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Encountering *Supai*: An Ecology of Spiritual Perception in the Ecuadorian Amazon

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Running Head: An Ecology of Spiritual Perception

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Abstract

In this article I set out to draw an “ecology” of spiritual perception among the Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon. In particular, I look at the ways in which *supai* beings—forest spirits—are perceived by the Runa through two main sensory modalities: smelling and dreaming. Inspired by recent advances in the anthropology of religious learning, I then explore how certain Runa people—those who have undertaken a bodily training known as *sasi*—are more likely than others to encounter *supai* beings. This ritual training is conceived as *corporeal* learning. I conclude by suggesting that attention and self-attention developed during such corporeal practices play a central role in the perception of forest spirits.

Keywords: spirits, perception, attention, learning, Amazonia

Résumé

Dans cet article, je décris une «écologie» de la perception spirituelle chez les Runa de l'Amazonie équatorienne. En particulier, je regarde les manières dont les *supai*— les esprits de la forêt—sont perçus par le Runa à travers deux principales modalités sensorielles: l'odorat et le rêve. Inspiré par les progrès récents de l'anthropologie de l'apprentissage religieux, j'explore aussi comment certains Runa—ceux qui ont entrepris un entraînement corporel connu sous le nom de *sasi*—sont plus susceptibles que d'autres de rencontrer des *supai*. Cette formation rituelle est conçue comme un apprentissage du corps. Je conclus en suggérant que l'attention développée au cours de telles pratiques corporelles joue un rôle central dans la perception des esprits des forêts.

Mots-clés: esprits, perception, attention, apprentissage, Amazonie

Resumen

En este documento delinearé una ‘ecología’ de percepción espiritual entre los Runa de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana. En particular, observo las formas en que los *supai*, espíritus del bosque, son percibidos por los Runa a través de dos modalidades sensoriales: oler y soñar. Inspirado por recientes teorías en la antropología del aprendizaje religioso, este trabajo explora cómo algunos Runa—aquellos que han llevado a cabo una formación ritual conocida como *sasi*—tienen más probabilidades que otros de encontrarse con los *supai*. Estas prácticas rituales se conciben como un aprendizaje corporal. Concluyo sugiriendo que la atención y la auto-atención desarrolladas durante tales prácticas corporales juegan un papel central en la percepción de los espíritus del bosque.

Palabras clave: espíritus, percepción, atención, aprendizaje, Amazonia

Early on during my fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Pablo, the son of the woman I was living with at the time, disappeared in the forest. He was found only three days later, laying naked in a remote part of the forest, in a state of mental confusion. He claimed to have been following the smell of a *supai* woman (forest woman) who had appeared in his dreams lately. While I found the episode disconcerting at the time, I soon learned that experiences like that of Pablo, if not an everyday experience, are quite common among the Runa, an indigenous people living in the region of Pastaza, in Ecuador, with whom I have worked since 2011.ⁱ Indeed, my fieldwork soon became interspersed with stories of quasi abduction and seduction of humans by what the Runa call *supai*, forest beings.

In the pages that follow I try to make sense of such experiences. This attempt at understanding requires me to start from the very beginning, to the foundations which render such an experience possible. While I do not aim to provide an answer to the puzzle posed by Pablo's experience, I make a first step in the direction of trying to understand how Runa people come to perceive forest spirits. Drawing on recent works on the phenomenology of spiritual experience (Blanes and Espirito Santo 2014; Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2011), I will explore the specific sensory modalities through which *supai* beings are experienced: dreaming and smelling. Focusing on the specific context in which spirits are perceived, I will offer an ecology of the perception of spiritual beings. Such ecology, I will show, is grounded in the practical activities of hunting, gathering, and walking in the forest. Finally, through an analysis of a ritual training known as *sasi*, I will argue that the perception of *supai* is inextricably linked to local understanding of bodily transformation and learning.

Perceiving Spirits

The Runa describe *supai* as human-looking spirits which inhabit lagoons, mountains, or remote parts of the forest. Some *supai* are the "masters" of certain animals, plants or features of the landscape, those in charge of their well-being and reproduction. *Supai* can be gruesome and scary, with exaggerated bodily features, like ogres or dwarfs, while others are stunningly beautiful, with dark eyes and beautiful long hair. Often *supai* are described as foreign-looking people with elegant business suits or feathered headdresses and facial painting associated with other neighboring indigenous tribes. Some forest spirits look just like Runa people, but with extraordinary features (exceedingly long hair, military suits, etc.). All *supai* can speak *Runa shimi*, the native language of the Runa as well as many others. *Supai* "culture" is distinctively human: they drink manioc beer and eat game meat, they build houses with thatched roofs, they have drinking parties and festivals. *Supai* are thought to live in underground caves, mountain hills, or inside giant ceiba trees located in remote hunting territories (*purina*). Often a day-long trek, such territories are situated far from the villages, either deep in the forest or downriver. Each family in the area I worked owns a *purina* territory where they go hunting.ⁱⁱ Going to *purina* is a fundamental practice for learning about the forest (*sacha*) as well as the spirits' world. It is by walking through this landscape punctuated by rivers, steep hills, animal footsteps, and smells that children learn to see and trace the passage of a solitary peccary or become aware of the habits of a hummingbird. It is in these parts of the forest that the Runa sometimes perceive a *supai*.

What exactly does it mean to perceive a spirit? Recently, a number of works in the anthropology of religion have attempted to engage in what Cassaniti and Luhrmann (2011) defined as "a phenomenology of spiritual experience," a comparative account of the ways in which spiritual entities are sensorially apprehended. Inspired by such endeavor, my approach in this article can be seen as an attempt to look at spiritual experience "working *backward*," as Ruy Blanes and Diana Espirito-Santo (2013, 6) aptly put it: I seek, in their words, to "understand the existence of particular ontological beings or entities as defined and refracted through the pragmatics of their effects in and on the world" (7). By paying attention to the pragmatic circumstances in which spiritual experiences occur, I aim to delineate an "ecology" of spiritual experience, one which takes into account the multiplicity of factors shaping the experience of *supai* encounters.

