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Everything has its Jaguar. A narratological approach to conceptualising Caribbean Saladoid animal imagery

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Chapter 3. Studying oral narratives

How are the acts of narration and of decorating pottery interrelated? Ellen Dissanayake's theory on "Making special-behaviour" explains that both are expressions of this behaviour (see 3.1). Zoomorphic images and animal actors can be considered cultural signs: a means to share ideas, expressions of knowledge and social codes. This assumption leads to a discussion on "meaning" and "signs". The latter cannot be deciphered, or translated, as a foreign language can. However, they have/had meaning within their own cultural setting i.e., evoked a shared set of sentiments and associations. The animals depicted as signs were thus not merely portraits of an animal, but mental constructs (i.e., high-order representations; see 3.1.1).

Various functions of narratives are addressed (see 3.2) in order to better understand why peoples all over the world tell and listen to stories. As will be demonstrated, storytelling is an effective strategy for the survival of non-literate communities, because narratives transmit and preserve forms of knowledge.

While the first part of this chapter discusses various concepts and theories, the succeeding sections (3.3 and 3.4) develop a methodology for this research based on these theories whereby the first section focuses on collecting, clustering and analysing the narratives (3.3), whereas the second is concerned with theories and methodologies for interpreting the data (3.4).

Section 3.3.1 deals with collecting, clustering and analysing narratological data. First, the first-hand story acquisition is addressed, during my 2009 field trip. In the course of this field trip I had the honour of meeting an Arawak elder who shared his stories with me (see 3.3, under sub-heading *Shared stories*). Next, the focus will shift to how these tales were documented in a database (3.3.1). Here the narratological methodology applied is presented.

The methodology then focuses on the second theoretical tool: perspectivism. This instrument will serve as an interpretative framework in order to not only analyse the narratives but also to better understand the Amerindian contextualisation and conceptualisation of the zoomorphic imagery (see 3.4). Perspectivism is introduced as a more inside perspective and enhances the more structuralistic methodology.

Section 3.5 addresses issues related to adopting written, translated accounts of (once) dynamic oral narratives (see 3.5.1). Next, the use of contemporary, dominantly mainland stories to interpret the Saladoid island iconography is reflected upon (see 3.5.2).

3.1 On “making special”-behaviour

What justifies archaeologists to dive into narratives as a means to make sense of iconographical features? The present section poses the theory of “Making special”-behaviour, as proposed by Dissanayake, as an overall framework that interrelates storytelling and adorning which are expressions of this type of behaviour. Moreover, both function as a means to make sense of, and give meaning to, the world in which we live. Narratives in particular are central to this study as they not only narrate but also communicate “meaning”, hereby explicitly and implicitly contextualising cultural signs.

Iconography and (oral) narratives are the result of human activity i.e., decorating (adorning) and storytelling. Both these activities apply signs and symbols as a tool of expression, as a way to connect, even though this form of communication may be unintentional. An artefact may be decorated out of boredom, or just to make it “look pretty”. Even so, a spectator is likely to be struck by a “feeling/evocation” when looking and/or holding it to perhaps even extract an interpretation from it.

How an individual reacts to, or interprets, a narrative or an adorned object is not only partly personal but also culturally determined. These narratives and items provide a means through which we as individuals become acquainted with “cultural symbols” because narratives feed our forms of knowledge (e.g., semantic or encyclopaedic). They themselves are the products of symbolic knowledge (see 3.1.2; Sperber 1975: 108). Even though a cultural *sign*/symbol*⁴⁷ might not be equal to a word or a concept, we are still able to extract information from it (Sperber 1985: 83-4).

⁴⁷ Italic words signified with an asterisk (*) are explained in the Glossary.

“Art” can be considered an activity or behaviour that involves the intentional making or expressing of something more than is required for practical purposes and not as the product of such activity (Dissanayake 1980, 1982, 2006, 2008). When presenting an artistic expression to an idea, or recognising it is artistic, we give it (or acknowledge it with) a certain specialness. It is made to be something special, that is to say, to treat it as different from an everyday item. Such behaviour is referred to as “making special” and is the root proclivity from which everything called “art” has developed (Dissanayake 1982: 148). Throughout time and cultures, humankind was and is, involved in transforming ordinary experiences (objects, sounds, utterances, surroundings) into something *extra*-ordinary (Dissanayake 1980, 1982, 2008: 14).

“Making special”-behaviour (e.g., storytelling or decorating pottery) contributes essential social benefits to communities as it expresses or revives or canalises emotions, reiterates social values, mirrors social codes, provides an avenue for shared experiences and comprises a tool for coping with psychological pain (Dissanayake 2006, 2008). However, as a means of self-expression, it trains our perception of reality and also supplies a sense of significance or meaning to life. Expressions of such behaviour therefore not only embody and communicate experience, but they also constitute a means through which we comprehend, give relevance to, and therefore control, the world (see also 3.1.2).

In this sense, adorning and storytelling fit the same behavioural pattern as they take place within the same (“symbolic”) cognitive context. Both decorated pottery and oral narratives are the results of this “making special”-behaviour. Both apply (shared) motifs, metaphors and signs that acquire their “meaning” within the cultural frame of reference created by and for peoples who are part of the same cultural framework. It is therefore probable that similar signs, motifs, metaphors and the like are utilised within the act of storytelling and adornment.

Here the concept of “meaning” is not a ready fixed, code-like manner as are words encountered in natural languages. Neither does it imply that decorations (drawings, artefacts) depict indigenous “myths” and/or narratives. Here the term “meanings” refers to the evocations/associations it triggers. What comes to mind when we think about rabbits, bats or lions? The way we interpret cultural *signs** is partly universal, partly determined by culture. Each symbol/sign has a certain meaning that belongs to a certain context, which excludes other contexts. A “symbol” does thus not signify anything but itself. Their force lies in their ability to evoke recollections and sentiments” (Sperber 1975, 1985).⁴⁸

This behaviour of “making special” binds the activities of storytelling and adorning. Iconography and the actual narratives are the results of this behaviour. Signs, motifs and the like are one of the means through which mankind express an “idea”. Although in theory,

⁴⁸ A reference to a definition, or function, of “symbols”, see Sperber 1975: 117-8, 1985; see also 3.1.

humankind has indefinite ways to make something special and ostensibly, bound by both universal and cultural contexts, we apply similar ways to actually do so.

At the same time, iconography and narratives are ways to get acquainted with (cultural) signs. They also communicate the importance and “meaning” of the motifs and signs they themselves display. The manifold meanings of animals are narratively articulated.

3.1.1 Signs, icons and symbols in iconography

Studying the “meaning” of zoomorphic iconography could also be considered an investigation into symbolism. The “meaning” of iconographical features cannot be deciphered as with a foreign language, but iconography can be considered as cultural signs which do not refer to knowledge but are knowledge, and as a result, evoke a shared recollection of sentiments (see 3.1).

Controversially this research focuses on animal imagery, implying that depictions are at least “deciphered” or identified as animals, sometimes specific animals, e.g., jaguar, bat or caiman imagery. However, is this identification perhaps not proof of exactly the opposite, i.e., that these zoomorphic motifs can be deciphered? This leads to the principles, or laws, that link a given signifier to a given signified, or an object to a subject (Bayley 1991; Hodder 1987: 3).

The iconographic analysis concerns the relationship between the image (and object) and the subject of the depiction. Or, in other words, the relationship between signifier and signified. Three types of links have been identified (Peirce 1931-36: 36, 1958) and comprise: (a) **Iconic signs**, through which the signifier is connected to the signified, through resemblance. The “sign” (signifier, e.g., image, *adorno*, figurine) resembles what it signifies, because it looks like it, sounds like it, smells like it, etc., (b) **Indexical signs** tied to what is signified, because they are connected through the principle of contiguity e.g., cause-and-effect, and (c) **Symbolic signs** which are artificial, whereby the signifier and signified are linked by means of an arbitrary (human-imposed) convention.

As this research focuses on (identified) animal imagery (e.g., zoomorphic *adornos*) they are not “symbolic signs”, but most likely iconic. Resembling a (specific) animal, they could have been, and likely are, also indexical i.e., their “meaning” or what they once evoked is conceptualised differently from “merely” the animal depicted; as signs, they probably serve additional metonymic or metaphoric functions.

Because animal imagery is iconic as well as indexical, the imagery is analogous and constitutes metonymic and metaphoric functions.⁴⁹ A metonym signifies a thing through a part or aspect of that what is signified, e.g., jaguar teeth signify the jaguar as a whole. A metaphor evokes similarity, but refers to something it is not; therefore a metaphor forms an implied

⁴⁹ The graphic arts follow the style of verbal arts, see Roe 1982: 2-3.

comparison. For instance, a Warao story explains that “to break the legs of a brown heron” is a metaphor for collecting a variety of foodstuffs⁵⁰ indicating that for example, an identified frog *adorno* is an iconic *sign** because it depicts a frog (i.e., is analogous to a frog). However, as a metaphoric analogue, that *adorno* could signify fertility, water, rain or transformative power resulting from the frog’s life cycle (egg > tadpole > froglet > adult frog). The zoomorphic *adornos* presumably serve a metaphoric function in that they signify a mental concept, related to symbolic knowledge. Therefore they fall in with Sperber’s description of “symbols” (see 3.1).

I, therefore, adopt Damerow’s two-step order put into practice in Mackowiak de Antczak’s study on Venezuelan figurines (Mackowiak de Antczak 2000, referring to Damerow 1996). The model presented there integrates a holistic approach on figurine interpretation (see 2.1.3). The first stage (referred to as an “Empirical stage”) consists of five steps and leads to a “subject identification”, e.g., depicting a jaguar (see Fig. 3.1). This so-called “first order” identification has been established because the imagery, for instance, when linked to *adornos*, is identified as portraying an animal.

However, in the present research, I consider animal imagery as high-order representations comprising mental objects or ideas communicated by means of signs (e.g., zoomorphic *adornos*). In the abovementioned model, the high-order representations are identified through the four steps of the “Understanding stage”, see Fig. 3.1. Based on their metaphoric or metonymic functions, these animal imageries also constitute a high-order representation (Mackowiak de Antczak 2000: 50).

Thus, although the zoomorphic *adornos* underlying the present study are not “symbolic signs” as defined above, they still are the product of symbolic knowledge and signify beyond what they (while serving as an icon or index) display. This research aims to contribute to our understanding of *adornos* as high-order representations and is consequently a study on “symbolism” and “meaning”.

In this dissertation, the term “animal”, which includes specific “animals”, is often written between inverted commas in order to indicate its high order. For instance, whenever an *adorno* is identified as a “bat” *adorno*, a bat may be depicted, but what this *adorno* portrays is *not* a bat (animal), but a mental construct i.e., a portrayal of symbolic knowledge. In the present study, animals presented as mental constructs are (re)constructed by means of their narrated meaning.

⁵⁰ Wilbert 1975: 9-11. In this study documented as Story no. 538.

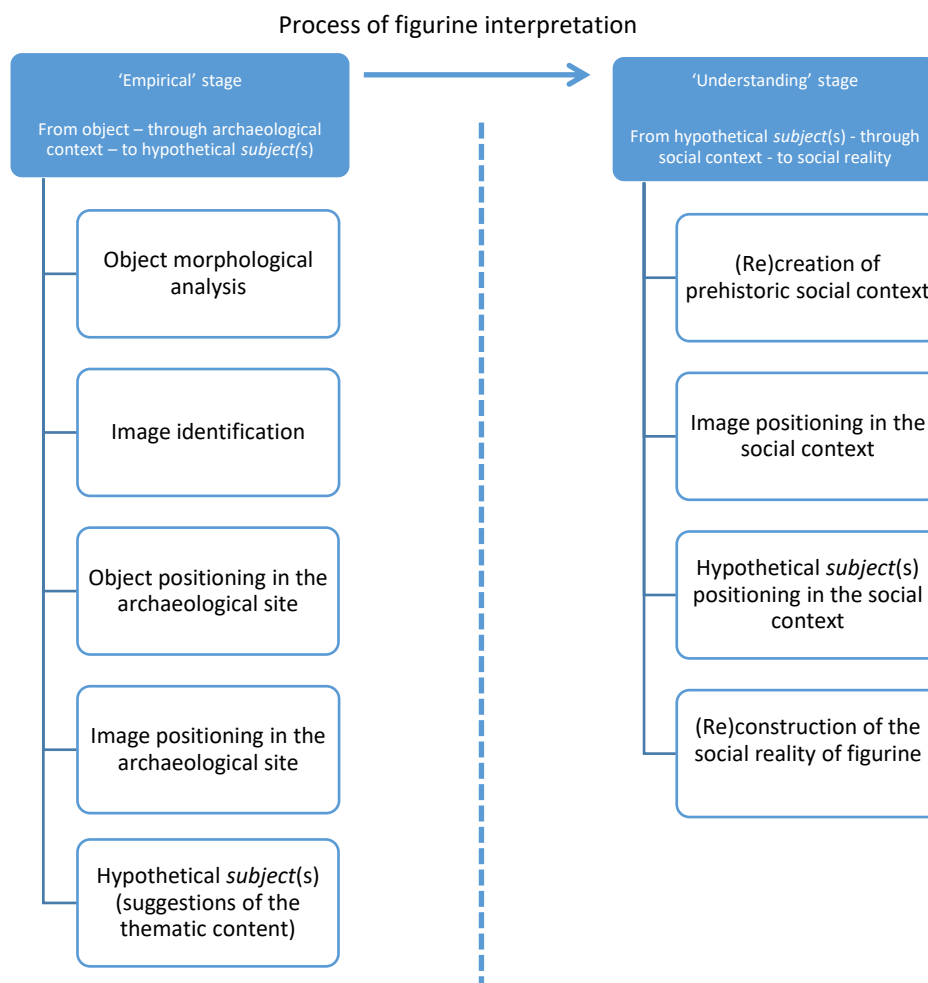


Fig. 3.1. Model for figurine interpretation. Two stages and nine elements of the “step-by-step strategy”; based on Mackowiak de Antczak 2000: 7, Fig. 72.

