not in idle contemplation of the world as it is perceived but in an acquaintance with the occult world of essences which is revealed through the activation of *iyári*. Inspiration is the gift of the deities, and consists in their permitting man to identify the original significance of the world and to apprehend the network of reciprocal obligations which binds him to his deities. Huichol art is not an art of this world, but an art in which is inscribed the essence of a deeper nature to which it only alludes.

Such a conception is not unique to the Huichol, and may constitute a more general characteristic of a category of thought common throughout much of Meso-America before the Spanish conquest. Westheim has described this vision of the world as 'mythical realism', and has suggested that it motivated the form and significance of pre-Columbian sculpture. In comparing it with Western art, he wrote (1972: 28):

Modern realism has as its end the reproduction of the visible; that of mesoamerican realism is to make visible the invisible. The artist in western civilisation believes he

represents a nut by depicting its shell. In pre-Hispanic Mexican thought the shell of the nut is only an exterior aspect of little importance. The essential thing is the nut itself.

This section has attempted to detail the relationships between certain key conceptual categories which underlie the domain to which aesthetic judgements refer and which condition access to it. The existence of similar concepts among the people of the American south-west and related historical Uto-Aztecan peoples of central Mexico may indicate some general ontological principles once present throughout the area, but of which only few vestiges now remain.

V

It will be clear that any Huichol category of thought that at the outset may appear to have corresponded to what in the West is defined as aesthetics rests upon presuppositions exotic to the modern imagination. Huichol aesthetics has no existence independent of the religious and ritual contexts for which traditional objects were and are made, and which both provide the rules for their manufacture and use and supply the criteria for their evaluation. Aesthetics as a discourse does not exist, but aesthetics as an ethical codification of the use, significance, and purpose behind sacred and ritual arts pervades metaphysics and ontology.

Leach (1973: 227) has argued that art is nearly always associated with ambiguous, dangerous, sacred, interesting, mysterious, exciting, or sinful episodes which are restricted to ritual occasions. Art, he suggests, goes further than fulfilling normal expectations by entering into the forbidden or unexpected. And, because it touches upon taboo subjects, its elaboration and use will be most closely related and even restricted to the intermediate period of separation during ritual activity, which is clearly distinguished and kept apart from the normal round of social life. This argument clearly fits the Huichol data that I have presented here; and, indeed, if, in the absence of an indigenous category of 'art', the context and the emotional value which an object evokes can partly be used to define something as art, then I have no hesitation in describing those objects discussed here in these terms.

We have seen that certain objects serve to represent and evoke moral contracts between different categories during ritual or ambiguous situations which mark the junctures between different ontological and social domains, such as between the supernatural and human realms, as part of the wedding ceremony when the transition from being single to married is highlighted, or between Huichols and non-Huichols. These situations coincide both with the contexts in which Leach argued art would be used and with the values which are attached to them. Since the outcome of the supplicatory offering for the rain, of a marriage proposal, or the result of an encounter with a foreigner

cannot be known in advance, they constitute situations full of ambiguity whose potentially opposing and conflictive nature is represented in the different categories of object that take part in the exchange. This uncertainty creates a tension among the parties involved, which in the case of offerings to a deity is both mysterious and dangerous and may be accompanied by intense pleas for forgiveness and by weeping. Marriages, on the other hand, are not considered consummated until the couple have accepted certain gifts from each other and have had sexual intercourse. Relations and friends gather around the house where the couple are sleeping, offering advice, joking, and encouraging consummation. The occasion is one of excitement, general interest, and sexual innuendo. The sale of crafts involves transactions with foreigners (*tewari*), outsiders who are never trusted and whose deviousness and cunning are legion. This negotiation is the most ambiguous of all. Its rules of engagement cannot be anticipated; they are capricious, sometimes incomprehensible and often only self-interested.