Before proceeding any further, I wish to spend a few words on the meaning of “experience” as well as on the methodology to tackle spiritual “experiences.” In a critical essay on the concept of experience, Jason Throop stresses a “complemental model of experience that is grounded in the organization of attention according to the dynamic structuring of what is foregrounded and backgrounded in awareness” (2003, 234–235). Drawing on the works of William James, Edmund Husserl, and Alfred Schutz, Throop suggests seeing experience as both the “immediacy of temporal flux” (233) in which are present past and future perspectives and the moment of reflective assessment where “experience” is thought upon. He also notices how different field methodologies may grasp experience in its different temporal articulations: in the moment in which experience is explicitly articulated (for instance, in interviews) or during the unfolding of the event itself (which can be thus recorded only through observation). During my fieldwork, I deployed methodologies which captured different kinds of “experience.” I was present in many instances immediately after supai encounters when people came back home feeling sick or scared. I also observed many of the ritual practices known as *sasi* which take place on almost a daily basis. However, due to the solitary nature of supai encounters (of which I will explain later), such encounters could not be directly witnessed by the ethnographer. The experience of supai, with its rich sensorial description, always emerged by communicating with others. This, as I will show later, is *necessarily* so: for the Runa to do otherwise—that is, to maintain a solitary, subjective experience of supai encounter—would mean surrendering to the spirit world.

To return to my proposed ecology of spiritual experience: my approach starts from a simple premise: that “spiritual conceptions are not simply expressed in activity ... rather, they *subsist* in the flow of activity” (Willerslev 2007, 156). As a number of scholars in the anthropology of religion have argued, religious or spiritual experience cannot be considered as a matter of abstract belief or representational content but rather as something which emerges from within the materiality of everyday engagements (Keane 2008; Meyer 2012).

This approach prompts the question of the relationship between perception and spiritual entities. How does God—or any “other-worldly” being—become manifested in the texture of everyday life? In an article exploring the perception of religious value, philosopher Nathaniel Barrett (2013) suggests that, in order to think about spiritual experience, we need to rethink the very meaning of perceiving. Drawing upon James Gibson’s work and theories of embodied cognition, Barrett argues that rather than as a matter of “construction,” perception should be thought of as a process of “discrimination.” While in the former case, meaning is added on top of an objective reality “out there,” in the second case, meaning is intrinsic to the very act of perceiving. Religious meaning in his view is not something we “add” on top of reality but rather is intrinsic to reality itself. This perspective is radical in so far as it does not merely claim that environmental states (the “outside” world) affect mental states (“the self”), but rather it attempts to make the distinction between the two purposeless in the first place (Wilson and Golonka 2013). It also prompts us to reconsider standard anthropological understandings of environmental perception which, in the words of Tim Ingold, tend to assume that this consists of “a cultural construction of nature, or as the superimposition of layers of ‘emic’ significance upon an independently given, ‘etic’ reality” (2000, 20).

This analytical shift has two consequences. First, by making the distinction between mental states and the “outside” environment meaningless, it questions the nature of reality. In the case of religious experience, this means, as Tanya Luhrmann writes in her work with Evangelical Christians, that believers “are not simply modelling the world according to different cognitive constraints [but that] in some fundamental sense, they live in a different world, which provides them with different evidence for their cognitive models than the secular observer may have” (2007, 99). The second related consequence regards the issue of learning to perceive spiritual entities. As Ingold (2001) aptly put it, perception is primarily an “education of attention” (see Gibson 1979, 254). If that is the case then, how does one learn to pay attention to spirits? This is a question which has recently emerged forcefully within anthropology (Berliner and Sarró 2007; Naumescu and Halloy 2012). The issue has been tackled previously by cognitive anthropologists who, in their

work, focused on the mechanisms which underpinned the transmission of religious beliefs (Boyer 1994; Sperber 1996). While recognizing the importance of such works, the recent anthropological approach to spiritual learning differs from them because it is primarily interested in the experiential aspect of religion. For instance, acknowledging that religious learning “is not merely a cold-blooded technical process of cognitive downloading” (Berliner and Sarró 2007, 10) but rather one which takes place in an intersubjective and cultural space, such research is interested in exploring the process by which people learn to feel and perceive the presence of God and other spiritual beings. Despite the self-evident fact that religion, as any other social process, is “learned,” Naumescu and Halloy rightly observed that “very few anthropologists considered the pragmatic conditions of transmission, that is the way contextual factors shape cognitive, perceptual and emotional processes” (2012, 166).

This remark also stands true in Amazonia where ethnography abounds with descriptions of encounters with nonhuman “invisible others.” Such others form part of what has been commonly described as an “animistic” or “perspectivist” landscape where animals, plants, spirits, and objects are attributed with (human-like) personhood and point of view.ⁱⁱⁱ Spirits figure prominently within the cosmology of Amazonian indigenous people and are often described in relation to shamanism, dreaming, and other ritual contexts (Chaumeil 1983; Grotti and Brightman 2016; Fausto 2008; Kopenawa and Albert 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2004). Despite the centrality of the spirit world, there is, however, relatively little on the phenomenological aspect of such encounters and even less on the experience of learning to perceive spirits. As Fernando Santos-Granero, one of the anthropologists most interested in exploring Amazonian sensorial experiences, points out: “scholars of perspectivism have not explored the sensorial dimension of this phenomenon of perspectivism, except to state that Amerindians attribute to animals, spirits, and other nonhuman beings the same cognitive and sensory faculties that they possess” (2006, 76). Yet some exceptions in the region demonstrate this to be a fruitful research path. For instance, Bernd Brabec de Mori (2012), working among the Peruvian Shipibo, describes how “voice-masking”—a technique by which ritual experts assume the voice of a nonhuman other—is a central tool for *experiencing* transformation into a nonhuman. Similarly, Andrea Gutierrez Choquevilca (2016) suggests that the process of mimicking nonhuman voices during ritual singing plays a central role, from a cognitive and pragmatic perspective, in the transmission of certain animistic representations among the Runa of the Peruvian Amazon. From a linguistic perspective, Pierre Déléage (2009) has analyzed how the substitution of evidential marking which occurs during shamanic initiation among the Peruvian Sharanahua enables the shaman to switch to a cognitive modality for which what is being enunciated is perceived as “true.” Shifting away from “the descriptive and explanatory quality of narratives” (Brabec de Mori 2012, 98), all these works point to the pragmatics which shape the perception of the spirit world as well as the importance of experience in the process of “learning” animism. It is exactly this pragmatic approach to experience which also guides my attempt to understand spirit perception among the Runa.