3.1.2 Feeding perceptions

“Making special”-behaviour builds upon knowledge of the indigenous peoples, and narratives form an important “feed” to what has been called “symbolic knowledge” (Sperber 1975: 108; 1985: 83-4). They are important because they (literally) narrate meaning. Motifs, actors and contexts can all function as a cultural sign. Within the world of narratives, they are interrelated and therefore contextualised.

However, narratives merely provide a single means through which we make sense of the “symbolic” world. Returning to Goodman’s theory on “world-making” (see also 2.3.1), our knowledge and perceptions are informed by a vast variety of world versions originating from science, the works of painters and writers, performances of symphonies, etc. These worlds often contrast to such a degree they are not mutually reducible. Once united all these varied worlds do enter into the process of knowing, perceiving, understanding and therefore of experiencing the world (Goodman 1978: 3, 22).

Knowledge of science and “art” are unified in the processes through which knowledge, in general, is organised and created. “Even if the ultimate product of science, unlike that of art,

is a literal, verbal or mathematical, denotational theory, science and art proceed in much the same way with their searching and building” (Goodman 1978: 107). In this sense, both science and “art” are symbolic systems, a frame of reference in which cultural signs and depictions can be understood.

Scientists build theories, artists paint pictures, narrators tell stories and all do so by keeping other theories, pictures or narratives in mind. They then delete, add and/or alter elements, so that these elements are reshaped and transferred metaphorically. These three (re)creators organise and reorganise in response to their particular theoretical and practical needs. They thus build new worlds from already existing worlds. Creating “new worlds” is in actual fact a process of remaking (Goodman 1978: 6-7).

The premises of these worlds differ as do the signs predominantly applied within these worlds. Nevertheless, all make similar use of metaphors. Any metaphor, or sign, only has a meaning in the world or frame of reference it fits into. Scientists, artists and narrators all provide such frames which we adopt in order to structure the world around us. Only suitable arrangements and groupings allow us to handle vast quantities of materials (and signs) either perceptually or cognitively.

When encountering cultural signs and depictions in various contexts we are able to grasp their “meaning”. The iconic, or indexical *sign** “turtle” may, for instance, appear: (a) in a materialist manner whenever a carapace serves as an instrument or food, (b) as an icon in the form of a painting or petroglyphs, (c) within a ritual context forming part of shamanic songs, (d) as a medicine, (e) portrayed in dances, and (f) as a trickster or the mother of culture heroes in narratives. Through all these encounters we not only become familiar with the “turtle” as a cultural *sign** but also with its high-order representation.

3.1.3 Challenging “meaning”

The present section elaborates on the difficulties in understanding the meaning of signs as high-order representations. Difficulties in understanding (cultural) signs arise as the evocation of a *sign** is to a certain extent very personal. Every culture has its own cultural signs, including first-order and high-order representations. These signs may not be (easily) translated into words but are nevertheless familiar to members of a culture, as they are products of symbolic knowledge.

Extracting a “meaning” from cultural symbols poses challenges, as research conducted on the Nage indicates, an indigenous group populating eastern Indonesia (Forth 1994, 2004, 2007, 2009). Within this community, increasing awareness of local cultural differences was encountered, accompanied by the recognition of the contrast existing between local and national culture. In his research, Gregory L. Forth applies the forked, engraved wooden post (*peo*) in order to illustrate his viewpoint. When he asked the Nage about their culture, they

showed him a *peo* which served as a marker of their ethnic identity. They also informed him that each carving carried an individual “meaning”, which served as a “symbol” for a series of positive qualities or cultural values.

G. L. Forth acknowledges not only that the perspective of the Nage may have been influenced by recent developments, referring to modernism, but also that this view could differ from the perspective adopted in ancient times. In fact, the opinion “motifs constitute a standard and public, or even a culturally and generally accepted code” is criticised. Ideas on meaning and symbolism may be a recent innovation, tied to processes of social change or “modernization”. Literacy may have played a role here, too: to read is to collect knowledge. The idea of culture, or of cultural symbolism, as constituting a fixed code analogous to natural language implies that it is learnable and can (and indeed should) be acquired by everyone (Forth 1994: 152).

This is not to state that the notion of meaning which concerns any understanding of expressions of indigenous cultures is completely inappropriate. It is, however, argued that such a meaning is perhaps identified by individuals. Or, such elucidations which anthropologists could refer to as being statements of meaning, characteristically do not forge a stable, public code, and are therefore generally not recognised as collective “culture” (Forth 1994: 152).

Forth’s research indicates not only that the concept of “meaning” and “symbol” presumably originates from, and belongs to, the Western literary paradigm but also that these concepts could be alien to the cultures we study. This is in accordance with the lines of thought formed by Dan Sperber, a French social and cognitive scientist, who concludes that putting “symbols” into words may be impossible (Sperber 1975, 1985, 1994). If we do find the words, it is very likely that they will vary as much as humans do. However, as a concept and as to the way in which various signs (e.g., the *peo*) are conceptualised, it is probably very similar.

3.2 How storytelling makes sense

Various scholars realise the importance of narration both as a survival strategy and a social binding activity.⁵¹ The practice of storytelling itself is widely spread and has emerged independently among even the most isolated indigenous peoples (Heymans 2003; Scalise Sugiyama 1996, 2001, 2006). Evolutionists consider this shared phenomenon to be a human strategy which can not only store but also transmit valuable information.

⁵¹ See Bieseke 1986; Coe et al. 2005; Couch 1989; Dissanayake 2008 (which does not focus on storytelling, but on the general traits of art); Ochs & Caps 1996; Scalise Sugiyama 2001 and 2006; Scalise Sugiyama & Sugiyama 2012.

Various functions of narratives can be distinguished. Within the present research the emphasis will lie on the following themes⁵²: (a) ensuring and transmitting knowledge, (b) informing, (c) encoding social behaviour, (d) validating the world, and (e) establishing a group and personal identity. Each theme is elaborated upon in the present section.

3.2.1 Ensuring and transmitting knowledge

Within hunter-gatherer societies, knowledge is only transmitted orally. Therefore it is of importance to not only ensure that transmitted knowledge sticks with the subject but also that any information crucial for the survival of the group is not known just to a few individuals but to all. Narratives are a very efficient means to this goal for these communities, for instance, because knowledge is not transmitted directly but additively: it is a “fun” social activity as well as a tool with which to transmit and ensure information (Scalise Sugiyama 1996, 2001, 2006). In addition, information placed within a narratological context is more easily stored, internalised and memorized, because our brain handles bundles of knowledge already presented in an orderly form better than loose facts (Bieseke 1986: 163; Byrne 1995).

Drama is applied in narratives as a mechanism to support our memory and compel involvement (Bieseke 1986).⁵³ All in all, “...narratives that persist in collective memory do so because their content triggers motivational mechanisms [e.g., “*interest*”] designed to respond to the cues associated with the agents, objects, activities, and/or phenomena represented within them” (Scalise Sugiyama & Sugiyama 2012: 353). The above-italicized term is placed between square brackets by the author.

Pieces of information with historical value can be recorded in the group’s collective memory through narratives. According to Sellato (1993), the historical narratives comprise stages whereby: (a) an event or information is directly recorded, (b) original elements are altered and supernatural elements introduced, and (c) a mythical dimension, as well as an intermingling of the human and supernatural worlds, are accomplished. Through each transition, it becomes more difficult to identify historical facts from fiction, objectivity from subjectivity, etc. (Sellato 1993: 157). However, there is a fine line between historical and mythical information (see also 2.3.1, under the sub-heading “*World-making*”), which discusses how the “Before time” (or “mythical” time) is still relevant in “Today time”).

The transformation of a historical character into an animal is a common aspect of the evolution when a historical narrative becomes “mythical”. This mutation is also stimulated by the fact that animal names are also very commonly utilised as personal and/or indigenous

⁵² When analysing each narrative dealt with in this dissertation I identified these five narrative functions (see also 3.3.1, under the sub-heading *General data*).

⁵³ Crouch and Sellato identify rhythmic qualities of narratives (e.g., songs) as a means to support a memory, because an aesthetic quality is added and a fixed order of words ensured (Crouch 1989: 590; Sellato 1993: 156).

group names as is the case with the *Maya-yana* ("Frog"-people) and *Kaikusijana* ("Jaguar"-people). A Waiwai (Cariban) narrative reports how many peoples are invited to a large feast attended by certain other peoples who "do not like each other". The "Buzzard"-peoples dislike "Jaguar"-peoples because they always bite them. These references could also illustrate historical disputes between various groups and/or peoples (Story no. 397; Fock 1963: 56-67).

The function and content of narratives probably differ when looking into smaller, mobile and non-stratified communities when compared with larger sedentary and stratified ones (Sellato 1993). In the larger stratified communities, aristocratic families preserve (are "keepers" of) tradition and narratives. They may even apply their status as custodians of tradition and "myths" as an instrument with which to mobilise their peoples, for instance, by creating a common goal in order to inspire going to war. Moreover, the elite utilises narratives to justify their status by for example claiming their divine origin. This difference between non/less-stratified and stratified communities could well be reflected in the contents as well as in the structures of narratives.

3.2.2 Informing

Narratives are thus by nature an effective strategy for humankind to ensure and transmit various forms of knowledge which can then be (relatively) easily remembered and recalled in times of need. Storytelling is a way to share personal as well as group experiences with a potentially large audience. In this way, the community is informed of all kinds of practical matters e.g., the (in)edibility of plants and animals, which arrows to use⁵⁴ when hunting or any geographical/navigational information (e.g., constellations, locations and the names of rivers or mountains).

Western culture would presumably categorise the narratives discussed in the present study as "myths" or "fairy tales/fables" i.e., as fancy and fictional. However, they contain valuable information on the survival of groups and can be considered part of their strategy to transmit knowledge. For instance, narratives about animal characteristics help to identify (edible) species. Moreover, animal behaviour indicates the best season/time of day to chase game. Utilising animal actors by means of anthropomorphism (i.e., attributing human traits to animals) decreases the amount of information a forager must store (Mithen 1990, 2005). It is argued that a pre-existing set of behavioural terminology serves, as do words, to describe human behaviour. Thus, within a single narrative, information on animal behaviour/traits and human sociality can be combined, e.g., on how honey can be found and extracted as well as on marriage and betraying a secret.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Narratives describing specific arrows with which to catch game are numbered: 52 (Trio, Cariban), 163 (Tariano, Arawakan) and 258 (Kachua, Cariban). Narratives on curing the ill are numbered: 444 (Warao), 411 (Cariban). Narratives on how to catch fish by means of poison are numbered: 48 (Trio, Cariban) and 131 (Arekuna, Cariban).

⁵⁵ See Story no. 132 (Taulipang, Cariban) in Koch-Grünberg 1921: 105-9; see Story no. 274 (Quechua) in Lévi-Strauss 1988: 43; see Story no. 376 (Warao) in Roth 1970: 199-200.

Narratives can contain useful information on interspecies associations. A striking example of this comprises a Yanomamö tale in which the fasciated antshrike (*Cymbilaimus lineatus*) mourns its father-in-law the tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) with the cry, “Shoabe!” (“Father-in-law!”), an exclamation which the Yanomamö call the “announcing song” of tapirs. In this case, Antshrike searches for a tapir by following its trail which “... followed a river upstream, meandering along, went past a hill, skirted it then turned back. That was how Antshrike taught us how to follow the trail of a tapir” (Scalise Sugiyama 2001: 233, referring to a narrative reported by Wilbert & Simoneau 1991: 356).

Another important aspect of rendering storytelling an effective tool both for sharing and warranting vital information is the fact that the knowledge of one is shared by many. Narratives are told to many men, women and children at the same time and known by virtually everybody. Individuals do not need to explore the world by themselves but will be able to learn from the experiences of other members of the group. This form of wisdom enables individuals to express pragmatic attitudes that vary according to the necessities associated with the situations he or she may experience.

Storytelling fills a need to acquire knowledge of (potential) dangers, of numerous species of flora and fauna as well as of specific cases of animal and plant behaviour, thereby contrasting any knowledge of general “rules” which are of no use in practical life. This aspect is expressed in oral narratives where the interest focuses on the actors’ responses to detailed environmental and social situations rather than to general rules (Biesele 1986: 164). When combined with the multitude of available narratives, a discussion on similar themes and messages actually contributes to the need to acquire knowledge, because the “truth” linked to that which everything one believes lies somewhere amidst all the dialogue.

3.2.3 Encoding social behaviour

The third function of a narrative is closely related to the function Informing (see 3.2.2). For, social behaviour is a specific type of information which has a reproductive value. In addition to containing this type of information, storytelling is not only a social activity by nature but also often a dynamic, interactive activity in which the narrator and audience together create a story world. A positive ambience of sharing, laughter and motivation is thus created.

Because their contents comprise elements of sociality, narratives give rise to harmony by means of bringing individuals together. Moreover, they can explicitly and implicitly illustrate how society expects its members to behave. Narratives may indeed: (a) reveal the consequences of behaviour, e.g., when sleeping with your brother punishment will follow, (b) forward implicit indications e.g., husbands must leave game outside the house for their wives to pick up, or that food should be shared with mothers-in-law.

