



Anent

News of the Jivaroan people

ALESSANDRO PIGNOCCHI
FOREWORD BY PHILIPPE DESCOLA



STEINKIS



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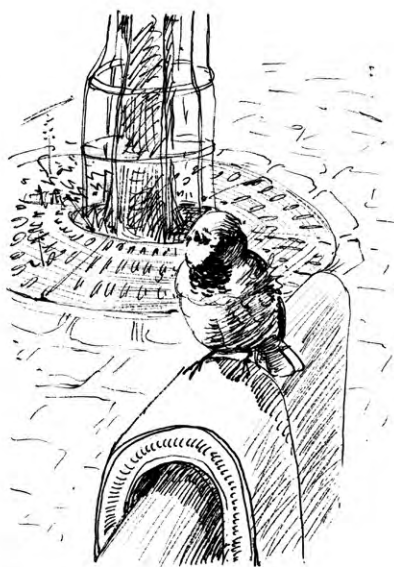
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Foreword by Philippe Descola



Philippe Descola's *Spears of Twilight* is about the three years he and his wife, Anne-Christine Taylor, spent among the Achuar people- the most isolated tribe of the Jivaroan groups.



The two anthropologists were graciously welcomed at Wajari's place, in return for a machete and a piece of fabric for each of his three wives.



« Without a word, Wajari sat down on his small wooden sculpted stool... He had been gone since dawn to hunt with his blowpipe, and had recently come back, a big white-lipped peccary loaded on his back. When he walked in, wives and children went silent, pretending not to care about this top-notch game... With a booming voice, the master of the house suddenly shouted:



You drink Nijiamanch following the rules of propriety, which I got familiar with after a few days. You always start to learn about an unknown culture thanks to food and eating behavior."



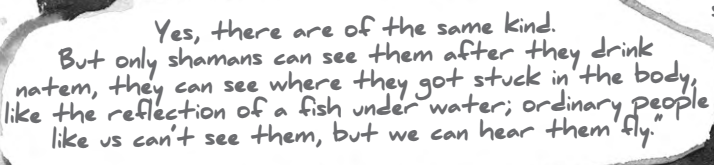
I read Descola's research years after I visited my first Amazonian communities...

...When I was eighteen, with friends...



Of course they weren't Achuar people – far too isolated and of whom we had never heard of anyhow – but Shuar people, another tribe of the Jivaroan group. Small communities, a few kilometers away from the last villages, had started to open up to tourists who wanted to try ayawaska – “natem”, for Shuar and Achuar people – a highly psychotropic drink.





After cooling down the tsentsak darts he found, stuck in his patient's body...

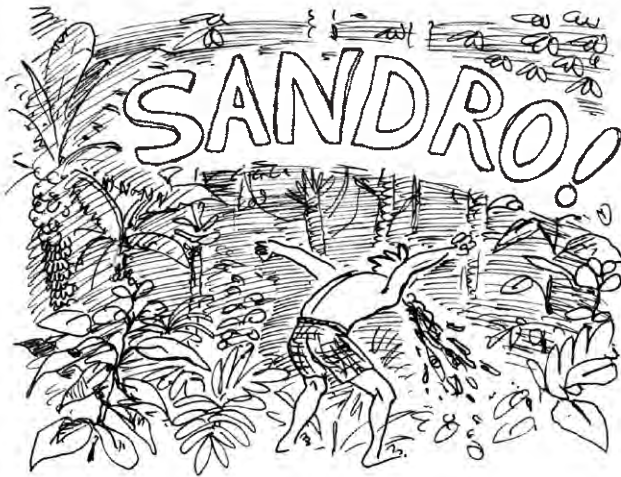


...the shaman blows his own tsentsak darts, which he usually keeps in his throat or thorax, so they can stick to the enemies' darts.

"Each kind of tsentsak live in its own "mother-drool", a sticky saliva in which they grow, like a fetus in amniotic fluid, and that the shaman scrapes from his thorax up to his mouth whenever he needs to."



But then all of a sudden, they all shouted out my name at the same time... It made me barf.



At that same moment, a huge bat just brushed past me and made me fall in the mud.



So at that point I couldn't remember our hut's location...

I heard somebody puke... I thought it was one of you...

So I went there and lied down in the hut next door.



"At daybreak...
because Wajari invited me to join him, I reluctantly left my quiet bed to be on
fire duty. Wayus is more than breakfast tea; it's an institution..."



Alone with Wajari, near the fire, we look for one another, exploring through
words, as suspended between sleep and dawn by a fire circle which protects us
from the dark."



"The wayus ritual is reaching an unavoidable end. I go with Wajari in the bushes along the Kapawi, and here, following the daily purging ritual, I tickle my uvula with a small feather and vomit in the morning fog. Men would not start the day without this vigorous cleansing, which gifts the organism with the virginity of an empty stomach.



Wajari doesn't go back home with me. Instead, with a calm voice, he tells me he is going to defecate in the river. The cleanse must end with an immersion in the cold water of the Wapawi, and the release of the last human wastes to the river's current."



My name is Wajari! I'm strong!
I'm a roaming jaguar in the night!
I'm an anaconda

"In a whispering but intense voice, Wajari tells me about a dream he has just shared with Entza, while still in bed.



Nunkui, the spirit of gardens, appeared to him last night. It had chosen to come as a little stocky female dwarf; its face was covered with roucou. Seated on a tree trunk, with the still serenity of a toad, she was surrounded by a vibrant red halo.



Wajari was surprised. Usually, Nunkui appears to women in their dreams, to help them with their gardening duties. The spirit asked him to follow her and brought him on a steep bank of the Kapawi River. There, with her chin, she energetically pointed in the direction of a rocky outcrop...