To return to my original ethnographic question: what does it mean, for the Runa, to perceive a supai? In the next pages, I will attempt to answer this question by purposefully taking a long route. I first look at the sensorial modalities through which supai beings are perceived in the depths of the rainforest. The Runa are very explicit with regards to the perception of supai: if you see (*ricunata*) a supai during wake life, you will instantly die. Seeing a supai with ordinary vision is a real impossibility: thus, the existence of supai beings can only be accessed through other sensorial modalities. Rather than invisible, it would be more correct to state, as Grégory Delaplace notices in his work on the perception of ghosts among Mongolian herders, that supai spirits “are perceivable only by some people, in certain contexts, and in a particular way” (2013, 52). Spirit encounters are thus governed by a specific “regime of communication” (Delaplace 2013; see also Taylor 1993) which differs from any other nonhuman-human exchange.

In their descriptions of supai encounters, the Runa emphasize two sensory modalities over others through which they come to know supai beings: smelling and dreaming.^{iv} I will explore these modalities in the first sections of this article. I will then look at one particular condition which is

necessary for any supai encounter to take place: being alone. Finally, I will consider the important question of why some Runa people are more susceptible to supai encounters than others. This ethnographic observation directly feeds into the question how one learns to perceive supai beings. Why do some people happen to experience forest beings more than others? Answering these questions will force us to take into account local understanding of the self and learning and push the limits of what an ecological approach to spiritual experience should include. But before anticipating too much, let us now turn to the pragmatics of the sensorial experience of supai beings.

Smell Like a Supai Spirit

Throughout my fieldwork, I have come to greatly appreciate Runa ability to perceive and discriminate between different kinds of smell. When in the forest, Runa children often lean over a tree, sniffing the humid bark to then whisper to each other with a satisfied grin: “A deer has been here!” I sometimes bent forward and inhaled too, but smelled nothing, or at least nothing different from the mixture of moss and putrescent leaves which impregnates the forest. During our treks, my Runa hosts seemed to be able to detect a variety of different odors, from the sweet scent of rotten fruits to the pungent smell of tapir sweat. All these are referred to by the Runa with the same term: *asna*.

Smell is for the Runa an important sensorial modality in everyday life, but it is even more important when it comes to perceiving nonhuman agents such as spirits and ghosts. For instance, one day I was sitting with my host brother Jairo and sister Eva and their cousins when suddenly Jairo stopped talking and asked: “What is this smell?” We all paused for a second. A light smell of burnt plastic was lingering in the room. Jairo urged his younger cousin to go to the kitchen to check if something was burning in the fireplace, but it turned out this was empty. The smell concentrated in the precise spot we were sitting, stayed there for a minute, and then vanished. For Jairo, Eva, and his cousins, this was the evident sign a ghost had just passed by. Indeed, a smell whose source could not be directly located, is often considered to be a manifestation of the presence of an invisible entity like a ghost (*aya*) or a forest spirit (supai).

However, unlike the case of ghosts—which, as we will see, have a distinct ontological status from spirits—in encounters with forest spirits it is not only the “suddenness” which prompts the Runa to identify such olfactory experiences as uncanny but also *the quality* of the smell perceived. Indeed, not all sudden smells are taken as the troublesome appearance of supai beings. Forest spirits are generally thought to manifest themselves in two distinct ways: in the form of a revolting smell of rotten meat or animal sweat or, alternatively, as an enticing scent, something likened to the smell of blossoming flowers or industrial perfume. While both are associated with the presence of supai, these types of smells are thought to produce distinct effects. In the first case, the foul odor causes a state of illness (*huayra*) in the person who senses it, while in the second circumstance, the smell is thought to seduce the human person into a relationship with the spirit.

The first case is very common. Most Runa people I know have, at some stage, experienced a state of *huayra* which was attributed to the encounter with a supai. For instance, Flavio, a good friend of mine and the son of a neighbor in the village, once returned from a hunting trip feeling dizzy and weak. He recounted that, as he was chasing a white-lipped peccary, the animal entered a hole underground. He followed him in the underground cave, although he was aware it was a dangerous move. As Flavio stepped into the hole, he suddenly smelled a very “strong odor” (*sinchi asna*) which was “like tapir sweat but much stronger.” He described how the smell made him feel dizzy, and his head began “going in circles” (*uma muyuhuan*). He rushed outside to avoid fainting in the underground hole. When Flavio came back with nausea and a strong headache, he and his family had no doubt about what had happened: Flavio had encountered the owner of white-lipped peccaries, who lives underground with his army of peccaries and he had tried to take his life. The foul smell permeated Flavio’s body and left him debilitated.

Cases such as Flavio’s are usually healed with a ritual known as *huayrata anchuchina* which is performed by an old knowledgeable person. The ritual involves the burning and smoking of tobacco, the manipulation of some fragrant leaves (*tsuan panga* and *asnac panga*), and the use of industrial perfume. The healer begins by cutting some pieces of a dark palm wood called *chonta*

and places them into the fire until they become carbonized. Meanwhile he or she lights up a tobacco cigar and smokes it all over the patient's body. The kitchen, the place where the ritual usually takes place, soon becomes filled with the smell of wood and tobacco smoke. Then the healer grabs the leafy branches of *tsuan panga* and *asnac panga* and begins to whip the patient's body with them. She puts some perfume in his mouth and blows it in the air. Smoking tobacco and spitting perfume onto the patient's head, she then rubs the body with the carbonized wood. Leaning forward, she heavily breathes onto the *corona*—the top of the head which is conceived as a fundamental point of passage of breaths, substances, and smells.^v Although such rituals vary in the kind of materials used or in the sequence of actions undertaken, they all terminate with a specific gesture performed by the healer in the midst of tobacco smoke and aromatic vapors whereby he sniffs the head of the sick person and says aloud: "*Phuuuu! Asnac man!*" (It stinks!). Sometimes family members join in the sniffing, and each person takes turn sniffing the patient's head and expressing disgust. This concluding passage is fundamental as the foul smell emanating from the patient's head is the tangible proof that the illness has indeed been caused by a supai. The sickness is thought to gradually leave the body under the form of a foul smell. Healing sessions are usually repeated until this fetid odor ceases to be excreted from the person's head.

As Glenn Shepard reports for the Matsigenka and the Yora of the Peruvian Amazon, smell appears as a central sensor modality through which healing is accomplished. In particular, the Runa seem to subscribe to a "pneumatic-allopathic theory of efficacy" (2004, 253) whereby each material exhales an odor which displaces the one left by the supai. During the healing, the odor of smoke, tobacco, perfume, and carbon are explicitly described as counteracting the foul smell which affected the sick body. As a research participant aptly put it, the healing ritual is a real "therapy through smell" (*terapia a través del olor*). The healing seems to work by enacting the same principle governing the process of getting sick. Just like supai smell is said to engender in the person a state of "trauma," during healing sessions the illness gets "traumatized" by the strong smell of tobacco, perfume, and the aroma of burnt wood and is induced to leave the body. This understanding is in line with Runa belief that supai beings are repelled by certain human odors such as tobacco. For instance, Runa people who live in the city often irrigate the borders of their backyard garden with toilet detergent as a means to prevent supai from entering the house. Supai beings are also said to "dislike" urban areas because they cannot stand the smell of gasoline produced by cars. Likewise, during healing rituals, the illness caused by supai is described as "becoming disoriented and drunk" because of the strong smell of tobacco and of other substances and finally comes out of the body.