“Traditional children’s stories” fulfil various roles in encoding behaviour, when influencing the (social) behaviour of children and even of distant descendants (Coe et al. 2005). It is argued that narratives are repeated, either consciously or unconsciously, because of their influence on behaviour. They provide moral and evaluative guidance. An important goal is to not only teach children the morals and values of their parents but also to inform them about religion and/or society in general. By reading, or being read to, children follow a social path, learn role orientation, and acquire norms and values. Storytelling therefore did (or does) also function as ideological instructions aimed at moulding the inner nature (Zipes 1991; 1994).

In the majority of the narratives, correct behaviour is not dictated. Instead, the many consequences of actions are portrayed. Underlying metaphors shape any decision making. The huge corpus implies one is able to combine elements from various narratives in order to understand how to act in specific situations, even though this concerns taking by and large unconscious decisions. Reciprocal altruism is a social function which children acquire thanks to narratives. By means of the actions and reactions of protagonists/heroes/anti-heroes, children are informed on not only how to behave but also to subtly discriminate against non-altruists (Coe et al. 2005). Whether a narrative is fictional or not is of no importance to this narrative function. Even fictional, improbable beings can serve as models for the human environment by means of their interactions, as long as these beings exhibit human psyches. The audience is now able to observe the consequences of incest, marital infidelity and homicide (Scalise Sugiyama 2001: 224).

3.2.4 Validating the world

Amerindians inhabit a potentially hostile world comprising a forest environment full of predators, both human and non-human. As with other humans across the globe, they must deal with questions of “life”, such as: “why are things the way they are?” Narratives provide us with a means to answer these questions.

A new world is created within a narrative to include demolished frontiers, non-existing juxtapositions and differences. Here, instead of boundaries and contrasts which are evidently present in the practical world, transitions and solutions exist whereby the possibilities are immense such as a world in which animals are able to talk or humans can fly. When we acknowledge that which Goodman refers to as “versions of the world”, the reality of a multiplicity of knowledge, we accept that scientists, artists, narrators or historians do the same (Goodman 1978; Overing 1990) when they construct the world by adopting the same thought processes. However, the premises on which these worlds are based are very different.

Storytelling can be considered to be a process of creating a world because it involves the composition and decomposition of (new) worlds which always consist of other worlds already at hand. Narrators are thus creators, too, as they disassemble and assemble the versions of the world at hand. When forging story elements into a plot, they attempt to not only identify

problems met with in life, but also how and why they emerge, and their impact on the future. Through dialogue, action and reflection, narratives expose narrators, as well as listeners to potentialities for unanticipated pain and joy, encountered while alive, whereby the spiritual and therapeutic functions of narrative activities are included.

Narratives are often launched in response to current anxieties, complaints and conflicts. The reason for this is: comprehending the past is required to understand and cope with such issues. In Amerindian cosmology, the past, present and future are interrelated (see 2.3.1). The past is, therefore, an appropriate indicator of what could happen in the future (Ochs & Capps 1996: 25). It has been argued that history and folklore are necessarily joined. Moreover, historical events cannot be fully grasped without understanding “attitudes and actions of real men and women” encountered in folklore which in turn cannot be comprehended without understanding the historical circumstances of its creation and transmission (Joyner 1989: 11).

Narratives tend to explain why things are as they are. Not only do they clarify natural features concerning animal, plant and human life, they also fulfil a meaningful task in validating the world: things are the way they are because they always have been that way. The narrative activity provides humankind not only with the opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events but also to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds. Narratives provide communities with amity by uniting the unseen with the seen, the old with the new. For instance, a shaman applies narratives and/or shamanic songs to bring back order to the (disarrayed) world. He can perceive the true identity of an agent and can cure the ill (Overing 1990; Viveiros de Castro 2004, 2012; see 2.3.1 and 3.4.2). By creating new (story) worlds, humans are able to influence and understand the world they inhabit in order to then impose order to the otherwise disconnected events.

3.2.5 Establishing one's group and personal identity

The fifth relevant function of a narrative comprises enabling a group and a personal identity. In many societies, storytelling is a group activity whereby the narrator interacts with the audience. They cooperate regarding the process of world-making, which includes in a way collaborative authorship. Hence, the group builds its own identity, a sense of belonging while achieving its target and communal goal.

Our own self-image is inextricably linked to an awareness of other peoples and things. We define ourselves not only by means of our past, present and future but also by an imagined involvement with fellow humans and things (Ricoeur 1991). Story motifs and metaphors not only describe but also interconnect people, society and the environment. Within narratives, particular events are indeed placed against larger horizons of human virtues, philosophies, actions and relationships.

Narrators together with their audiences evaluate specific events in terms of communal norms, expectations and potentiality. Ideas as to what is rational, moral, appropriate and aesthetic are established. In this manner, we affiliate with other members of society, both living and deceased. Thus a group identity, as well as a personal identity, is built (Ochs & Capps 1996: 40). This identity also constitutes a crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes and identities, while developing interpersonal relationships and constituting memberships in a community.

Each narrative situates narrators, protagonists and listeners at the nexus of a morally organised, past, present and possible experiences. Therefore it provides humans with an opportunity to acquire a (fragmented) self-understanding (Ochs & Capps 1996: 22) by means of (a) ensuring and transmitting knowledge, (b) informing, (c) encoding social behaviour, (d) validating the world, and (e) establishing a group and personal identity.

When narrating, drama is utilised as a mechanism in order to improve memory and compel involvement. This fact enables the recalling of the content of narratives and applying the assembled knowledge in a time of need. They can, therefore, be considered an effective strategy to transmit and “ensure” any group knowledge required in relation to the survival of the society.

3.3 Breaking down the narratives

Narratives provide non-native researchers with a means to study the significance of Amerindian stories within the cultural and natural context set by and inherent to the story world. The above sections do not only include a general introduction on how narratives and iconography are related but also clarify why narratives form a central feature of this research.

I will now in two steps position the methodologies based on the theories dealt with in the above sections. The first step focuses on collecting, clustering and analysing the narratives by means of the methodology of narratology (section 3.3). The second step concerns theories and methodologies with which to interpret the data, based on perspectivism: a theory of Amerindian ontologies which provides a framework for the indigenous perceptions of “being” (e.g., human, non-human), section 3.4.

Shared stories

The study area for the data (narrative) collection has been defined in section 1.2.1. This study, however, also includes thirteen narratives obtained firsthand. In the summer of 2009, my husband Lucas Arts, an archaeologist with a special interest in the Americas, and I went on a fieldwork trip to Suriname, including a short visit to French Guiana. We stayed near, and repeatedly visited, the Wayana (Cariban) village of Apetina. Richard, a local young man who was learning to be a guide, accompanied and kindly introduced us to the chief and captains of Apetina. During short trips, Richard shared with us his knowledge of local culture and nature. One night was spent at a Maroon village named Granbori.

When visiting Matta, a Lokono (Arawakan) village located in the district of Para, we were very fortunate to be joined by Yvonne Ebecilio from Matta. Having informed her of my research, she said that her father was not only knowledgeable but also a shaman and a storyteller, adding that he would very much like to share his stories. On 27 June 2009, we had the honour of becoming acquainted with Sjaak Ebecilio (b. 1916, see Fig. 3.2). However, being unprepared, we agreed to meet again on 2 July in order to have more time. He kindly told us twelve stories, which I recorded and transcribed in order to produce a booklet which was sent to him later to be corrected. Yvonne and Sjaak mentioned he had once owned a notebook containing all his stories, which someone had borrowed and had never returned to him. I felt grateful when able to present him with a number of these tales in a written form.



Fig. 3.2. Sjaak Ebecilio (aged 93) at Matta, Para region/Suriname; photograph by L.J.M. Arts (2009).

Sjaak Ebecilio and his daughter provided me with several biographical details. Sjaak is a Lokono (Arawakan) who had also lived among the Carib for many years. Having witnessed the border expedition in 1936-1937, Sjaak even mentioned the reason why certain areas are still disputed: “The Dutch followed the wrong river!”.⁵⁶ Having participated in expeditions led by de Goeje and Geijskes, Sjaak referred to them as “the Admiral” and “the Baron”. In the course of these ventures, he met various Amerindians, including the Wayana. Sjaak Ebecilio served as a teacher of Dutch in a number of indigenous villages. His knowledge of plants and medicines is impressive.

Yvonne remembered how her grandfather used to tell stories especially about stars (presumably constellations [interpretation by the present author]) to all the children. If he had had enough of this, he would tell a “ghost story”, causing his audience to run off in fear. Yvonne also shared a narrative with us: which explained why the Carib people do not eat turtles. In Appendix A, all the narratives provided by Sjaak and Yvonne are presented, in both Dutch and English. I am greatly indebted, filled with gratitude and sincerely hope Sjaak will never lose his stories again.

⁵⁶ Claudius H. de Goeje (1879-1955) took part in reconnaissance expeditions along the Tapanahoni and Gonini Rivers between 1903 and 1904. These scientific explorations of inland Suriname resulted in topographical maps and ethnographical accounts based on encounters with various indigenous communities. In 1937 de Goeje now on his final expedition to the Southern border of Suriname resided in a Wayana village (Taponte) for nearly 4 months (van Broekhoven 2010: 153).

3.3.1 Documenting narratives

Documenting narratives requires a solid database design. A scientifically valuable database not only organises the data for maximum analytic use but also enables the research questions to be answered. In the course of this complex research which attempts to quantify qualitative data, many hours were spent developing the basic design. I worked together with Remco Jansen, a friend and colleague with experience in building databases for research purposes, who studied American archaeology as well. We started with identifying and organising the acquired information, before breaking it down to its smallest logical parts.

The analysis of this study is based on methodological choices. This section is therefore not merely a simple description of the database, but also a detailed discussion on underlying (methodological) choices and on how they contribute to answering the posed research questions. The main research questions to be answered by means of this database are: (a) which attributes and roles are ascribed to specific animals in South American oral tradition?, and (b) with what or whom are they associated within the narratives, and in which context? Two other research questions are also partly answered: “Why are certain animals more significant than others?” and “How can the conceptualisation of animal imagery inform us about the socio-cultural behaviour of society?”.

First and foremost, the roles of animal personages are key in approaching the above questions. By applying the narratological approach, the various contexts in which these personages act and with whom they interact are examined interdependently. In addition to the information needed in order to conduct a narratological study, general data have been documented, too, as will be discussed below.

General data

The source of each narrative is documented, a number of narratives have multiple sources because they have been published by various authors. Throughout this dissertation, the narratives are referred to by means of their (unique) Story numbers and the linguistic affiliation of each indigenous group. Appendix B provides the referential information in relation to each Story number.

Summary and initial interpretation

Once created, a summary is included along with a first interpretation which is highly subjective: this subjective interpretation constitutes the initial ideas and notes written down immediately after reading a narrative. Although very subjective, these interpretations are a valuable addition to the followed methodology. The reason for this: any (structural) methodology has the downside of tunnel vision which may lead to overlooking elements because one is simply not looking for them.

Linguistic affiliation

A language family, when identified by means of the specific language, documents the linguistic affiliation. The websites of Glottolog 2.3 and/or WALS Online were consulted in order to establish geographical coordinates for each narrative, based on its linguistic affiliation.⁵⁷ These coordinates were used to plot the narratives on a map.

Whenever the linguistic affiliation is unknown and a geographical area or feature is presented (e.g., “Amazonia”, “Rio Negro”, “Teffé area”) the coordinates are approximated. This procedure is carried out by utilising Google Earth by taking a fictitious point in the middle of the geographical area. In other cases, the specific language remained unspecified. In these instances, the most logical alternative is chosen. For instance, unspecified “Carib” narratives are provided with the (established) coordinates for the Kaliña/Galibi (Cariban-speakers, aka “True Carib”). The coordinates serve to plot narratives on a map of South and Central America not only in order to visualise the distribution of narratives, motifs, actors and/or events but also to analyse any regional similarities and differences.

Narrative function(s)

The narrative function is another aspect recorded in the database. The five narrative functions have been elaborated above (see 3.2). Identifying these functions enables us to further explore the reason why the Amerindians recall the stories they tell. The narrative function(s) also inform us of their society as well as its socio-political structures. The distinguished narrative functions follow the proposed functions in 3.2. A number of these functions have been subdivided in order to acquire more detailed information regarding a specific function (see Fig. 3.3). These functions do not exclude each other. Multiple narrative functions have if relevant, been documented for each narrative.

Narratological data

I will now apply the layout of the database designed for this research as a leitmotif in order to describe how narratology, as a method, is integrated into this research. Narratology is a generalised method for studying texts which is so widely applicable it can serve the study of visual arts (Asselbergs 2004; Bal 2004; Felluga 2003). Any meaningful analytic categories as to this particular research have been distilled in order to document, compare and analyse the collected narratives.

The two styles of analysis in present-day narratology are: (a) more or less structuralistic and (b) post-structuralistic. The latter comprises numerous approaches and angles e.g., ideological, feministic and ethic narratology.⁵⁸ Although many have criticised traditional, or

⁵⁷ Glottolog 2.3 (<http://glottolog.org/>); WALS Online (<http://wals.info/>; Dryer & Haspelmath n.d.) consulted on 16 July 2014.