Having described traditional and commercial Huichol arts, the complex metaphysical notions with which the former are connected, and the ontology on which they are based, we are in a better position to discuss indigenous concepts of beauty. Since the world of appearances is subordinated to the world of essences, and is valued less than the latter as a source of truth and intransient certainty, objective judgement is based on occult rather than on visible criteria. In consequence, the realm of beauty lies in the manifestation of the essence of a thing, which is known through sacred sight. Among the Huichol of San Andrés, the beauty of an object or phenomenon is expressed in the term *xip'ane*, which corresponds to the Spanish *bonito*. As its opposite it is paired with *repu'ane*, *feo*, 'ugly'. Grimes and McIntosh (1954: 37) also give *vísi*, which seems to be used in a way similar to *xip'ane* to mean pretty or good. A beautiful thing is, therefore, a good thing, and, as we have seen, for it to be regarded as good it must be related to the ancestral deities. *Nierika*, votive bowls, and other ceremonial objects, as well as weavings, are most certainly beautiful because their manufacture is taught to the Huichol by the deities. However, arts and crafts which have no archetypal myth of origin or traditionally prescribed use or significance may be more ambiguous. Furthermore, the ethical basis of this beauty may be evaluated by its ability to objectify an aspect of the deity which it is meant to signify. Beauty is a form of revelation which explicates what is implicit and reveals that which is occult.

Among the most frequent Huichol expressions of beauty is 'clarity' (*claridad*),[14] which is used to describe the sierra in which they live. It is a sacred world, established, as I have recounted, by the ancestral deities, and is called the place of clarity (Benítez, 1968: 473). It is divided from the regions which lie around it by a curtain or frontier called Tukamerishe, 'the line of shadow', which is anthropomorphized as the god Reuṭari (ibid. 141). Within this boundary, the mountains, precipices, rivers, springs, and flora are all said

to share this quality of clarity. Once, a Huichol standing next to me at the edge of a precipice, looking outwards to the consecutive ridges of mountains that unfolded as far as the horizon, described how 'pretty' (*bonito*) the 'clearness' of the sierra appeared. Whenever the Huichol leave the sierra, to undertake wage labour on the coastal plantations of Nayarit or live in the large cities to produce or sell their crafts, they lose 'clarity', which only returns to them once they re-enter their mountainous home. 'Clarity' does not refer solely to their perception of the objective environment, but also to their recognition and understanding of the essences underlying perceptual phenomena. When they leave their land, they also leave their deities, who are no longer able to protect and care for them. They become unable to see their deified land, and lose their *iyári*. Beauty is transcribed into the familiar landscape, since every object and phenomenon has a meaning as the metamorphosis of a deity and contains a significance particular to it which the initiate can read. If one is able to penetrate to the essence of the natural landscape, it is possible to enter the land of the deities, a realm of perfect parameters which coincide with aesthetic ideals. This world is described in the shaman's chants:

> Here, say the songs, the gods were born. Thus says the peyote, the masticated flower. All say that an infinity of gods were born here and it is proven. My gods sing and they say that their path is in the Mountain with White Lines.
>
> In the world of these divine flowers, all is wisdom, counsel, example and song. The whole landscape is transformed into dance and unknown horizons.
>
> Oh divine flower, you were born amongst gods. In these lands you knew your world. You knew a people and this people reveres and respects you. Look to your world and your god, oh flower of the centre, oh flower of the divine priests. You [are] dispersed but everyone searches for you and finds you. Oh beautiful flower, flower of the gods, you will never again be deserted. Free from all evil mind, since you are followed always by good thoughts. (Mata Torres, 1974: 44)

The chant refers both to the peyote and to the *toto*, a small white flower which grows alongside the maize and blooms when the maize is maturing. Like peyote, the plant is associated with the sacred knowledge of the deities. It is another manifestation of *iyári* and, therefore, a source of knowledge about their nature. The image of the flower cuts across the diversity and different categories of gods and emphasizes their unity and relationship to man. The flower is an image of the occult world, a representation of the order found in Wirikuta during the ancient times to which the world should correspond, and as such represents an ethically charged aesthetic imperative. The importance of the flower as a symbol of perfection and wholeness is shown by its popularity as a predominant motif in Huichol textiles, particularly on shoulder-bags. Following Lumholtz (1900), Villaseñor and Vanegas (1977: 155) list eighteen distinct stylizations of it in weavings. The flower's evocation of the world of essences is unmistakable, conveying the origin of the

inspiration which lies behind their representation and the place to which the designs are addressed as a sort of prayer and offering.