What I would like to draw attention to, now, is the way in which smell is conceived to affect one's interior state. To do so, I will look at the second type of smell which is taken as a manifestation of supai agency: the case of enticing smell. As mentioned earlier, supai do not only make their appearance through a sudden foul smell but also under the form of a fragrant perfume which resembles eau de Cologne. Usually, this smell is associated with a supai who wants to seduce and kidnap a human person. This was the experience of Juan, a 20-year-old Runa man who entertained for a few months a relationship with a supai woman. He first became aware of her presence in the forest when he perceived an enticing smell during a hunting trip. He could not figure out where it came from, since no other human person was around. The smell—a mixture of industrial perfume and deodorant—kept following him, "just like a human person." In the stories he recounted about the supai woman, he remembered her sweet scent and described its effects on him using a telling expression: "*Uma muyuhan*," which literally means "my head goes in circles." As one might recall, this is the same expression used by Flavio to describe the sensation he experienced when he chased the peccary in the underground hole.

Significantly, expressions such as "my head goes in circles" or "trauma," which are used to describe the experiences of smelling supai beings, are also commonly deployed to denote the effects of drinking *ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*, the hallucinogenic vine used in shamanic rituals) and alcohol consumption. Indeed, in his story, Juan alternated the expression "*traumado*" (traumatized) with the adjective "*machashca*" which literally means "drunk" and again is used to describe the

state of dizziness and confusion caused by both the ingestion of *ayahuasca* and alcohol. What I wish to suggest here is that all these three states—the olfactory experience of supai, *ayahuasca* drinking, and alcohol consumption—while different from each other, share a common characteristic: they are contexts where “normal” perception fails.

Take for instance, the drinking of the hallucinogenic vine known as *ayahuasca*. For the Runa, the ritual drinking of *ayahuasca* is a primary means to access a reality which is not readily visible.^{vi} Seeing through *ayahuasca* is being witness to another world, a reality known as *ucu pacha*, “the time and space of the *supai*” (Viteri 1993, 149). In this world, animals and plants show their human form and hills and caves reveal a geography of subterranean metropolises inhabited by a variety of supai. During the visions, the drinker meets other nonhuman beings, exchanges knowledge with them, and can know the future. Such experiences are highly valued sources of knowledge about the world. To gain the clearer visions of *ayahuasca*, however, one has to abandon everyday perception and enter a state of exceptional visionary and auditory perception. This transition—from the ingestion of the hallucinogenic liquid to the moment in which “normal” perception is abandoned—is defined as “*machai japisha*,” literally, “becoming drunk.” It is described as a moment where vision becomes blurry and thousands of flashing lights come to occupy the vision field. Noises and buzzes fill the drinker’s ears, and one has the sensation of spinning around. Once *ayahuasca* takes off, these senses acquire an extraordinary character: the drinker is said to be able to hear the roar of a jaguar (or the gossip of people) from miles of distance as well as to discern the human qualities of trees and animals.

Like *ayahuasca* experiences, states of drunkenness are similarly characterized by the abandonment of one’s normal perception. For the Runa, people who get drunk often act “crazily” (*nusparishca*) since they are no longer able to see and hear normally. Their sensorial ability is weakened. However, unlike in *ayahuasca*, the perceptual confusion caused by alcohol intoxication only brings about negative consequences. While during *ayahuasca* people abandon normal perception to acquire a superior perceptual awareness, when drunk people are deemed unable to think well and are thus susceptible of losing their usual self-restraint and let strong emotions out, thus causing fights and conflicts. During such states, like in dream and *ayahuasca* visions, a person’s soul is more likely to be harmed by some malignant action from human and nonhuman agents. This suggests that the loss of “normal” perception endangers the stability of one’s soul which can be attacked and invaded by external forces.

By explicitly associating smell with such experiences, the Runa point at the capacity of odors to affect people by changing “normal” perception and inducing a confusional state. This might have to do not only with the kinds of smells involved but also to the specific environmental properties of smell. For instance, like auditory phenomena, smells cannot simply be avoided. Without belonging to a particular visible body, smell propagates and envelops the perceiver. It may be these characteristics which render smell the perfect vehicle for supai agency: beings can either “traumatize” a human subject and make him sick or tempt him into a relationship. In both cases, smell produces a change in the way one thinks/perceives in ways which parallel alcohol and *ayahuasca* consumption. By affecting one’s capacity for distinguishing between different kinds of realities, supai smell opens up the possibility of abandoning a uniquely human perspective and thus of falling prey to the world of nonhuman beings. While such uncanny olfactory experiences constitute an initial point of contact with the supai world, it is necessary to observe that they become truly dangerous only when followed by dreams.

Dreaming Supai People

Dreaming is, for the Runa, an essential part of life. The Runa sleep in houses without walls or doors, all together, lying next to each other. Night is certainly not a time for uninterrupted sleep as people keep waking up throughout the night to tell each other what they have dreamt. As Eduardo Kohn has beautifully described for the Ávila Runa, at night “dreams spill into wakefulness and wakefulness into dreams in a way that entangles them both” (2013, 13). And yet, despite the smooth transition from states of wake to those of dreaming and vice versa, the Runa clearly distinguish the vision they have in dreams (*muscuña*) from ordinary vision (*ricuña*). As elsewhere

in Amazonia, the main difference between these two kinds of “seeing” is the reality they have access to (see Viveiros de Castro [1998] 2012; cf. Peluso 2005). Through dreaming, Runa people are able to see the invisible forms of the world which are not otherwise perceptible during wake life. Along with *ayahuasca*, dreaming is a primary way through which the Runa can see and communicate with nonhuman beings. For this reason, dreaming is closely associated with shamanism as well as knowledge. The Runa term for dreaming, “*musku*,” is also used to refer to shamanic vision or prophecies (Whitten and Whitten 2008). Dreams are not conceived by the Runa, as in the Freudian tradition, to be the expression of unconscious and preconscious thought which stems from one’s repressed desires and is triggered by psychic events which take place during wake life. For Runa people, the origins of dreams always lay with others. It is others’ agency—not your unconscious—which cause you to dream (in Kichwa, *muscuchihuanga*; see also Bilhaut 2011; Muratorio 1987).^{vii}

To give an example, one day my host Ana and I walked to gather fruits deep near a lagoon deep in the forest. On the same night, Ana dreamt of a black man sneaking into her bed. She did not push him away but rather asked him who he was. He answered that he was her husband. She let him enter into her bed. However, she suddenly regained consciousness and replied that she already had a husband, Jorge. Then she suddenly woke up and told me the dream. She said that the supai living in the lagoon had “made her dream.”