⁵⁸ Post-structuralists not only broaden the notion of a narrative to the extent that almost anything can be a story but also that almost all expressions of culture (paintings, dance etc.) are narratological. Structuralistic narratology focuses on the intrinsic structures/patterns in a narrative, whereas the post-

structuralistic narratology, most narratologists take cues from it, more or less explicitly, because of its usefulness with regard to the practical study of narratives, hereby labelling the object of study according to specific layers, oppositions and predefined categories. Structuralistic narratology distinguishes three inherent layers: (a) **Text**: a finite, structured unit composed in a sign system, (b) **Story**: the depiction of a fabula, and (c) **Fabula**: a series of logically and chronologically related events brought about or experienced by actors (Greimas 1987).⁵⁹

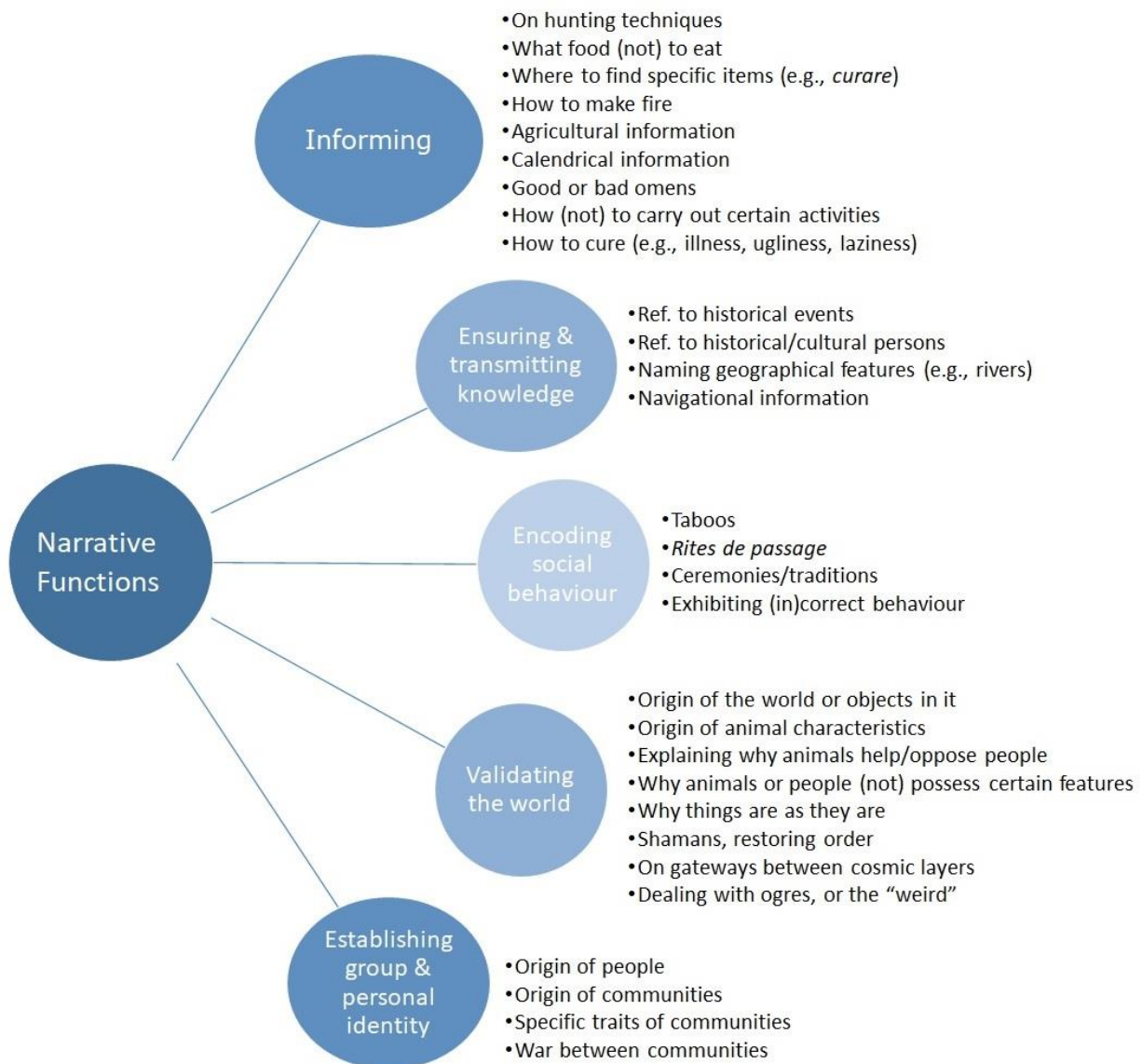


Fig. 3.3. Narrative functions including sub-functions; survey composed by the author.

structuralistic reaction includes aspects of ideology, biography, social position, etc. These approaches attempt to fill the gaps the structuralistic method does not face: (a) the strict definition of “text”, (b) the rigidity of the layers, (c) the anthropomorphic approach of narrative elements (e.g., focalisator), (d) a hierarchical way of thinking, and (e) the emphasis on the text (Herman & Vervaeck 2005; Hühn et al. 2009; Meister 2009).

59 The three layers can be noted differently, for instance as History, Story and Telling, depending on the author (see Herman & Vervaeck 2005).

Within the Fabula, the following basic elements are defined: events, actors, time and place. The methodology denotes that narratives are to be studied according to the arrangement of these four elements. Their arrangement within a text determines how a fabula is transformed into a Story. Events, actors, time and place are also important when understanding the “creative moment” of a narrative. The phase positioned beyond the text provokes emotions. Semiotics, too, is relevant for a true comprehension of the emotions experienced by the reader/listener, since these experienced emotions depend upon the medium through which a narrative is presented. Semiotics investigate a culture as being processes of communication facilitated by an underlying system of signs.

The three layers all have their own characteristics and are to be studied independently as well as in relation to each other. As the present research is based on written sources, the “telling” itself is lost. Having applied written translations, the “text” itself does not lend itself for a study in semiotics. The words, the grammar and structure were probably altered in order to suit the targeted Western audience. The layer called Text/telling has therefore been excluded from the present research.

Fabula-layer: actions, actors and setting (fabula)

Fabula, or history, is the most abstract layer and focuses on the sequential occurrence of the events, actors and setting. All three elements can be analysed separately as well as interdependently. The way in which actions, actors and setting are studied is described below. These elements are presented to the reader in a certain manner, which forms the next layer of narratology: the “Story”.

Numerous structuralists interested in narratives have studied this layer, even before this field was labelled “narratology”. Its early stages can be traced back to the 1920s when, for instance, the Russian scholar-folklorist Vladimir Y. Propp (1958) and the American scholar of folklore Stith Thompson (1934) published important works.

Actions/events

In order to study and compare the narratives, they have been broken down into motifs. Morphologically, motifs are elements encountered within a narrative which enable researchers to compare and understand its distribution. Therefore a motif needs to be an identifiable unit within the narrative.⁶⁰ For a very elaborate index of motifs, see Thompson (1934). His six-volume index describes over 6000 motifs, each containing a letter of the alphabet (hereby coding a theme e.g., an “A” for mythological motifs) as well as a combination of numbers.

⁶⁰ A motif is defined as the smallest element in a narrative, having the power to persist in tradition. It discerns the following classes of motifs: (a) the actors in a tale, (b) certain items in the background of the action and (c) single incidents. See Thompson 1946: 413-27 and the Glossary.

Such an index is by no means a static collection of motifs. They change through time in the course of which the index composed by Thompson has often been elaborated on. To date, the essence of his meticulous labour continues to be very meaningful when comparing narratives based on their motifs. Many researchers interested in narratives apply this index. It may be mentioned here that Johannes Wilbert and Karin Simoneau studied South American “myths”/narratives by means of this index (Wilbert 1974; Wilbert & Simoneau 1970, 1975, 1978, 1991, 1992).

Wilbert and Simoneau have investigated various South American indigenous communities, focusing on narratives, referred to as folktales of, among others, the Yupa (Yukpa, Cariban), Warao and Yanomamö (Yanomam) of Venezuela. The motif-index Thompson established serves to classify the motifs encountered within the stories.⁶¹ Several of these he wrote down. For instance, those told by the Yupa (Yukpa, Cariban), Warao, Cuiva (Guajibóan) and Sikuni (Guajibóan). They are also incorporated into the body of narratives dealt with in this research (Wilbert 1974; Wilbert & Simoneau: 1970, 1991, 1992).

Motifs can either refer to an actor (e.g., animal personage, evil relative) or to an action (e.g., murder by poison). They can also be descriptive (e.g., magic tree, excellent swimmer). The present research follows Wilbert’s and Simoneau’s Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, in turn, based on Thompson’s index. Motifs can be directly related to the animal personage, but may just as well be a general motif linked to the narrative but not directly to an animal personage. The database provides the possibility to document both. So each documented motif is linked to a specific story, but not necessarily to an animal personage, thus enabling research into motifs directly related to an animal personage, and into indirect associations.

For instance, Jaguar is directly linked to motif “A 1414: the origin of fire”, because he owns it. Toad might act as an advisor in that same narrative, but is not directly linked to the motif referred to as “the origin of fire”. If Toad does play a role in the majority of, or in all, the narratives about the origin of fire, this motif and Toad may still be interrelated, as a result of implicit knowledge. The relation between a specific animal personage and certain motif(s) might be common knowledge to the audience. Therefore the narrator does not have to explicate it.

As motifs can be linked to the narratives itself as well as to each specific animal personage, a single particular motif can be documented multiple times for one specific case. However, a particular motif can only be related once to a specific animal personage.

⁶¹ Wilbert and Simoneau, when studying South American Amerindian “Folktales”, identified and documented the motifs (see e.g., Wilbert or Wilbert and Simoneau: 1970, 1974, 1975, 1978, 1991, 1992).

For analytic purposes, five predefined categories called “main events” have been documented in addition to motifs. A main event forms the core which interrelates numerous motifs, and on occasion even be the core of the entire narrative i.e., the red thread underlying other events. Seven types of “main events” are distinguished based on their repetition in the corpus of narratives. The choice of these main events is not based on a specific method or scientific theory but simply identified as recurrent themes. By identifying these main events, narratives can be clustered whereby recurrent themes are identified in order to be studied in relation to specific narratological contexts and (animal) actor(s). A number of (sub) main events were added after forming the initial database and after the process of filling the database was started.

These five (sub) main events are: (a) the quest for a certain individual or object; (b) the rescue of missing family members after an abduction, or a warning which leads to an escape (e.g., information on imminent danger causing a protagonist to take the appropriate steps in order to stay out of harm’s way; or restoring order (e.g., repainting the sky after it had fallen down); (c) truth finding; (d) a contest of endurance, of speed and of strength; (e) (setting of on) an epic journey; (f) the abduction of a human or an animal, and (g) acts of deception.

To sum up, motifs and main events provide us either with information on actions or events encountered in the narratives, for instance, motifs associated with transformations, murder, various tasks, etc. All identified motifs and main events per narrative are documented in the database. Needless to say, events are often interrelated (an abduction leads to a rescue, etc.). Events are also related to specific (both spatial and temporal) contexts and actors.

Actors

The actors have been studied by means of the actantial model developed by A.J. Greimas (Greimas 1987; see Fig. 3.4). This specific research focuses on animal personages thus excluding narratives in which no animal personages or their deeds are mentioned. These personages are documented on the genus/species level (Jaguar, Dog, Peccary) as well as on the class level (Mammal, Avian, Reptile, Amphibian, Insect). Whenever attributes or traits (e.g., spotted, two-headed) are described, these are also documented.

Which role(s) is/are ascribed to each animal personage within the narrative has been documented. This role is also related to specific actions and/or chronotopes, enabling to analyse if, for each animal personage, the specific roles (e.g., helper) are related to specific actions and or (spatial/temporal) contexts.

The actantial model suggested by Greimas is a well-known tool applied in order to describe the six roles fulfilled by actants (or figures). It is based on a subject behaving in a certain manner while it strives toward a certain object. A *destinateur*, also termed a sender inspires this push. The agent benefits from the striving subject, which Greimas calls a *destinataire* (also

designated a receiver). The actor who supports strivers is referred to as a helper, whereas the thwarted is considered an opponent.

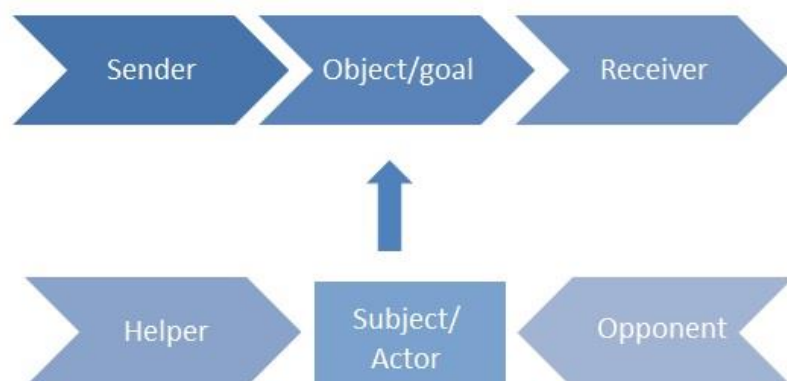


Fig. 3.4. Scheme of an actantial model after Greimas (1987); modified by the author.

These roles are abstract and should not be confused with actual personages. A single personage can fulfil all these roles and multiple personages can fulfil a single role. The advantages of this model are its simplicity and applicability, which at the same time are its disadvantages. It is too simple to reduce all personages and motifs to these six roles because this not only results in dealing with all texts in the same way but also does not establish any distinctions.

Within the Amerindian worldview, identity is fluid. Humans and *significant other-than-human-persons** (e.g., animals, spirits) exist in a shared relational frame of interaction (see 3.4.2). In several narratives, it is made explicit that a shaman transforms into an animal or for instance that a spirit “takes the form/wears the clothes” of an animal. In such cases, this “state of being” is recorded in the database.

Based on anthropological/ethnographical as well as archaeological studies it is also apparent that certain animals are kept as pets. References to domestic animals are documented when relevant.