'Clarity' is the gift of 'sight', and 'sight' is limited to the realm which the Huichol recognize as corresponding to the home of their deities. Clarity is, then, an essential component of the idea of beauty.

The world of essences, which 'sight' makes clear, is populated by many deities closely connected to birth, fertility, and regeneration, which the designs on votive bowls, different kinds of textile, and *nierika* commonly represent. Many of these themes revolve around sexual metaphors, which may be seen to be a chief concern of Huichol art, as well as providing the roots around which many connotations of beauty are clustered.

Further confirmation of this focus of aesthetic appreciation can be had from the exchange relations in which objects having such motifs partake. Huichol marriage preferences demonstrate the relationship between beauty and the ancestral world. A beautiful woman is one who has been well brought up and taught the correct ways of behaviour and ethics as they were given the Huichol by the deities. She must be hard-working, able to cook and weave, fertile, and committed in her devotion to the deities. Her archetype, as well as that of man, is established in myth. Such an idea of beauty, again a largely moral version of wider ethical concerns, emphasizes the woman's complementary role as a transformer and her reproductive capacities, as well as her ability to engage in a closely tied relationship by which she and her husband can approach the world of the ancestral deities. A beautiful woman is necessarily a good woman. Similarly, an upstanding man would be one who is diligent at his agriculture, proficient in his technical accomplishments, and devout in his religious obligations. This complementary relationship is essential, since a man cannot complete his shamanistic training until he is married, and his wife must also devote herself to the deities at the same time that her husband makes offerings and undergoes privations to receive ancestral knowledge.

The water deities, and particularly the rain mothers, are also associated with beauty, not just in the ethical sense by fulfilling their obligations to preserve life, but in the description of their homes and the elements connected with their cult. Tatei Rapaviyeme, the southern rain mother, dwells on the shores of Lake Chapala in southern Jalisco. She lives by an ancient fig tree (*rapa*), which has luxuriant green foliage covered by a moist, translucent sheen of dew which continuously drips from its leaves. Tatei Uteanaka, the protectress of fresh-water fish, lives in 'a beautiful house, beautiful as if seen on a clear night. It is a cave made of rock crystal and red, yellow and multicoloured tongues of flame', situated in the centre of the water (Benítez, 1968: 434). The home of Tatei Haramara is a rock which stands in the Pacific Ocean, just off the coast at San Blas, Nayarit. The sea is likened to a giant serpent, and the spray which is hurled against the craggy rock is said to be the many-coloured serpents which guard her house. The Huichol refer to all

these places, and the other homes of their gods and goddesses at Tatei Matinieri and Rreunar in the east, as beautiful. With the exception only of the last-named shrine, the birthplace of the sun, all the other locations connected with beauty are steeped deeply in the imagery of birth, fertility, and life that are guaranteed by compliance with the terms of the ethical contract instituted by the ancestral deities. Tatei Uteanaka protects fresh-water fish, the form taken by the rain mothers after they have fallen from the sky as serpents, to return to their aquatic homes at the four cardinal points. The dew which always clings to the fig tree owned by Tatei Rapaviyeme represents not only the source of bountiful supplies of water but the soul, also conceived as a dew-drop fixed above the forehead. The serpents that guard the home of Tatei Haramara are the same as the lightning sky serpents, which represent the rain mothers as they cross the sky to fertilize the Huichol earth. Clouds, too, are much admired, and the many names given to the different formations were traditionally used as women's names. Beauty and goodness are thus intimately connected.

Leach (1973: 223) has suggested that art communicates at different levels, and is most effective at overcoming cultural barriers when its imagery depends on non-cultural forms, such as the human body, and when its meaning focuses on transcultural themes such as sexuality. Such images and meanings can be expected to be the most easily recognizable despite other cultural dissimilarities. While this argument is applicable to the present identification of such themes with art and concepts of beauty, it has nevertheless been possible to approximate the indigenous terms by which they are apprehended. Despite this, however, it must be agreed with Leach that even deeper and alternative meanings probably exist which lie undetected by the ethnographer's eye.