This understanding of dreaming is underscored by a particular ontology of the self. Runa people claim that all beings—including stones, animals, and forest spirits—possess one or more souls (*alma*). In dream, these souls can travel freely from one place to another. Because of this free circulation of souls, dreaming is conceived as a fundamental source of knowledge. Through dreaming, people have access to the world of animals and other nonhuman entities with which they establish a dialogue. Such encounters are an important source of knowledge (*yachai*) and simultaneously a delicate and dangerous affair. For instance, in a dream told me by a young boy, he was given a shiny sword from his dead grandfather. The grandfather told him the sword would keep him safe from the attacks of enemies. Since then, he often dreams of the sword and attributes his strength and well-being to it. Another friend of mine, a man in his fifties, told me once that he had recently woken up amidst an uncontrollable fear. He had dreamt that a stranger had stolen the feathered headdress he usually wore in his dreams. He understood the removal of the headdress as an attack on his vital force and promptly sought a shaman to find out who had harmed him. As a state in which souls migrate from one place to another, dreaming constitutes both an opportunity to acquire knowledge as well as a threat to one’s strength and vitality.

It is within this dream world dominated by predation that supai make their appearance. They are often ambivalent figures. They look like white or foreign people and inhabit large underground cities. They can give advice and help the dreamer to heal from a disease or to guide them. On the other hand, supai can also attempt to seduce the human dreamer by offering some food or inviting him to visit the supai world. For instance, Juan recalls a dream he had in which a supai girl invited him to pack his clothes and follow her along a path made of flowers. He said that he was about to walk off with her because the flowers were blossoming and sweet-smelling but, all of a sudden, his younger sister, who was sleeping nearby, woke up and hugged him tightly. He then woke up too and could not fall back asleep again. Thinking retrospectively, Juan said his sister had in fact “rescued” him by impeding his departure to the supai world where the girl wanted to bring him. Writing about the Yaneshas of the Peruvian Amazon, Santos-Granero (2003) writes that household heads repeatedly wake everyone up at night to prevent their souls being captured by dream enemies. Here a similar assumption seems to be at work: Juan’s sister intervenes to rescue her brother from the dangerous dream by waking him up. Indeed, the intervention of kin during dreamtime is frequent. Pablo, the other young man who met a supai woman, told me that he had a dream in which he was sitting with his parents together with the supai girl’s kin. They were happily chatting and laughing together. Pablo felt very happy as he deeply loved the supai girl. However, when the girl’s mother offered manioc beer to his parents, they steadily refused to drink it. Pablo suddenly

woke up feeling upset and resentful of his parents' rejection. "They did it to help me," he said; "but I felt very angry at them."

In this ethnographic example, Pablo's parents do not wake him up directly but, by refusing to drink, they explicitly reject the relationship with supai beings. The Runa often insist that it is important not to drink or eat any food received in dream: to do otherwise will likely lead to illness or transformation into a nonhuman form. In this particular case, the acceptance of manioc beer by Pablo's parents would have stipulated an agreement between them and the supai world, and Pablo's soul would have been irremediably lost. In both instances, kin action is what forces the two young boys to return to wake life and thus to recognize themselves as kin, as humans. Such examples forcefully point to another essential characteristic of supai encounters: the "lonely" condition of the human perceiver. In the next section, I consider the quality of being alone in relation to the perception of supai and Runa understandings of the self.

An Ecology of Selves

As my ethnography has shown, encounters with supai beings only occur within a specific "ecological" condition: when someone is without human company, usually deep in the forest. This solitary experience is what differentiates the experience of perceiving other invisible entities, such as ghosts, from supai. While the former can manifest themselves to multiple people simultaneously, the encounter with a supai is always an experience, an intimate one-to-one meeting between a human and a nonhuman. However, the solutions to counteract supai agency can only work if they are collectively orchestrated by fellow human beings: as the dream examples I discussed above demonstrate, only a concerted human effort (i.e., the intervention of relatives) can prevent people from falling prey to supai beings. The reason as to why this might be so has to do, I believe, with the specific ontological status of supai beings.

Ghosts, the other invisible entity which sometimes appear to Runa people, have no specific independent existence from humans. Ghosts are dead people, transient traces of a past human life. While some Runa may concede that ghosts live in a place called "hell," ghosts are not thought to lead a human-like life in an alternative reality. When explicitly asked, Runa people evasively answer to the questions about the details of ghosts' world. Nobody really knows or thinks about it much. On the contrary, most Runa have clear ideas about supai reality. Unlike ghosts, supai have bodies and an existence independent to those of humans. It is because of this specific ontological status as powerful beings living in *another world* and possessing *another body* that they can deeply affect humans. The solitary character of supai encounters thus needs to be located in a specific understanding of the self which has been famously described as "perspectivist" by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro ([1998] 2012). A main tenet of the Amazonian perspectivist model is that, while the soul is conceived by Amazonian people to be the same for all beings, what makes each species different is their body. As Luis Costa and Carlos Fausto put it, "the common soul guarantees that each species sees itself as human, sharing in human culture and language, but different bodies ensure that each species sees others differently" (2010, 94). It is exactly because of this common "soul" or "culture" that the risk of transforming into "other" is always latent. As a human status depends exclusively on bodily habits and behaviors (and not on an abstract human soul), it needs to be constantly maintained through the sharing of foods, substances, and through specific "human" practices (Vilaça 2002).

Within this perspective then, one can understand why Runa people only experience supai beings when alone. Being alone is a moment in which humans are most susceptible to falling prey to a kind of ontological confusion. No supai can succeed in seducing a human when she or he is surrounded by fellow human beings.^{viii} This is because the presence of others guarantees her solid place as a human amongst others. Carlos Fausto (2007) has argued that this is exactly the point of commensality in Amazonia: eating together ensures that a similar point of view is shared, that everyone sees food as the same unambiguous object.