Setting

All actions take place within certain settings in space and time. These settings (aka chronotopes) form narratological and ideological centres, shaping the personages as well as actions (Burton 1996, referring to the Russian philosopher and literary critic M.M. Bakhtin (1895-1975)). Moreover, the abstract view of human and humanness (i.e., what it means to be human) and worldviews acquire their shape by means of an embedding of personages (the concept of man) and the events (worldview) within the chronotope.

When describing the setting, one has to consider which terminology and criteria are applied in order to typify it. A trait of the structuralistic approach comprises the preference for dipolar oppositions, such as inner/outer, open/closed, high/low, far away/close by. Elements of time are also analysed according to oppositions: long/short; continuous/interrupted; day/night;

light/dark. Crucial in this characterization of time and space is the adjusted or exceeded border/boundary. Events and actors going beyond these dividing lines are often meaningful. The villain often breaks boundaries, whereas the hero repairs them.

In theory, the number of oppositions to be studied is infinite. As to the present research, the oppositions to be looked into were determined beforehand in order to ensure that each narrative was equally documented to benefit an overall comparison. A downside of predefining any oppositions is: they (can) lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and blindness as well as to other, perhaps more relevant, oppositions. However, certain categories were predefined to establish a means for comparisons. The predefined oppositions have been based on: (a) my personal knowledge and understanding of Amerindians populating the study region who told/tell these stories, and (b) scholarly publications on the subject.⁶²

The oppositions documented in the database, considering their settings in space and time are: (a) forest/village which includes: an abandoned village, a bathing site, a temporary hunting site, a field, a cemetery, (b) day/night which also distinguishes a sunrise and a sunset, (c) cosmic layers i.e., land, water, sky and the underworld and the *axis mundi* (the gateway connecting cosmic layers), cave, cenotes, lakes and the world tree.

Events, actors and settings are all interrelated and all provide each other with significance. Each of these elements cannot fully be understood without taking the other two elements into consideration. The narrator, writer or artist presents these elements in a specific way.

Story-layer: characterization and duration

The story-layer no longer concerns the abstract logic of sequences, but now deals with the concrete manner in which events are presented to the reader. The three central points of interest in a narratological analysis are: (a) duration, (b) characterization, and (c) focalisation. A narrator/author influences, or operates the narrative's content by means of various tactics. He/she can apply time (i.e., duration) in order to dramatize an action, or an event, by creating a momentum. The reader perceives the narrative world through the eyes of its personages who are of significance when interpreting its content. Which personages the writer presents (focalisation) and how they are presented (characterization) are thus of interest to the story-layer.

The second narratological layer of interest pertains to Story, i.e., the depiction of a fabula. The story-layer comprises the concrete manner in which a narrative is presented to the audience. This layer now poses a problem, as the narratives included in the present research are written

⁶² E.g., Boomert (2000, 2001); Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1973, 1974 [1962], 1983 [1964], 1988 [1985], 1990 [1968], 1990 [1971]); Roe (1982, 1995a, 1998); Siegel (1997); Wilbert (1974, 1975, 1985, 1987); Wilbert & Simoneau (1970, 1978, 1991, 1992). See also a discussion on this matter in section 4.2.3 under the sub-heading *The bias of dipolar oppositions*.

translations. It is therefore highly likely that the concrete way in which the “translator” presents the narrative differs from how the narrator may have recalled it. For, the translator wrote it down for a very different audience (in this case Western) when compared with whom the narrator presented it to (see 3.5). Moreover, the narrator as well the translator did so with a very different goal in mind.

As to (b) characterization, the focus lies on how a personage is typified. As to (c) focalisation, the relation between the focalised and the focalisator is central. The focalised comprises a personage, action and/or object presented to the reader. Focalisation suggests perceiving centres within the narrative itself that can think, act and feel. That has given rise to questions if indeed any self-perceiving centres exist within narratives. If so, should these be studied as anthropomorphic “beings”? An example by means of which to clarify focalization now follows. If we read a book about a depressed woman (subject and focalisator), the world (focalised object) she describes may seem a dark, gloomy place. However, because the same book contains more focalisators (e.g., a couple in love, a child) as well as the depressed woman, the image of the world as perceived by the reader will thus be completely different. Taking the focalisator and the focalised into consideration can lead to a better interpretation of the perceived story-world, as discerned by its readers.

As the present research mainly includes documented (written) and translated narratives, I feel “focalization” cannot be studied within this context. The reason for this is: the exact words a personage (the focalisator) chooses are not the words preferred by the narrator, but by the translator. Therefore this investigation into the story-layer has been restricted to characterization and duration.

Characterization

Characterization concerns the concrete portrayal of roles. That gives rise to the following questions: how is an actor described or typified within the narrative? Does the reader become familiar with a personage through its actions or through a description of its characteristics? In order to answer these questions, three modes comprising a direct, indirect and analogue characterization can be discerned.

The appearance and inner qualities of a personage are literally described by means of a summarisation of his/her traits in the mode of direct (or explicit) portrayal. Indirect (or implicit) characterization is based on elements related to the contiguity of the personage. Thus, the personage is typified by means of a metonymic ratio. A personage’s deeds are related to its character as are, the words it speaks (through dialogues). Analogue characterization is based on metaphoric and not on metonymic images by applying metaphors of the actor e.g., it resembles an angry gorilla.

Analysing characterizations presents us with challenges because characterization is positioned on the level of semantics and of content analyses. The concrete portrayal of personages is an issue that differs from text to text. It is, therefore, less interesting as to the structuralistic approach. However, its significance increases as to the post-structuralistic approaches (see 3.3.1 under the sub-heading *Narratological data*, note 58).

How the various animal personages are characterized is relevant to the way they are conceptualised by the audience. Are animals introduced or are listeners/readers expected to be able to understand personages without any explicit introductions? Are they described by their actions or appearance? Which elements, attributes and/or characteristics of the animal are emphasized? Caution is needed when drawing conclusions based upon the analyses of the story-layer, as the outcome of this analysis may just as well be based upon the interpretation of the non-native writer.

Duration/Time

The narrator is always located in a specific temporal position relative to what he/she is telling. A number of tools are applied in order to utilise time e.g., by summarising, accelerating, an ellipsis (i.e., deliberately not describing an event), setting a scene (in which the story time is real time) and by inserting a pause. Subsequently, narrators are able to differentiate between “real time” and “narrated time” (i.e., the time within the narrative). A researcher can study the use of time by looking into duration, frequency, the order of events and actions. Durations can serve narrators to achieve various ends. “Real time” can be expanded within the narrative whereby an entire book can report the final seconds before someone passes away. A narrative can be shortened. Moreover, an event can be described according to “real time”, for instance, in a dialogue.

How a storyteller/writer plays with time can be examined by relating “real time” (i.e., the time required to read, or which the narrator needs to tell) with narrated time (i.e., the time frame within the narrative itself). When one listens to or reads, a dialogue, the “tell time” and the narrated time are the same. However, this method poses the following practical queries: how to determine the narrated time? And, how long does a narrative spend on an action? Is that quantifiable by the number of pages needed to describe an action? The “tell time” poses a similar problem when it is a written source.

I here apply predefined categories for the narrated time, because this enables a comparison between the narratives. Five time span categories have been distinguished: (a) shorter than or equal to one day, (b) a couple of days, (c) weeks, (d) months, and (e) years. The narrated time is not explicitly mentioned in most narratives. Therefore determining a narrated time is indeed difficult, or at least highly subjective. Whenever the life of culture hero(es) is concerned, the narrated time can be presumed to be years or at least months. However, when a narrative deals with a journey to other realms, or if it is a lengthy story, it is not clear if it

took days, weeks, months or even longer, rendering any establishing of the narrated time subjective in nature.⁶³

For each narrative, the page numbers of the original source are registered. The number of pages required serves as an indication for “real time”. This presents a further issue, as this designation is related to the type, size, letter format/size, line spacing of the pages and the presence of illustrations. To partly refract these obscuring difficulties only three, rather broad, categories have been defined: (a) 1 to 5 pages, (b) 6 to 10 pages, and (c) more than 10 pages. The duration is studied by means of interrelating the narrative’s actual length (the total number of pages) and the narrated time.

3.4 Towards an interpretation

The description of the first stage of a two-step methodology comprising collecting and analysing the narratives has been presented in section 3.3. We now, of course, must move beyond an “etic”-based methodology towards a more “emic” interpretation of the data.⁶⁴

A perspective from within the Caribbean cultural lifeworlds poses various difficulties since the participants (i.e., the Caribbean peoples of the Early Ceramic Age, 800/200 BCE-400/600 CE) lived in the far past. Therefore, in the field of archaeology, “emic” approaches are often based on a direct historical approach, thereby adopting the perspectives of (nearest) descendants. Only a small number of direct descendants of the peoples hailing from the insular Caribbean still inhabit the islands, constituted by small indigenous communities located on Trinidad, Saint Vincent and Dominica.

Because the migrants of the Early Ceramic Age presumably originated from the Orinoco area and because they are most likely Arawakan speakers (see 1.1 and 1.1.1), the indigenous groups from the tropical lowlands could be considered linguistically and culturally affiliated. The Early Ceramic Age islanders remained in touch with their mainland counterparts by means of extensive exchange networks (see 1.1.2). The present research thus incorporates mainland Amazonian narratives as well as ethnographic accounts.

⁶³ A further complication as to the supposed narrated time is: South American Amerindians consider time to be non-linear or even simultaneous, whereby the past, present and future are interrelated. Although this concept comes the closest to quantum time, it does not comply with our (Western) linear notion of time (see also 2.3.1).

⁶⁴ Kenneth L. Pike first introduced the terms emic/etic in his *magnum opus* entitled *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior* (Mouton, 1967). From then on, his publication has been part of the epistemological discourse and adopted by the social sciences. For a discussion on and an overview of how these concepts have been applied over time, see the essay first published as Chapter 1 in T. Headland, K.L. Pike and M. Harris (eds.), *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1990). Basically the emic perspectives attempt to study a culture (including its products and a participant’s behaviour concerning that culture) as its participants observe it. The etic approach pertains to a scholarly “outsider” view held by the researcher(s) engaged in studying a culture.

Furthermore included in this study are certain (primary) historic accounts reporting on island peoples i.e., the “Taíno” from the Greater Antilles and the Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles (see 1.3). These accounts provide various relevant observations regarding the island peoples, their lives, worldviews and first-hand narratives.⁶⁵ In addition, in the course of a field trip in Suriname (2009), ten stories were recorded directly in the Dutch language (see 3.3 under the sub-heading *Shared stories*).

The following paragraphs: (a) address the theory of perspectivism as a framework when interpreting data, and (b) serve as a model in order to better grasp the Amerindian contextualisation and conceptualisation of animal imagery.

3.4.1 Illusion of the true perspective and objectivity

Western methodologies and approaches are often equated with truth and objectivity. This Western (etic) discourse has been challenged because its concepts (e.g., truth and objectivity) are now under scrutiny if pertaining to notions rooted and shaped in Western discourse.⁶⁶ In my view, achieving objectivity should be attempted albeit in itself an elusive goal. We, humans, possess opinions, preferences, biases shaped by shared historical, political and socio-cultural backgrounds. Being subjects, we always conceptualise the world based on this inherent context. This forming of concepts rings true for the outsider studying a culture and for the participants active *inside* that very culture.

This assessment implies that, whenever any indigenous community experts are involved, their considerations and interpretations provide us with a valuable perspective. Nonetheless, their explanations do not necessarily display a privileged authoritativeness, nor does our exterior “scientific” perspective. No outsider or insider holds the true perspective or objectivity. Incorporating both factors is, in my opinion, therefore most fruitful. As this study focuses on narrative meaning, the Amerindian perspective expressed by insiders is essential. In accordance with the doctrine of *Verstehen* (as opposed to *Erklären*), mental constructions can only be understood when “folk-psychology” and interpretations of those involved are taken into consideration (Bransen 2001).

⁶⁵ As to these primary sources, the historical and political contexts in which they are created and which concern intended audiences, as well as their purposes and motives must be taken into consideration e.g., missionary accounts of “savages” who needed to be taught the “right” way (i.e., Christianity). The writers of these reports had their own agendas. Nevertheless, being the only primary sources, they form a valuable addition to the present research.

⁶⁶ See 2.3.1 for a further discussion on versions of worlds. As to how “truth” relates to the world it fits in with, see Goodman 1978. Looking into scholarly articles reveals that the “myth of objectivity” has been argued in disciplines such as journalism, psychology, law and epistemology. For an overview pertaining to how “objectivity” as a concept has changed over the past 100 years in the view of American historians, see Novick 2005.

Etic and emic perspectives combined

As to the present research both exterior and interior perspectives are considered valuable. By means of etic approaches and methods, certain patterns of similarities or differences could be observed which participants may, or may not, perceive, but which still hold important insights into indigenous concepts. The fact that these patterns are the outcome of an etic analysis does not necessarily imply it is not “true” in the sense that this result has no value. *Verstehen* being the main objective of this study, the Amerindian perspective is of vital relevance when venturing beyond descriptions and comparisons aimed at comprehending any *symbolism** and *meaning** i.e., mental constructs. This procedure should ultimately lead to a better understanding of indigenous Amerindian zoomorphic *symbolism**.

Both iconography and the narratives are considered to be indigenous Amerindian expressions, and both acquire significance by means of their very creators. These narratives mirror Amerindian thought, concepts and worldviews because they were not only devised by the narrator but also built on other worlds at hand (see 2.3.1 under the sub-heading “*World-making*”). They are therefore indigenous products and expressions through which symbolic knowledge is articulated as well as shared.⁶⁷ Narratives are indeed a world in which *signs** are contextualised by and for an Amerindian audience.