Aesthetic judgements are not confined to phenomena associated with the water deities. The fertility of the earth or Huichol woman is achieved only through the reconciliation of the water and solar or feminine and masculine categories; hence beautiful imagery is also ascribed to the sun. An example of such imagery has already been given in the prayer dedicated to the sacred flower. It is also evidenced in the close relationship between *iyári*, the sun, and Tatewarí. It is the resplendence of the sun that gives sight, and the heart of Tatewarí that permits the Huichol to penetrate the appearance of the world, and understand the distinct natures of the deities. As in other realms of Huichol thought, appreciation of the world is not possible without the co-operation of the different categories which compose it.

VI

Huichol art and aesthetics correspond to a site of intense emotional excitement. Devotional acts are made in an attitude of deep humility and reverence, when the supplicants express their own unworthiness, plead forgiveness, and

acknowledge the benevolence and sanctity of their gods. During the recitation of sacred chants which tell of the sacrifices and privations that the deities underwent to create the world and provide sustenance, it is not uncommon for men and women to weep at being reminded of such selfless deeds. It is the high ethical regard in which these events are held that binds the Huichol to following the path of their deities and continuing the work that those deities began.

> We have served all the gods that were born and now exist. We have complied to the letter with that which they have ordered us. We have conserved the offerings while we live. We have made uncountable journeys to find them and have them nearer.
>
> We have followed your footsteps and cried at your absence. We have kept all your teachings. We love the religion that you have left us and understand your sentiments. Those do not cry who say they know nothing nor reclaim the past, which they no longer see in the present. Do not look with indifference to the being who takes us along the good path.
>
> Think in this world to whom you owe what you are. Whether you know or not other lives and other generations, do not worry. Be content with what you are and with what you have.
>
> Some day all the traditions that we have will be gathered by the gods. They will take them to the place of their dwelling, to the place of their birth. Everything will be left in darkness, but before this happens we will have brought to a head all that they ordered us.
>
> We set a good example to our sons, since they too will have those to teach what is life and what is death. They will teach that after death there is another life, and in this life as well there is a duty to perform. (Mata Torres, 1974: 43)

In summary, Huichol aesthetics is not concerned with an abstract concept of beauty, divorced from the ethical categories with which it is bound. However, while for the Huichol ethics and aesthetics may be compounded to constitute a single field of knowledge, the organization of its categories and the epistemology on which they are based are distinct from other aspects of contemporary Western aesthetics. Huichol aesthetics, unlike its contemporary Western counterpart, does not appear to make any distinction between signified and signifier. Its art is iconic in that it does not only represent the deities but becomes a manifestation of them and shares identical sacred qualities. Furthermore, Huichol art is profoundly religious, and its meaning is based on ideas of ontology and metaphysics that are exotic to our own thought. In these respects, its closest counterpart may be the art and ideas of beauty developed by scholasticism in medieval Europe (Eco, 1986).

I have described how, among the Huichol, traditionally produced decorative objects are used in exchanges between different domains and mark their distinct junctures. They signify, or actualize, the intangible things that are being exchanged: fertility and regeneration in one cycle, or productive and reproductive qualities and abilities in the domestic sphere of exchange. Com-

mercial arts, however, form part of asymmetrical exchanges whose conditions express the economic and cultural dominance of the metropolitan society, rather than the aspirations of their producers. The situational meaning of the material and its form can be obtained from examining the structured contexts in which the objects participate. However, to penetrate the source of aesthetic inspiration and the values upon which appreciation and judgement are based, it is necessary to examine the fundamental ontological categories of their thought. For the Huichol, the world appears very different to that which confronts the Western observer. Outer reality is a trick, shifting, restless, deceitful, but constituted by essences from which the aesthetic dimension feeds. Aesthetics is about how the 'real' world is, but the real world, for the Huichol, is not the world that we perceive, and any attempt to explicate their aesthetic ideas cannot assume a shared body of perceptions about which objectively recognizable laws of form, position, and volume intervene to provide the criteria for beauty. For the Huichol, aesthetics is not concerned with passive reflection, but with an active attitude to maintain or adjust a system of ethics, inherited from their ancestral deities, which organizes the world and defines appropriate activities and relations within it.