We can view thus parental interventions as ways to ensure that a human perspective is maintained. Let us take the example of Pablo, who had a long-lasting love story with a supai woman (which resulted in his temporary disappearance in the forest mentioned at the beginning of

this article). When his parents finally found out, they forbid him from going hunting alone. His two younger brothers always went with him. In addition, every morning his grandmother rubbed his body with paint, wild garlic, and creolin. The smell, she assured me, would keep the supai at bay. Pablo's grandmother was literally making his body "human"—and thus different from that of a supai—through smell. Similarly, Juan sister's action of waking him up described earlier could be considered as powerful way to restore his human perspective. At this regard, it is important to notice that dangerous dreams such as the ones mentioned in the previous section can be "neutralized" or "controlled" by sharing them with other people. Dream encounters with supai beings are in fact a threat only if they are kept for one's self, that is, not subject to the perspectives of fellow human beings.

While so far I have emphasized the dangers of meeting supai, I should stress that if such encounters are properly managed—that is, shared with other fellow human beings—they acquire an immense value. As among other societies in Amazonia, someone who entertains a relationship with forest beings is said to receive gifts of meat or fish and to acquire some extraordinary knowledge. This productive dimension of supai encounters, whereby these latter bestow humans with gifts of game, should not be overlooked as it highlights the profound relationship which exists between perception and action (Ingold 2000): it is in fact only within the practical activities of hunting, fishing, and gathering in the forest that supai emerge. The perception of supai is inextricable from the tropical landscape and the "cosmic food-web" (Arnhem 1996) in which humans and nonhumans are embedded: indeed, it is no coincidence that urban areas are places where, according to the Runa, supai cannot exist.

Finally, there is another issue which is essential for understanding the perception of supai beings among the Runa: the relationship between corporeal transformation and learning. As I mentioned earlier, supai being are not perceived equally by all people. Although all Runa can experience supai beings, not everyone does it with the same intensity or frequency. This is not because some people are thought to be innately predisposed to experiencing supai but rather because such persons have undergone a specific bodily training or transformation. As we will see in the next section, it is this kind of corporeal learning which makes the difference in perception.

Learning to Meet a Supai: Transforming the Body

In the aftermath of Pablo's disappearance with the supai woman, his family gathered in his parents' house. The recent happenings were, of course, the central topic of conversation. Pouring manioc beer in Pablo's drinking bowl, his grandmother stood in front of him and sighed that she knew all too well that one day he could have been taken away. She continued, addressing Pablo's father and mother: "We raised him (*huiñachishca*) with diet (*sasihuan*); the supai could smell that! His body only smelled of forest!" The statement—upon which everyone silently agreed—referred to Pablo's every day practice of fasting, which he had undertaken since he was a small child. "Diet" (*sasi*) is a word which denotes a period of a specific bodily regimen which includes, among other things, the drinking of herbal concoctions, abstinence from sexual relationships, baths in cold water, and self-instigated vomiting. These practices are carried out in the intimacy of the house, alone or in the company of family members, and are considered to be part of normal daily life.

While many of such practices were once common for apprentice shamans, they are not, by any means, restricted to them only. Many Runa undertake these practices as a means to strengthen their bodies and be able to carry out activities such as hunting, gardening, and so on. These *techniques du corp*, to use the Maussian expression, aim to make one "strong" (*sinchi*) and "knowledgeable" (*yachayuc*). They work by affecting one's *samai*, life force. The vital force everyone is born with is gradually accrued by the ingestion and penetration of other vital substances. This kind of somatic learning is based upon a specific understanding of the body as a fluid, permeable entity capable of incorporating the qualities or "vitalities" of other beings, including plants, objects, and animals. This is what Santos-Granero called a "constructional approach" to selfhood, whereby people are understood as "resulting from the creational, generative, and socializing contributions of a variety of human and nonhuman entities and, therefore, as possessing compound anatomies and subjectivities" (2012, 181).

This is a pattern of personhood widespread in Amazonian societies. As mentioned above, in Amazonia, bodies are conceived as the locus of a human perspective and as such, they are constantly shaped and modified by various techniques which include tattooing, facial painting, the ingestion of substances, and so on. As Cecilia McCallum puts it “all the myriad materials that impinge upon or enter the child's body, whether in a controlled fashion or simply through chance contact, form its particular individuality” (1996, 354). People thus become knowledgeable through bodily modifications, substance ingestion, and other kinds of somatic practices. For instance, Runa people periodically drink infusions made of medicinal plants, which are thought to be “strong,” to acquire some of their strength. As elsewhere in Amazonia, these body modifications are understood as a kind of learning or training.

This does not mean that other forms of learning are not acknowledged. For instance, Runa people highly appreciate the role played by observation and imitation in becoming productive and skilled members of society. It is thought, for instance, that pottery making (a female occupation) can be learned by watching and imitating other women. Young boys are thought to learn hunting by observing closely the movements and techniques of more experienced hunters as well as by paying attention to animal behavior. However, for all these cases, the Runa also strongly emphasize the role played by other kinds of “learning.” For instance, when talking about their experiences of learning pottery making, many skilled potters mention, as a professional turning point, the dream encounter with *mangallpa apamama*, the “grandmother” and owner of Clay. This dream appearance is considered foundational to becoming a master potter. While acknowledging “normal” learning, the Runa generally think that “extraordinary knowledge” (Santos-Granero 2006, 67)—that which happens through intercession of one’s soul or vital force—is far more important than everyday learning. This extraordinary kind of learning which happens in dream or via bodily exchange is what makes the difference in the perception of supai beings.

A training by smell is one of these extraordinary practices which predispose Runa people to the experiences of supai. When Pablo’s grandmother in the opening paragraph of this section referred to the good smell Pablo’s body had developed, she referred to a specific “olfactory” training which some Runa people undergo as early as after birth. For instance, when a baby is born, he is readily bathed with a bitter, pungent-smelling plant known as *tzicta*. This is thought to remove the unpleasant smell associated with childbirth blood which is said to accumulate inside the baby’s body and harm him. Every time a baby is born then, he and the people who are present at his birth are thoroughly washed with *tzicta*. This initial olfactory training (which happens to most babies) can be continued throughout childhood and adolescence through the daily practice of bathing with herbal plants. Ingestion of bitter plants as well as the avoidance of particular strong-smelling foods make the body smell good. In a document written by some Runa indigenous leaders on shamanic apprenticeship, *sasi* was described as a means through which the body acquires “the same breath and smell of plants. The smell of the forest.”