The motifs, events and actors have been researched within the context of the narratives. Thus, on a meta-level, they are organised, compared and analysed by means of a methodology based on narratology. On a micro-level (i.e., when interpreting and studying the narratives), a more inside approach has been attempted by incorporating perspectivism as an interpretative discourse (see 3.4.2). This approach serves to not only improve the comprehension of the narratives but also to conceptualise the animals as *signs** (i.e., in an iconic, indexical and symbolic manner) based on their role and position within the Amerindian worldview and ontologies.

A more holistic approach is pursued when conceptualising the “*meaning(s)**” of animals by means of their roles in nature, in narratives, in iconography and in indigenous cosmologies. These roles in nature are especially significant as the island potters who modelled zoomorphic *adornos* inhabited a very different environment (i.e., insular Caribbean) when compared with the mainland peoples who recall and listen to the narratives. It may be added here that available historical records on the Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles as well as accounts concerning the “Taíno” peoples inhabiting the Greater Antilles provide firsthand descriptions not only of the Amerindian belief systems but also of traditions associated with various animals.

⁶⁷ One consideration is the fact that the narratives applied in the course of this research are presented in a translated and written form. Therefore the once dynamic accounts have now become static. Moreover, any translation involves the loss of idiom. See 3.5 for a discussion on this methodological contemplation.

3.4.2 Perspectivism as an interpretative model

As explained above, perspectivism is posed as an interpretative model in order to study and comprehend the narratives from a more interior point of view. Perspectivism is an anthropological theory that describes the underlying conceptual basis of the relationship between humans and non-humans. It unites the point of views of all beings (i.e., human, spirit, animal) because there is in fact only a single point of view: the human one. This assumption implies that every being with a conscience considers itself to be human, thus all beings possess a common *ánima* termed “interiority”. That gives rise to the following questions: what would the world look like if all beings were to hold a “human” point of view? How are “others” then perceived? What happens when an Amerindian meets a “jaguar” who sees itself as being human?

According to perspectivism, human culture is shared by all who can either think or possess consciousness (i.e., humans, animals, plants, “things” and spirits).⁶⁸ All such beings hold their own points of view, regarding themselves as “persons” while considering other beings as non-persons or non-humans. This situation entails that everyone sees themselves living in villages as a community, feasting, drinking *cassava** beer (*cassiri**), etc., whereas “others” are seen as either prey animals or predatory animals, or spirits (Halbmayer 2012: 11; Viveiros de Castro 2012: 33). Having a viewpoint also implies that each being, human and non-human, observes the world through its own eyes and in a characteristic way.⁶⁹

All beings with a consciousness (i.e., a point of view) are united by means of a shared humanity, their interiority. Their “physicality and affects” (i.e., their nature) divides them, as these factors result in varied points of view (Halbmayer 2012: 13; Viveiros de Castro: 1998, 2004, 2012).⁷⁰ For instance, the jaguar considers itself to be a person, as a human being, with the same culture as the Amerindians. Thus, from this animal’s viewpoint, through its eyes, it resides in a village along with its family, owns a home, goes out to hunt, etc. Any “cooked food” in a jaguar’s opinion is “raw meat” when seen from the Amerindian perspective; that which Jaguar considers to be *cassiri**, is blood to Amerindians. This example forms the basis of the assumption that the interiority of Jaguar and Amerindian is identical as they share the same culture, whereas their viewpoints differ, each observing the world around them in a characteristic manner.

⁶⁸ This shared “human” quality is explained by the fact that (a) animals are “ex-humans” and (b) humanity is the shared original condition from which animals are differentiated (Halbmayer 2012: 13; Viveiros de Castro 2012). Artefacts, or “things”, also appear to have existed prior to other forms of being and are assigned a crucial function in creation (Santos-Granero 2009: 5). See also 3.4.2 under the sub-heading *Nature and the intensity of subjectivity*.

⁶⁹ Similar concepts have been applied such as the “ecology of selves”. We read, “... all beings, and not just humans, engage with the world and with each other as selves - that is, as beings that have a point of view” (Kohn 2007: 4). Those having souls, or those being souls are distinguished, see Lima 2000: 45.

⁷⁰ Differentiating factors that render the body of every species unique are the “affects, dispositions or capacities”; the body is merely a bundle of influences and capacities, see Viveiros de Castro 1998: 478.

Therefore all species are defined by means of a shared humanity, or “are supposed to have a spiritual component that qualifies them as “people” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 465). The outer appearance which is often referred to as clothing conceals this interiority. This difference between interiority and exteriority can be literally displayed as for instance in narratives about a dog-woman. Here, when a hunter is chasing game, his dog transforms into a woman whereby the clothing is removed, allowing the interiority (i.e., humanoid form) to appear. Having returned home, the huntsman burns these clothes, after which this dog-woman cannot return to being a dog and keeps her female (human) form.

Changing clothes means transformation. Shamans and spirits can transmute, because they dress in the clothing of “others”, for instance, the coat of a jaguar, peccary or of a human being. However, each species has its own unique key attributes that clothing cannot replace. For instance, spirits wearing human clothing (i.e., with a human appearance) speak with a speech impediment, whereas jaguars dressed in human clothes don their claws and fangs as bodily adornments. These unique physical attributes constitute the nature of each being, as it distinguishes them to result in different points of views.

A common interiority covered by clothing implies that appearances can deceive *because* they “hide” specific points of view. The “clothing”/physical is observed from another subject who can only see with its own eyes and with another viewpoint. The perspectives of different beings, let us say humans and jaguars, are incompatible because they are not capable of seeing each other simultaneously as humans (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 34). Therefore, whenever a jaguar and Amerindian meet, they cannot see each other as being humans. When Amerindians see the jaguar as a human being, this implies that the Amerindians have entered Jaguar’s perspective and thus according to the jaguar the Amerindians would have become a peccary (i.e., prey). Only a shaman can enter the perspective of another and return to tell the tale.

If all beings with a point of view share a common interiority, how do they relate to each other? All see themselves as being human, while others are classified as either “other-than-human” or “*significant other-than-human-person**”. Considering the Juruna (Tupian, Brazil), this differential is best understood as wild vs. civilised (Lima 2000: 45, 48, note 15). This implies that “others” are related to in terms of being more/less wild/civilised than the Self. The “wildness”/“civilisedness” can be a differentiating factor *within* and *between* beings. For instance, the category “wild” can be linked to the jaguar as well as to an unknown human-group (Lima 2000: 46). The “other” occupies a higher position in the scale of “otherness” if it is least “civilised”, or the most “wild”. For instance, spirits are *significant other-than-human-persons** and can appear as humans, but nevertheless lack a key aspect of being “civilised”. As to the Trio (Cariban), spirits do not possess a “human-language”, because they speak with an impediment. These most important qualifiers concerning “civilised” vs. “wild” vary among

groups, resulting in categories referred to as human, *other-than-human-person* and *significant other-than-human-person**.

A worldview is always embedded in a specific language. Various Amerindian languages linguistically mark “otherness” and transient states. Carlin (2004) describes several such markers encountered in Trio, a Cariban language. The Trio apply a marker, the suffix *-me*, in order to illustrate that: (a) one knows the denoted is not inherently what it appears to be as the noun is in the (transient) state of being (Carlin 2004: 124, 128), or (b) a former belief has been falsified whereby it is linguistically marked that something was mistaken for something else, or (c) one is uncertain as to the identity of a perceived object (Carlin 2004: 128).

An example which clarifies the suffix *-me* consists of the Trio designating a jaguar (spirit)-man as a “human”-*me* (i.e., *witoto-me*): he looks like a human, talks like a human but is not human in essence, because he is, in fact, a jaguar. Another marker, referred to as *apo*, signifies resembling a being as to its behaviour or marginally having its appearance. For instance, to eat like a caterpillar implies eating leaves (Carlin 2004: 213-5). Moreover, the marker *-re(pe)* denotes that semantic expectations inherent to the noun are not met with. For example, if a key semantic feature of that noun is not fulfilled. In that case, a spirit is able to speak, but with a speech impediment. These linguistic markers all not only indicate how the worldview is embedded in their language but also how appearances can deceive.

The varied implications of this worldview encompass a multiplicity of incompatible points of views. If all beings with a point of view share their interiority, then what would an Amerindian eat without this becoming an act of cannibalism? How can the ill be cured, if that which causes the disease cannot be understood? This goal can only be accomplished when Amerindians enter the perspective of another subject. The only ones capable of doing so are shamans.

Shamans crossing (ontological) boundaries

Only shamans are able to enter the point of view of other beings, because they are, or can be, the conductors of perspectives. Entering another perspective as such is not the problem, but re-entering your personal perspective can be. A Trio (Cariban) narrative about a shaman visiting the water world (Carlin 2004: 511-6) describes that the way leading towards this realm resembles a path. Having walked into a hole in the water, he arrives at a path leading to Anaconda village. Here the locals are feasting, singing, dancing, drinking and trading. The shaman joins in dancing and singing. Next, the giant otter (the shaman’s familiar i.e., helpful spirit) warns him not to drink too much, or else he would be “blocked from going back” as the path would completely close. In another Trio narrative, two brothers each transform into a jaguar. However, in spite of being warned, the younger brother, having tasted blood (Koelewijn 1987: 118-20), has to remain a jaguar and is not able to return to his personal viewpoint. Therefore his elder brother has no choice but to kill him. The reason for this was

the fact that having transmuted into a true jaguar and provided with its point of view, the younger sibling now sees humans, even his elder brother, as prey.⁷¹

The two above examples point to the existence of behavioural restrictions whenever a shaman enters the perspective of “others”. Breaking these limiting rules not only implies crossing the ontological boundary but also the “closing” of the path leading back to his personal (“human”) perspective. It also often involves eating and drinking (e.g., do not drink a jaguar’s *cassiri**, or pineapple juice, for it is in fact blood). Sexual restrictions could also be imposed. Rules vary among the Amazonian communities but always concern entering into the perspective of “others”. Only shamans can do so, thereby holding on to, or returning to, their personal point of view if not crossing an ontological boundary.

Shamans have the ability to “see” with the eyes of the other, hereby observing as the other (i.e., jaguar, spirit) observes itself. Having identified the other realising whom/what he or she truly is, the shaman can act, or respond, accordingly in order to protect his personal perspective. Acting accordingly here implies that he should never cross any ontological boundaries, that is never fully adopt the perspective of the “other”. It is therefore *because* a shaman can identify the interiority of the other and *because* he can observe with the eyes of the “other”, without completely losing his own perspective (i.e., realising the *cassiri** is in fact blood) that he can not only maintain this perspective but also return to tell the story. Never capable of completely crossing an ontological boundary, the shaman enters the perspective of an “other” which entails controlled conditions and limitations (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 471).

A shamanic trait is being able to “see” with the eyes of “others”, from their point of view. Importantly, it allows a shaman to cure the ill, or to invest himself, or others, with predatory capacities. Moreover, he can “dehumanize” game animals. Shamans can not only understand but also communicate implications of any socio-cosmic relations which humans maintain with non-humans, past and present. Moreover, shamans are able to enter other perspectives and travel through both time as well as various cosmic layers.

A Piaroa shaman (*ruwang*) had to travel between the “Before time” and the “Present time” in order to understand who is causing the diseases or death. They are often jealous beings, who no longer possess the capabilities they had during the “before time”. They now predate on

⁷¹ Losing your own personal point of view, or “becoming”, does not necessarily imply that your “appearance” (clothes) changes. However, your perspective does alter whereby you can no longer recognise any next of kin. Your Amerindian relatives and friends are no longer “human” if observed from your (altered) perspective but have changed into prey e.g., a peccary. This mutation is the outcome of sharing the perspective of a predator in the form of an evil spirit or jaguar, etc. See Kohn 2007: 7; Lima 2000: 47-8; Viveiros de Castro 2012: 36.

the ill to then devour his or her body (Overing 1990: 608-9).⁷² By chanting, the *ruwang* urged beings from other realms to enter the bodies of the ill to next defeat those causing the disease. We read: "The words of chant had the force for curing: through and in them the *ruwang* willed beings of other realms to enter the body of the patient in order to enter into a cannibalistic battle with beings causing disease" (Overing 1990: 609).

The above illustrates that shamans can enter the perspective of "others" not only in order to understand them but also to request (in actual fact "will") other beings to render assistance. This same proficiency allows shamans to be "induced", or to lead Amerindian warriors to be instilled with the powerful, predatory abilities of for instance the jaguar or anaconda. As a result of this, the shaman/warrior would become unbeatable in battle.

Curing and inducing the qualities of other beings implies entering the perspective of "others", and observing the world from their perspectives. Another meaningful role to be fulfilled by shamans comprises protecting and keeping the "cosmic balance". This task is especially important in relation to food which needs to be rid of its human-quality, or else its consumption would amount to cannibalism.⁷³ In addition to the act of dehumanizing food, hunting and eating also imply a reciprocal relationship with the Master of Food or the Master of the Game Animals (Descola 1996).

Eating is always cosmologically significant: "Humans and animals are immersed in a sociocosmic system in which the direction of predation and the production of kinship are in dispute" (Fausto 2007: 500). One can devour someone (cannibalism) or maintain the practice of eating together, referred to as commensality which then becomes a device for producing an identity within and across "species". Cannibalism has a strictly alimentary objective: the appropriation of the victim's animistic capacities. In that case, you eat it "raw". As to commensalism, the subject has to be made into food, which requires work (i.e., shamanic interference). This fact also implies that it needs to be cooked. "Its subjective condition must be neutralised through cooking" (Fausto 2007: 504).