In these remote regions which have conserved vestiges of cosmologies which maintain a continuity between culture and nature, art may still be invoked as a form of what Bateson called 'grace' (1973: 235). Art codes the world differently from language, and is not entirely reducible to a system of meaning which is constructed through secondary process. Unlike consciousness, which selectively encodes the world and expresses it through language, art shares with dreams, intoxication, religion, and poetry the ability to allude to a vast reservoir of the unconscious concerned with the intransmutable generalities of relationships and the 'interlocking circuits of contingency on which human survival rest' (ibid. 246–9). Twice distanced from the Huichol significance of art and aesthetics, first by the linguistic and cultural barriers that separate our world from theirs and second by the difficulty of translating from primary unconscious processes to the purposive secondary processes of language, we nevertheless can glimpse the broad and bold purview of the many and complex relations and obligations which pattern the existence of their world, and which express what Bateson has called 'wisdom' (ibid. 250). For the Huichol, art makes explicit the immanence of intransmutable essences underlying the appearance of the world, and aesthetics provides the criteria by which the success of such intervention is judged.

Notes

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1 See Shelton (1988; 1989) for discussions of the Huichol pantheon and the relations between different deities.
2 The meaning of the symbolism of these designs has already been discussed in some detail by Lumholtz (1900; 1904) and Zingg (1938: 607–15), and will not concern us here.
3 Seler (1939: 11) considered these to be related to, and possibly derived from, the ancient Meso-American technique of mosaic work.
4 In a modern yarn painting by Jose Benítez Sanchez, *Invoking Our Mother the Rain*, the rain is depicted living under 3 gourd bowls.
5 The myth which tells of the acquisition of agriculture is recounted in Zingg (1938: 532–3).
6 These small fields, located around a district temple and cared for by temple officials, were traditionally divided into 5 areas, each reserved for a particular colour of maize, representing the 5 maize daughters specified in Huichol myth. Their mother, Tatei Haramara, and her sisters, the rain mothers, together with their father, whom Zingg (1938: 613) identified as Keamukáme, but who I was told was the sun, is invoked by the temple authorities to care for the maize children. It is not surprising that this field which becomes the home of the sacred family also bears the name *itári*.
7 Benzi (1972: 204) reports that the bride may also be given gifts of bracelets, earrings, vegetable dyes, and wool.
8 In ancient times, the squirrel stole the fire from the temple of the water deities and took it to the home of the solar deities, with whom he became associated. It is, therefore, an appropriate masculine symbol.
9 A concise expression of this view, which illustrates the historical evolution of the concept of nature in European thought, can be found in Collingwood, 1945.
10 North American peyote paintings, as illustrated by Jopling (1984), are much more naturalistic, and have been influenced by external Western conventions and styles which make them quite unlike those of the Huichol.
11 For the Huichol, the natural habitat has significance only through its mediation by myth. It represents a spatialization of temporality which consistently ties the present to the structure of the past.
12 Seler (1939: 10) compared these to the *tlachieloni* or *itlachiaya* used by the Aztec. These consisted 'of a disc borne on a stick, with a hole in the centre', and were associated with the Aztec fire deity and the nocturnal aspect of the sun, Tezcatlipoca. This similarity in form and association between solar deities and a fire deity, the source of shamanistic power, suggests that their uses were similarly conceptualized.
13 I do not refer just to power as a function of hierarchical ranking, but also to its

vertical distribution. This does not necessarily rest on the threat of coercion, but also offers a means of structuring relationships by moral compulsion.

14 'Clarity' here refers to the gift of vision bestowed on them by the sun. The light at sunrise is called *pari niube*, 'the speaking light of the sun'. *Pariya panatimie* is translated as 'here comes the clarity' or 'here comes the light of day' (Benítez, 1968: 534).

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