According to the Runa, dreaming too is a capacity which can be developed. During my fieldwork, I recall feeling slightly embarrassed when asked enthusiastically about what I had dreamt at night. I was usually only able to recall only a few fragments of my dreams and, often, none at all. In any case, the narrations of even my most vivid dreams only lasted a few minutes.^{ix} My Runa friends instead narrated their dreams in a very vivid manner, giving lengthy descriptions and punctuating their stories with details. And they did so on a daily basis! Among the Runa, since an early age, everyone is encouraged to dream and share their dreams. In addition to nocturnal dream telling, people continue to discuss dreams at dawn, during daily tasks and even, in case of a particularly significant dream, after days. I interpreted my lack of dreaming abilities as a cultural deficiency: I obviously had not developed the skills necessary to be a good dreamer.

My Runa friends, however, did not attribute my poor dreaming skills to my lack of familiarity with certain nocturnal practices—the repeated waking up throughout the night and the constant telling of dreams—but to a lack of *samai* (vital force). This could be reinforced only through a corporeal “training” which involved, among other things, the inhalation of tobacco juice and the drinking of dream-inducing plants. Santos-Granero similarly describes how the Yanasha of

the Peruvian Amazon use certain herbal vaporizations to cultivate one's self-awareness during dreams. Anthropologist Anne-Gaël Bilhaut (2011), who has worked with Zapara people in Amazonian Ecuador, compiled a list of practices which the Zapara undertake to have "clearer" dreams, including the use of plant concoctions, fasting, and other bodily techniques which strengthen one's *samai*. Learning to dream, in other words, from a Runa perspective, does not happen through *techniques du corps* such as collective remembering of dreams, repeated nocturnal awakenings, and the like but rather, through somatic, "extraordinary" means: the acquisition of vital force from plants, tobacco, and so on. Equally, in the above-mentioned example of olfactory training, the Runa don't understand the process of learning through smell as a practice of association—learning to "associate" some smells with some contexts/phenomena (although they might not necessarily deny that learning also occurs this way)—but rather they understand smell as engendering a real transformation.

From an analytical perspective, the practices explored so far sit uncomfortably within a learning paradigm. While it is easy to see why continuous interruptions of sleep, the daily recollection of dreams, and so on constitute effective techniques for developing self-awareness and for remembering one's dreams, it is more difficult to make sense of the claim that, through specific substances, people learn to dream. What I want to emphasize, concisely, is that this specific Runa understanding of learning escapes our paradigm for thinking about processes of knowledge acquisition and transmission. Even models which acknowledge that learning is a form of bodily enskillment, such as Bourdieu's (1977) or Mauss' (1950 [1935]), cannot account for the kind of learning which, for the Runa as for many other Amazonian indigenous people, takes place through the transfer of substances or the modifications of the body and soul.

The question which I want to ask here is: how can people learn about supai beings through this specific learning? Or, turning the question upside down: how do specific theories of learning inform Runa ability to perceive supai? To go beyond considering such claims as metaphors, we need to think about the ways in which such bodily modifications *do* in fact constitute a kind of perceptual training.

This is a difficult question to answer. Anthropologists working on the relationship between learning and religion have generally explored how people learn to perceive religious entities through specific techniques. For instance, in her path-breaking study on learning to hear the voice of God, Tanya Luhrmann (2012) shows how a specific cultivation of attention to one's inner self helps Evangelicals to experience God as present. In particular, she shows how such sensorial perception of God is actively learned through the technique of prayer which "manipulates the way the person praying attends to his or her own mind" (Luhrmann and Morgain 2012, 33). Is there something about the Runa corporeal training which parallels what Luhrmann describes with regards to prayer technology?

At a first glance, the Amazonian context I have described so far couldn't be more different from the Evangelical case. Here, we have no institutionalized religion, and Runa people, unlike American Evangelicals, do not "strive" to perceive spiritual entities. Furthermore, none of the training practices which I identified as influencing supai perception explicitly aim to "teach" the Runa to perceive supai beings; rather, these techniques aim to shape strong bodies and life forces which, in turn, result in characteristics that are thought to attract supai beings.^x The main difficulty here is that encounters with spirits seem to happen *effortlessly*. In a comment to Luhrmann's work, Aparecida Vilaça, who works among the 'Wari of the Brazilian Amazon, elaborates exactly on this point. Describing the perception of invisible jaguars during a shamanic ritual, Vilaça argues that among the 'Wari, "shamans do not undergo perceptual training" (2013, 361). In her reply to Vilaça's commentary, Luhrmann insists that, even among the 'Wari, where people do not doubt the existence of invisible entities, there must be "some kind of sensory training" (2013, 390).

I think that among the Runa there is some kind of sensory training involved in the perception of supai as Luhrmann suggests, but the form of this training might transcend our common understanding of learning (hence Vilaça's claim that nobody learns about spirits; indeed, like the 'Wari, none of my Runa friends undergo perceptual "training" straightforwardly

recognizable as “learning”). The model described by Luhmann (2013), for which religious practice is about learning to experience the mind in a different way, is underscored by a notion of personhood where the limits between the self and the external world are clearly demarcated and learning is thus commonly conceived as a process of incorporating outside knowledge in the brain. Among the Runa, where the boundaries between the body and external agents are understood as being permeable, learning is not thought of as a process by which information from the outside is processed into the brain but rather is a corporeal change which affects the entire organism or parts of it.^{xi} Again, the issue here seems to revolve around the question of whether such a different understanding of personhood can affect the way one effectively learns to experience forest spirits.

While I have no easy answer to this question, I believe that attention, and in particular, “self-attention,” may play a key role in learning to experience supai. Self-attention could be defined, in the words of Jason Throop, as “an attention shaped according to personal and cultural dictates so as to affect the ways in which he or she monitors and interprets changes in his or her bodily sensations and functions” (2012, 413). Bodily practices such as the ingestion of herbal concoctions, ritual vomiting, and smell therapies shape Runa self-attention in a specific way. Runa “fasting” is not only a way to train the senses or to “fine-tune” attention towards the “outside” (or what we might perceive as “outside”),^{xii} but importantly, fasting is also a way to learn to experience yourself in a very distinct mode. All the practices which compose *sasi*—herbal vaporizations, ingestion of liquid substances, abstinence from eating strong-smelling foods, and so on—center on the penetrability and the porosity of corporeal boundaries. If one learns to perceive one’s body and one’s soul as fluid and permeable, always subject to penetration and attacks, this is how she might come to experience it. In other words, I suggest that through practices which invite the perception of the body as open, one eventually ends up by having an “open” body. There is more: within this process, not only is one’s personhood felt as “open,” but others—those who makes up the “environment”—are also perceived as fluid and penetrable. Indeed, when Vilaça comments that “only the self-contained individual as a starting point enables us to ask questions such as: is the intimate relation with God a hallucination (God is just mind) or a real dialogue (God is a real exterior being)?” (2013, 361), she is correct: this is a question no Runa would even conceive. It in this sense, in the recognition of one’s self and others’ as mutually impinging that we can understand animism, of which the supai experience forms part, as developing a “mutual attention” (Ingold 2013, 32).