⁷² Each cultural aspect (e.g., hunting, gardening), having been lost due to a "Before time" animal, has a certain disease as its counterpart. These creatures now cause illnesses. For example: the aquatic creatures owned the phenomenon fire, before they lost it during the course of the "Before time" era. They now spread skin ailments, after being burned by the fire which the water creatures possessed. See Overing 1990: 613.

⁷³ See Århem 1996 for more information on the food taboos of the Makuna, a North Amazonian community. Århem correlates prey animals with women: a hunter has to seduce his prey. Setting off on hunting expeditions also encompasses reciprocal obligations, whereby the shaman not only has to return something to the "Owner spirits" but also remove human qualities from the prey. Similar expressions of belief have been encountered among the Yukaghirs, a small group of indigenous hunters residing in north-eastern Siberia (Willerlev 2007).

The process of dehumanizing is necessary for all beings endowed with subjectivity (i.e., those with a conscience) in order to turn these beings into proper food. This, however, does not imply that all plants and animals need to be de-humanized.⁷⁴ Even a differentiation within a family/genus is possible, for instance, as to certain monkeys or peccaries. For example, the Juruna people (Brazil, Tupian) differentiate between the white-lipped peccary and the collared peccary or between the night monkey and the capuchin monkey. The latter is considered an edible animal, whereas the night monkey is thought to be a spirit, and thus inedible (Lima 2000: 47-8). The hierarchy between animals with subjectivity has been referred to as the food chain's "cardinal index of agency" (Fausto 2007: 503). Various groups harbour discrepancies, but in general large predators are located at the top of this hierarchy, while plants and fish are positioned lower. Among the animals, carnivores are placed above herbivores. As a result, the procedures, or care, required in order to transform these animals/plants into food varies. When the balance of this "socio-cosmic system" is disturbed (i.e., food is not properly dehumanized and rules of reciprocity are broken) the Masters of the Animals will retaliate, causing disease or death to befall the Amerindians.

Nature and the intensity of subjectivity

In the previous section, the "cardinal index of agency" is referred to as an index, or a scale, in order to quantify the subjectivity of food, e.g., plant or (game) animal. This scale is also relevant for all, human and non-human, beings who possess subjectivity whereby the "amount" and the "nature" of subjectivity of beings differs.

The nature of subjectivity has been described by means of: (a) the degrees of personhood/animacy (i.e., possessing the quality or condition of being alive or animate) and intentionality/agentivity (i.e., the quality or fact of being an agent), and (b) a notion of biological life being independent of social intelligence (Halbmayer 2012: 14; Hornborg 2015: 39-40, 43-4; Santos-Granero 2009: 9). The underlying idea is apparently that certain beings are conceived as "persons", with a soul/subjectivity, but without any capacity to act on their own. Therefore, they possess animacy, but no agency. Beings in the possession of animacy but without any intentionality require another agency (either human or non-human) in order to activate their agency (see under the sub-heading *The subjectivity of "things"*).

This distinction results in the following categories on the nature of subjectivity comprising: (a) beings with animacy and agency, (b) beings with animacy but without (active) agency, and (c) beings with no subjectivity e.g., an animal, plant or "thing". Categories (a) and (b) include beings with (potential) subjectivities i.e., points of view. As to these categories, agency represents the differentiating factor, but in which way?

⁷⁴ It has been argued that an agency is not merely humanized and personalized, but also non-personal, hereby constituting a notion of biological life independent of social intelligence. For instance, stones can contain expressions of agency and power, but are not personalized (Halbmayer 2012: 14).

Among the Kalapalo (Cariban, Brazil) not all beings are attributed the same kind of “powers” characterized by: (a) possessing particular types of communication skills, and (b) being able to act only upon beings of the same class or classes with lower degrees of animacy (Santos-Granero 2009: 9). The Achuar, Juruna and Kuna describe similar ideas regarding the hierarchical classes of animacy (Descola 1996: 375-6; Kohn 2007:13; Lima 2000: 47-8). For the Kuna (Chibchan), any communication between beings with subjectivity of a different status is not reciprocal (Kohn 2007). Beings with a higher hierarchical position can without any alternate action understand others positioned lower down in the hierarchy. For instance, Masters of Animal spirits comprehend humans. However, if a subjectivity wishes to understand someone who occupies a higher position in the hierarchy, it needs to enter a shamanic state, enabling it to traverse ontological boundaries (Kohn 2007: 13). This observation shows that, at least for a number of Amazonian peoples, communication with other subjectivities can only be established with a subjectivity located on the same or on a lower scale of agency. Any communication with a higher/stronger subjectivity is only possible under special conditions such as a ritual trance, a dream state, etc. (Santos-Granero 2009).

The subjectivity of “things”

“Things” too can possess subjectivity (Hornborg 2015; Santos-Granero 2009; Henare et al. 2007). The category of “things” includes artefacts, images, songs, names, and designs as well as natural objects and phenomena (Santos-Granero 2009: 3). In addition, “Multiple ways of being a thing” have been distinguished, based on how they originate and the nature (or absence) of their subjectivity (Santos-Granero 2009: 8-9).

There are “subjective” and “subjectivized” objects. The former are conceived of as persons i.e., they possess souls and are agents. In contrast, the latter do own some kind of “soul substance”, the quantity or quality of which impedes them from acting on their own. These “subjectivized” objects require the intervention of human agents in order to activate their agencies. We read: “Native Amazonians distinguish objects according to their use-value, opposing artefacts of daily use to those used in ceremonial contexts” (Santos-Granero 2009: 10). Which “things” are “subjective” or “subjectivized” differs among communities. Nevertheless, the fact that (certain) “things” possess subjectivity and that several even possess strong agencies seems to be a broadly shared notion, as is also documented for the “Taíno” of the Greater Antilles who worshipped *zemis*, three pointers and other idols (Breukel 2013; Mol 2007; Oliver 2005, 2009).

The subjectivity of “things” may also be relational, especially when an object itself has no agency. Their agencies can be activated either by intimate contact or shamanic intervention (Santos-Granero 2009: 14-6), thereby implying that they are conceived of as extensions of their Masters/Owners. On occasion, objects need to be de-subjectivized. Among certain Amazonian peoples (inalienable) objects have to be abandoned or killed (i.e., become de-subjectivized), when the owner passes away. If not, (part of) the soul of the deceased could

haunt the living. Other objects are handed down from generation to generation (Hornborg 2015: 45; Santos-Granero 2009).

Turning subjectivities into objects (referred to as “objectification”, see Santos-Granero 2009: 16-9) can, for example, be carried out by: (a) producing artefacts through craftsmanship, (b) shamanic rituals, and (c) de-subjectification. Whenever artefacts are produced, they constitute the objective expression of their makers’ knowledge, skills and effects and thus share their subjectivity. Therefore, these artefacts are frequently described as “children”, or extensions of their creators (Hornborg 2015: 45, 48; Overing 1988; Rivière 1969). Shamans can, however, objectify powerful subjectivities, for instance, in order to produce powerful ritual objects. This procedure often involves shamanic chanting (Hill 2009; Santos-Granero 2009). Moreover, shamans can also de-subjectivize “things”, hereby transforming them into merely (inanimate) objects.

The role of certain properties ascribed to artefactual assemblages should be reconsidered when generating any specific varieties of human social organisation (Hornborg 2015). This implies that any power asymmetries addressed in studies on political economy should enable the tracing of specific human-object relations (Hornborg 2015: 40). This reconsideration would result in artefacts being conceived as playing the role of powerful agents and would in turn be of significance when understanding socio-political organisations. In the field of archaeology, e.g., “prestige-good systems” are identified in which high-value goods appear to have circulated widely. In the Caribbean and Amazonia, such products have been identified in the distribution of: the green-stone amulet (Boomert 1987), feather headdresses (Basso 2011), the “Taíno” *zemis**/*threepointer** (Mol 2007; Oliver 2005, 2009), shell beads and snuff trays (Hornborg 2015: 40). Archaeologists have not only attempted to reconstruct the emergence of these prestige-good systems but also to establish how the expanded circulation of subjectivized artefacts has generated new as well as more hierarchical forms of social organisation in prehistoric times (see also 1.1.1, 1.1.2).

Amerindians are thus part of a broad, cosmological web of social relations which include various human and non-human subjectivities. The concept to be addressed now concerns “mastery”, or “ownership”, which is not restricted to humans and conceptualised differently when compared with our one-directional, hierarchical idea of “ownership”. I regard mastery as a key concept for our comprehension of relationships extending across subjectivities.

Mastery or “ownership”

The relationships between beings, both human and non-human, are often regarded as identical to relations between prey and predator. This observation is perhaps best illustrated by the following Arawakan saying: *hamáro kamungka turuwati* (lit.: everything [all things and creatures] has [its own] tiger [jaguar]). It signifies that everyone is afraid of someone (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 29). Being apparently equally embedded in Amerindian worldviews that everything has its own master, results either in a mode of relationship or in a schema of

mastery and ownership (Fausto 2008). This schema is not only intertwined with perspectivism but also embedded in the narratives, and therefore dealt with here.

Master, also referred to as “owner”, is considered an important indigenous Amazonian category. Its reciprocal terms designate a mode of relationship that applies to humans, non-human beings and objects (Fausto 2008: 329).⁷⁵ The “Master”- concept involves both control and protection. Moreover, it defines a relation between subject and a resource whereby the Master is not only the mediator between subject and this resource but also the collective to which it belongs (Fausto 2008: 330).

To illustrate this concept of mastery or “ownership”, an example from the narratives will now follow in which on occasion protagonists meet a Master, often a Master of a specific Animal, such as the Master of Peccary, or an Owner of “Things” (e.g., the Master of the Mountain or the Master of Water). In a certain Cariban narrative (Story no. 403), the protagonist hunter meets another man (i.e., wearing human clothes) with whom he sets off on a hunting trip. When this hunter hears parrots in the distance and wishes to chase them, his companion turns into a large parrot and hits him. Having now grasped what had happened, the hunter from then on only hunts parrots as a means of reprisal. He understood that he had in actual fact been accompanied by the Master of Parrots, who had forbidden him to chase parrots. This example indicates that the Master of Parrots mediates between the Amerindian huntsman and all parrots, the collective to which he belongs.

The “Master”-concept entails more than “merely” portraying that which, or whom, is owned. The Master/Owner contains the collectivity within himself, whereby the owner comprises a plural singularity. Therefore the owner/master is the form through which a plurality appears as a singularity to others, such as shamans. Usually, this Master/Owner concept manifests itself in the eyes of others in the form of a predator e.g., a jaguar, anaconda or harpy eagle (Fausto 2008: 334). In the above example in which a large parrot hits the huntsman, the Master appears to the hunter not only as a man but also as a large parrot i.e., as a singularity. He is indeed a plurality and depicts all parrots.⁷⁶

A category entitled Master/Owner also implies an “owned” category which is best understood as either a pet or an adopted child. The relation between the Master/Owner and the “owned” is conceptualised as a form of adoption. The concrete schema as to this ownership relation has been described as *familiarizing predation* and converts predatory relations into an

⁷⁵ The term “ownership” can be problematic because, in Western discourse, this implies a mono-directional relationship between human beings and (often) “things”. The Amerindian concept of mastery is not restricted to “human beings” or mono-directional, but more reciprocal. In the present study the term “master/mastery” is thus preferred over “owner/ownership”.

⁷⁶ A shaman in addition to being a chief is in fact the Master/Owner of a community who, when interacting with other Masters/Owners would, in the eyes of the community members, be a predator i.e., a jaguar.

asymmetric relation of control and protection conceptualised as a form of adoption (Fausto 2007; 2008: 330, 333).

The relation between Master/Owner and adopted/pet is not given but constituted. To the adopted, it is not merely a negative and inescapable restriction, but also a way of eliciting attention as well as generosity. For the owner, this relation not only involves prestige but also the responsibility of taking care of and of feeding. In the eyes of the adopted/pet, the owner is thus a protective father. However, in the eyes of others (especially humans), it is a predatory (often jaguar) affine (Fausto 2008: 334).

It is not only the Master/Owner who is double-faced, but the adopted/pet will also never entirely lose its wildness, and consequently never be tamed or domesticated. The reason for this: the adopted/pet still has its subjectivity, its own point of view. Therefore any relationship between the master and the adopted is not a given, but a continual process: “[Masters/Owners are] ... forever on the verge of adopting the perspective of the others contained within themselves” (Fausto 2008: 342). This observation implies that the perspective of the adopted/pet could prevail over the opinion of the Master/Owner. It may also explain why pet animals receive treatment that could be described as both cruel and caring: the possibility of the dog’s point of view to overhaul its Master’s opinion.

Concluding remarks on perspectivism

“Lowland Amerindian concepts and ways of perception are in significant ways more complex than generally assumed” (Halbmayer 2012: 12). This complexity refers to a conceptualisation of animals, environment, life and the world as encountered in Amerindian cosmologies.

In sum, according to the Amerindian worldview, all human and non-human beings share an inner quality, which is culture. Appearances can deceive because culture merely comprises outer clothing, and is always perceived (“seen”) by another subject with his/her own eyes. Every creature has its own predator (e.g., jaguar) and its own prey (e.g., peccary). The schemata of familiarizing predation constitute the relation between Master/Owner and adopted/pet. The Master thus does not merely portray but indeed contains the multiplicity within itself, which others conceive of as a predator, often a jaguar. Only shamans can enter the perspective of another and “see” in order to observe with the eyes of the other how they see themselves i.e., enter the perspective of “jaguar” who sees itself as Amerindian. Therefore shamans can interact with Masters in order to protect the cosmic balance.