Conclusions

In this article, I explored Runa encounters with forest spirits through a phenomenological perspective. In what I have called an ecology of spiritual perception, I showed how spirits become manifest through two main sensory modalities, smelling and dreaming. I have also argued that encounters with supai need to be located within a specific way of inhabiting the forest.

In the second part of the article, I pointed out that those who are more likely to encounter supai beings are people who have undergone a period of ritual “fasting.” This, I argued, has to do with the specific learning which occurs during practices of *sasi* and, in particular, to the development of a certain feeling in which one perceives himself as “open” to the agencies of others. I believe this observation prompts the need, as Diana Espirito Santo wrote, of “not just taking local ontological assumptions seriously ... but also [of] recognizing that such ontologies may have effects beyond epistemology” (2012, 254).

Many questions remain to be addressed, but one, in particular, seems urgent. Through *sasi* and other practices, the Runa seem to cultivate an awareness that one’s body is inherently (and dangerously) permeable to the agencies of others. This emphasis on the porosity of corporeal boundaries is well documented all over indigenous Amazonia (McCallum 1996; Rosengren 2006; Santos-Granero 2012; Walker 2013). Since I have spoken about the practices of *sasi* as engendering a transformation, a question logically follows: does my assertion imply that the feeling of a “bounded” personhood is the starting point from which develops a more porous, “open” experience? In other words, is it correct to assume a feeling of boundedness as the default condition of human beings?

If one turns to recent trends in embodied cognition, the answer seems to be negative. Gibsonian approaches to psychology as well as theories of enactivism (Chemero 2009; Noë 2009; Varela, Thomson, and Rosch 1991) unanimously share the conviction that no straightforward separation between the self and the environment can be assumed. Since the self is constituted by the continuous material interactions with the environment, no person can be said to be impervious to the effects of others.

Given this evidence and comparing my experience with that of my Runa friends, I wonder how it is that the anthropologist (and presumably other people from the culture she belongs) can feel relatively impermeable to certain external agencies. With this assertion I do not wish to draw a clear-cut distinction between Western experiences of boundedness and a non-Western “open” personhood—a distinction which Melford Spiro (1993) famously criticized long ago—or to suggest that the latter is an inherently more desirable attitude. As my own ethnography shows, among the Runa, we witness to an omnipresent preoccupation with “closing” the body to avoid unwanted transformations. At the same time, it would be hazardous to claim that Western experiences of personhood are intrinsically characterized by a feeling of immunity to “external” agents. The question could then be reframed as such: how does the anthropologist learn to feel relatively impermeable to certain entities, for instance smells, spirits, and dreams? What kinds of corporeal practices foster such an experience? And, on a more general level, what is the relationship between spirit perception and conceptions of personhood?

Exploring the ways in which people learn to feel “contained,” so to speak, and invulnerable to certain phenomena (but not others) seems to be a promising departure for investigating further spiritual encounters. Tracing how the experience of a bounded “mind” (Makari 2015) is shaped by everyday bodily techniques and practices of attention is not only ethnographically interesting but also ethically important, since this very familiar notion of personhood is often the yardstick by which we measure others’ experiences of mind and body and the “reality” of their worlds.

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Notes

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ⁱ This article is based upon ethnographic materials gathered during 30 months of fieldwork in rural communities in the Pastaza region of Amazonian Ecuador. Runa people from this area live mostly on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and hunting as well as some informal labor.

ⁱⁱ Until two generations ago, most people in the Bobonaza area lived in their purina, occasionally visiting the mission centers/schools. Today, the most isolated purina outposts are occupied for long periods of time only during the school vacations.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a more complete account of Amazonian cosmologies, one can refer to the works by Philippe Descola (2013), Fernando Santos-Granero (2012), Terence Turner (2009), Viveiros de Castro ([1998] 2012), or the exhaustive review of animist ontologies by Costa and Fausto (2010).

^{iv} While certain sounds—such as acute cries, human-like whistles, and some bird calls—were also understood as manifestations of supai, most of the Runa I know emphasize far more the experiences of smelling and dreaming. For an in-depth study about the relationship between sound and supai perception among the Runa of Peru, see Gutierrez Choquevilca (2017).

^v The corona is also the place where shamans breathe to infuse the person with their vital force.

^{vi} Ayahuasca was traditionally used by Runa shamans to perform healing rituals. During ayahuasca visions, shamans were able to see the origins of the illness and to suck it out from the patient's body (Chango 1984) <<AU, provide citation for reference section>>. While traditionally a shamanic practice, today ayahuasca is prepared and drunk by lay Runa people.

^{vii} Usually it is people with dream power, such as shamans, forest spirits, animals, or even powerful objects, which cause one to dream. While some dreams may not have any clear "author" behind it (for example, in the case of omen dreams), most are thought to be caused by one's soul encounter with other beings.

^{viii} As noticed by other Amazonianist ethnographers, it is the loneliness of the hunter which makes him prone to seduction by nonhuman spirits (Opas 2005; Santos-Granero 2012, 203).

^{ix} There is ample evidence in lucid-dreaming literature that such techniques enhance the quality and length of dreaming and thus that anyone can "train" into lucid dreaming (LaBerge and Rheingold 1990).

^x It could be argued from another perspective that such bodily techniques are purposefully undertaken to attract supai beings since the relationship with a supai, if managed carefully, can bring about positive outcomes. Shamans, for instance, are able to entertain relationships with supai without losing sight of their own humanity and receive, in exchange, special knowledge.

^{xi} This does not mean that, for instance, Evangelical Christians do not learn through the body (indeed Luhrmann's ethnography shows that it is exactly through embodied practices that they come to experience God), but rather that, given their assumptions about the nature of personhood, the training techniques deployed in the process necessarily pivot on mental states.

^{xiii} Following this observation, we should be careful not to understand "ecology" as referring to the "world outside" (Ingold 2000, 17) but rather, as Ingold writes, citing Bateson, as "organism plus environment" (Bateson 1973 <<AU, provide citation for reference section>> in Ingold 2000, 18).