This section begins with the question: “What would the world look like if everybody displayed a human point of view?” A world in which you might lose your own opinion by being overpowered by a dominant point of view. Once again citing Viveiros de Castro, we read that this fear of *potential* danger almost always occurs: “This is precisely how the subjectivities [others with a point of view] that wander the forest are typically experienced by the Amerindians- they are usually almost-seen, communication is almost established, and the

result is always an almost-death” (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 37-8). This implies that Amerindians do not walk around in fear. Thus when spotting a deer, peccary or parrot they probably see potential food. However, it is only through interaction with these non-humans that it can be determined if they are indeed animals or rather beings dressed in animal clothes.

The theory of perspectivism foremost serves to improve any comprehending of the narratives, but it can also contribute to our understanding of iconographical display. In this respect, the following aspects need to be taken into consideration: (a) the unstable, transformational nature of body forms implies that any materialisation in clay or stone of a particular body form may disclose the intention to reverse or prevent the dangers of body transformation, and (b) the external, visible manifestation of bodies does not necessarily correspond to the inner essence of beings as portrayed by means of ceramic or stone figurines, but instead may depict transitory conditions (Barreto 2017: 422).

In pre-Columbian Amazonian figurines, the subjectivity of non-human beings is visualised by means of tridimensional perspectives in which either dual or multiple forms are revealed when viewing a figurine from different angles (Barreto 2017: 7-8). The fluidity of identity is also displayed in Saladoid iconography e.g., the two-faced *adornos* or the placement of an “alter-ego” on top of another anthropomorphic or zoomorphic *adorno* (Boomert 2001; Oudhuis 2008). These forms of display ostensibly support notions regarding the fluidity of identity as well as of animistic ideas. Nevertheless, the ontological grounds associated with perspectivism are difficult if not impossible to picture. The reason for this is that everyone sees the world through his or her own eyes. Through one’s own eyes everyone is human. Therefore, depicting an “animal” from its own perspective would imply depicting a human being.

Perspectivism is a modality that can be included in a more general ontology involving anthropomorphism, whereby everything is placed in terms of human reference (Karadimas 2012: 49). The most problematic aspect of perspectivism is the absence of a “third eye”: we cannot “see” through the eyes of a non-human being. Therefore depicting a non-human being (e.g., jaguar, bat) from its perspective is impossible. Displaying another creature with human-like traits is possible, whereby it concerns an ontology of anthropomorphism (Karadimas 2012: 29).

These considerations are of interest when studying iconography in the light of perspectivism. Could it be the intention to reverse or prevent any dangers as to transformation? What is implied if the essence of what is depicted does not necessarily have to correspond with its outer appearance?

3.5 Musing the methodology

Having dealt with the theoretical and methodological background, two issues are to be considered. In the following paragraphs, the “status” of the narratives is addressed. Once dynamic accounts, they are now embodied in static, translated and written sources. Another deliberation encompasses the discrepancy between the use of narratives originating from contemporary mainland peoples in order to conceptualise Saladoid insular iconography. A discussion on considerations and their implications follows.

3.5.1 Lost dynamics

“Making special”-behaviour provides us with a unifying context of both the act of storytelling and iconography (see 3.1). It explains why and how narratives contribute to a contextualisation as well as to an understanding (i.e., conceptualisation) of *symbolism**. The narratives included in this research are written and translated versions of what once were orally transmitted, dynamic accounts.

The appropriateness of applying translated and written sources highly depends on the set goals and purposes of their usage. It is naive to expect that oral traditions should coincide with archaeological observations. The present research does not intend to discuss the subject of historical accuracy. Moreover, it does not propose that the content and structure of the narratives did not transform. They are considered “mirrors” of Amerindian worldviews because the narratological worlds are, and were, built on other worlds at hand. As animal personages are contextualised within these narratives, they serve the present study which also discusses the attributes and the contexts of these personages and with whom or what they are associated. Concerned with “*meaning**”, the goal of this research is to conceptualise zoomorphic imagery and therefore not to draw a direct analogy between specific narratives and imagery.

From oral to written accounts

Although this investigation builds on oral traditions, written sources are also utilised. Writing down oral narratives can lead to important information (e.g., the body language) which is lost, as was the case when these stories were performed and as to the interaction between the narrator and his/her public (Thompson 1946: 5). Often a narrative develops during and by means of this interaction between the narrator and the audience (Basso 1990; Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999; Honti 1975; Vansina 1985). Writing down narratives causes the record to become and remain static. This record can therefore only be studied from a fixed, non-dynamic perspective, rather than by means of the dynamic event the narrative formed when told/performed.

When the oral traditions were written down, not only was information lost concerning the act of storytelling, an interlingual translation (or translation proper) took place, too. Any (interlingual) translation also means the loss of information because one language cannot be replaced with another, considering that not every word has the same meaning as the translated word. A worldview lies hidden within a language and one is bound by language

and/or vocabulary, implying that “language is a guide to social reality” (Sapir 1926). A translation involves far more than replacing lexical and grammatical elements. It is therefore vital to possess a sound comprehensive knowledge of the language and culture, hereby understanding, for instance, the applied idioms and metaphor (Bassnett-McGuire 1991: 13-38).

Insufficient attention paid to details of alien ontologies or on versions of the world can lead to misunderstanding metaphor and logic. The reason for this is that if we wish to grasp what the narrator is saying we should be aware that misunderstanding and confusion are not (only) the outcome of “the poetic mind at work creating obscurity”, but by and large a result of a difference in basic metaphysical principles i.e., premises as to what we assume the world is (Overing 1990: 610).

The majority of the tales dealt with here were written down by long-time residents among the indigenous peoples. They spoke the native languages and had acquired a profound understanding of the Amerindian culture. Local translators and guides were involved for example if any interpretation was required. The latter procedure cannot be proven, nor is it suggested, regarding all narratives. Therefore a loss of metaphors and/or a misconceiving can be assumed. Adding numerous narratives, from various sources and affiliations, also (partly) contributes to overcoming any biases resulting from the individual collectors of these stories. This is all the more the case here as this research focuses neither on individual narratives nor on those belonging to any specific Amerindian culture. This study aims at establishing an overall shared conceptualisation of “animal imagery” through an analysis of animal personages as well as their ascribed attributes and roles.

Another countermeasure directed against any misinterpretation of indigenous symbolism and metaphors includes not only anthropological theories on Amerindian ontologies (i.e., theory of perspectivism, concept of mastery) regarding the interpretation of the narratives but also the examination of the (zoomorphic) *signs** within the context of the Amerindian ontologies and worldviews (see 3.4.2).

3.5.2 Through time and place

Oral traditions contain messages transmitted beyond the generations from which they arose. Nonetheless, narratives were and are also dynamic accounts, which have passed through a continual process of adapting as well as discarding elements. Built on worlds at hand, tales transmute as “other worlds” change. Cultures were and remain dynamic while dismissing and adopting ideas, beliefs and customs. Certain events have an enormous impact, for instance, the European invasion and the introduction of African slaves. They comprise in addition to their on occasion political (or religious) assignments, their own worldviews, sign systems and narratives, resulting in a dialectic between varied cultures, all influencing each other, to an unequal degree.

Certain scholars would argue that, when the impact of the present is assessed, no message at all from the past remains (Beidelman 1970: 74-9). If this is the case, how then can we explain any social continuities? Moreover, where would social imagination encounter the ideas on which to base inventions? At any rate, the Western and African influences on Amerindian folklore are evident (Thompson 1946). Although stemming from another reference system (i.e., Western and/or African), these “alien” traits can and have altered indigenous messages subsequently to become part of the Caribbean system.

That gives rise to the following question: can any written narratives, documented mainly during the 20th century, serve to better understand the Saladoid zoomorphic imagery? If indeed the case, it is only feasible if we accept that throughout the aforementioned processes of alterity a certain amount of continuity remains. Even when in-coming (foreign) ideas, beliefs and motifs are introduced, they are not only included but also combined with existing motifs and beliefs, causing indigenous worldviews and narratives to be altered. However, being built on worlds at hand, this was and remains a gradual, conscious transformation comprising the inclusion, exclusion and even the abandoning of elements. Accepting these premises implies that studying the (stable) motifs, associations and attributes related to animal personages can indeed support our understanding of these creatures as iconographical features.

This research incorporates many narratives provided with a high degree of variation as to linguistic provenance. Thus, independent of any linguistic affiliation, similarities in motifs, ascribed roles and attributes can be established. Associations shared by a large number of South American cultures are also the most likely to have persisted throughout time and place. Archaeology shows continuity in zoomorphic iconography: the same animal-shaped features occur throughout the core area of this study, including mainland and islands contexts. This consistent existence in the archaeological records is also persistent throughout time, from the early Saladoid up to the “Taíno” era (c.800/200 BCE up to 1492 CE). As these zoomorphic depictions have remained reasonably stabilised, these animals would probably also have been, and remained, part of Amerindian stories.

Though tempting, applying certain narratives when interpreting specific iconographical features is not the purpose of this research.⁷⁷ The premise here is not that the same narratives are told in Amazonia during the 20th century as they were amongst the Early Ceramic Age

⁷⁷ Anthropological studies reveal the importance and the usefulness of this type of study when applying narratives in order to understand iconography. This procedure is especially fruitful among living Amerindians and the complex iconographical constructions that combine various identifiable elements. See the research carried out among the Mariña Amerindians, especially an analysis of musical instruments made of deer skulls (Karadimas 2012), on the four monkeys constellation (Karadimas 1999, 2015: 22-6) and on identifying the wasp, tarantula and stingray iconography and their interpretations (Karadimas 1999, 2016). Archaeologists use mainland narratives in order to interpret specific iconographical findings, a process that has even seen several scholars verify myths through archaeology (Fewkes 1903; Godo 2005; Piggot 1941; Waldron 2010).

peoples populating the insular Caribbean. The premise here is: the conceptualisation of animals by the Amerindians remains fairly stable throughout time, even if one migrates to the islands. Narratives serve as a mirror of this conceptualisation of zoomorphic signs. Therefore studying the attributes, roles, contexts and associations of animal personages encountered in folklore not only contributes to our understanding of these animals as iconographical *signs** but also to better grasping the reason why certain creatures are depicted more often than others.

As the main interest of this study lies in the stable elements (e.g., motifs, ascribed attributes, roles), it makes sense to incorporate stories originating from various linguistic and cultural communities forged by the Arawakan, Cariban, Warao and Tupian peoples who at least partly share a historical and cultural background. We read: “... tropical America was inhabited in very early times; ... numerous tribes were frequently in movement in various directions; ... demographic fluidity and the fusion of population created appropriate conditions for a very old-established syncretism, which preceded the differences observable between the groups; and that these differences reflect nothing or almost nothing of the archaic conditions but are in most cases secondary or derivative” (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 8-9; see also 2.2.1).

3.6 To round off

Certain key concepts underlying this study have now been discussed. The two-step methodology was outlined which firstly comprises the collecting, documenting and structuring of the narratives followed by applying perspectivism as a means to interpret.

This research deals with concepts of “*meaning*” and “*symbolism*”, with a view to better grasp the “*meaning*” of the Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos*. These are not symbols in the sense that the signifier (the zoomorphic *adorno*) is not completely arbitrary to the signified, but are identified as a specific “*animal*”. However, these *adornos* are also not pure icons, because although it is possible to identify what they depict, or signify, it is probably not (merely) that animal. Their meaning (i.e., all they evoke) is linked, but not identical, to the depicted “*animal*”. Thus even when the first-order representation may be established (e.g., when identifying an *adorno* as a jaguar, bat, bird, etc.), the high-order representation (i.e., its meaning) will not yet have been established and is, therefore, the focus here.

Therefore, throughout this dissertation, the word “*animal*”, including specific “*animals*” is often written between inverted commas in order to indicate a high-order representation. For instance, when an *adorno* is identified as a “*bat*” *adorno*, a bat may be depicted. Nevertheless, this *adorno* concerns a high-order and *not* a bat (animal), but a mental construct, i.e., an image of symbolic knowledge.

Narratives dealt with in this research are crucial to understanding zoomorphic *adornos*, for the stories themselves are and were an important means to share and transmit knowledge.

Moreover, they are a product of symbolic knowledge, as are *adornos*. Narratology lies at the basis of the analytical method and of the inherent database. This analysis adopts two of the three layers of a narratological analysis: fabula and story. The third layer, text, has been excluded as the present investigation utilises written, translated versions, and as it focuses on how the writer/storyteller has focussed on the narrative.

Perspectivism has been introduced as an interpretative model to better comprehend the narratives and roles the animal-like personages play here. This theory contributes to understanding how the Amerindians conceptualised humans and non-humans and illustrates the difficulties and limitations of the term, or concept of, “animal”. Perhaps this term should be completely avoided, as it does not fit any indigenous conceptualisation. However, replacing it would be problematic because that would obscure the focus of the present research and estrange the Western readers. All the more so since this study deals with zoomorphic *adornos* and focuses on “animal” personages and connotations. However, caution when employing the term “animal” is essential, for that which is depicted, or acts, or is referred to in the narratives probably was not the “animal”. The very nature and means of indigenous conceptualisation itself lie at the heart of this research. Therefore this term is either placed between inverted commas (i.e., “animal”), or the term “animal-like” is applied, as is the case when referring to specific animals (e.g., “Jaguar”).

In order to enrich our understanding of how (and which) meaning is ascribed to zoomorphic motifs, the conceptualisation of animals as *signs*/symbols** is also approached from the perspective of their role, appearance and place in nature. This procedure further contributes to the holistic approach in which animals as signs/symbols are studied within a variety of contexts, i.e., in nature, narratives, archaeology/ iconography and cosmology.