According to Wajari, this one of a kind dream augurs, or rather foreshadows, the discovery of a Nunkui gemstone. Also known as nantar, this stone's powerful properties foster the growth of cultivated plants while giving them its energy.



At sunrise, freshly fed with a sweet potato meal, we go hunt the gemstone. Wajari finds it exactly where he thought it would be, only three bends away from home down the river.



Entza, whom the stone belongs to, wraps it up carefully in a cotton rag, and puts it in a pininkia bowl. She then secures it in her straw-sack.



She harnesses the baby to her, grabs her machete and a torch, frees the dogs, indicates to her daughter to follow her, and the little group goes to the garden.



Anne-Christine goes along, and I follow them a few steps behind in a flippant way: men are not welcome in the gardens."

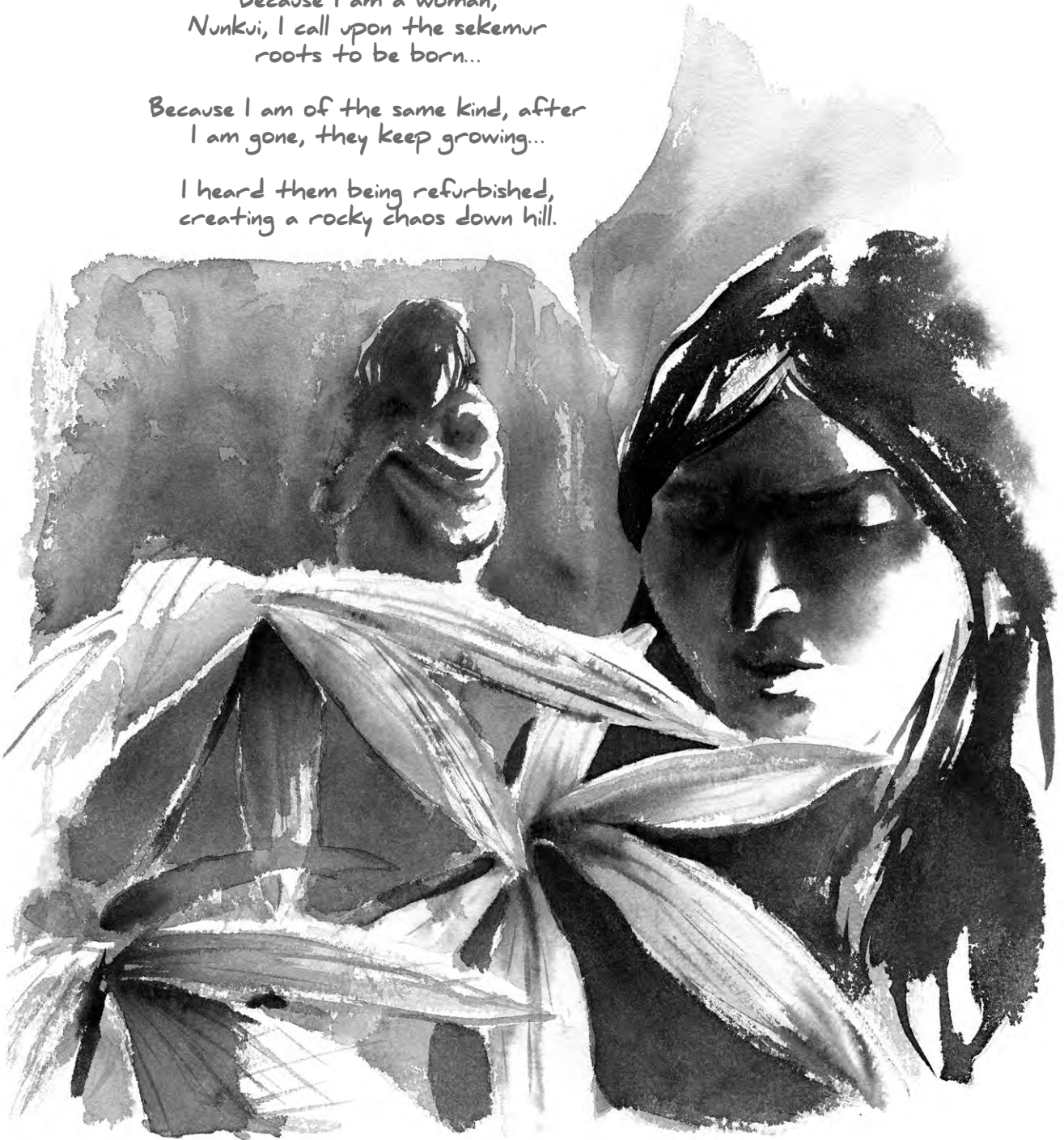


"Crouched in front of the manioc shrub, with a soft voice, she sings a little supplication to the plant.

Because I am a woman,
Nunkui, I call upon the sekemur
roots to be born...

Because I am of the same kind, after
I am gone, they keep growing...

I heard them being refurbished,
creating a rocky chaos down hill.



We are just starting to realize the importance the Achuar give to these short sung invocations. They call them "anent". Hummed in a low voice or repeated mentally, the anents allow a form of thought transmission to be established with the plants, the animals and the spirits. Communication is then possible with these beings, considered as alter egos.

"It's time to take care of the Nunkui gemstone. Entza takes the pininkia bowl in which she put it, covers it up with another pininkia bowl of similar size and buries the small container deep in the ground near a stub. Confined in this fashion, the nantar will work its magic without hurting the baby.

Indeed, these magical stones have a life of their own which enables them to move around; if they were left to roam free, they would sneak toward the kids to suck up their blood.



Thankfully, Entza knows an anent that her mom taught her long ago, and which allows to coax these mineral leeches into not attacking human beings."

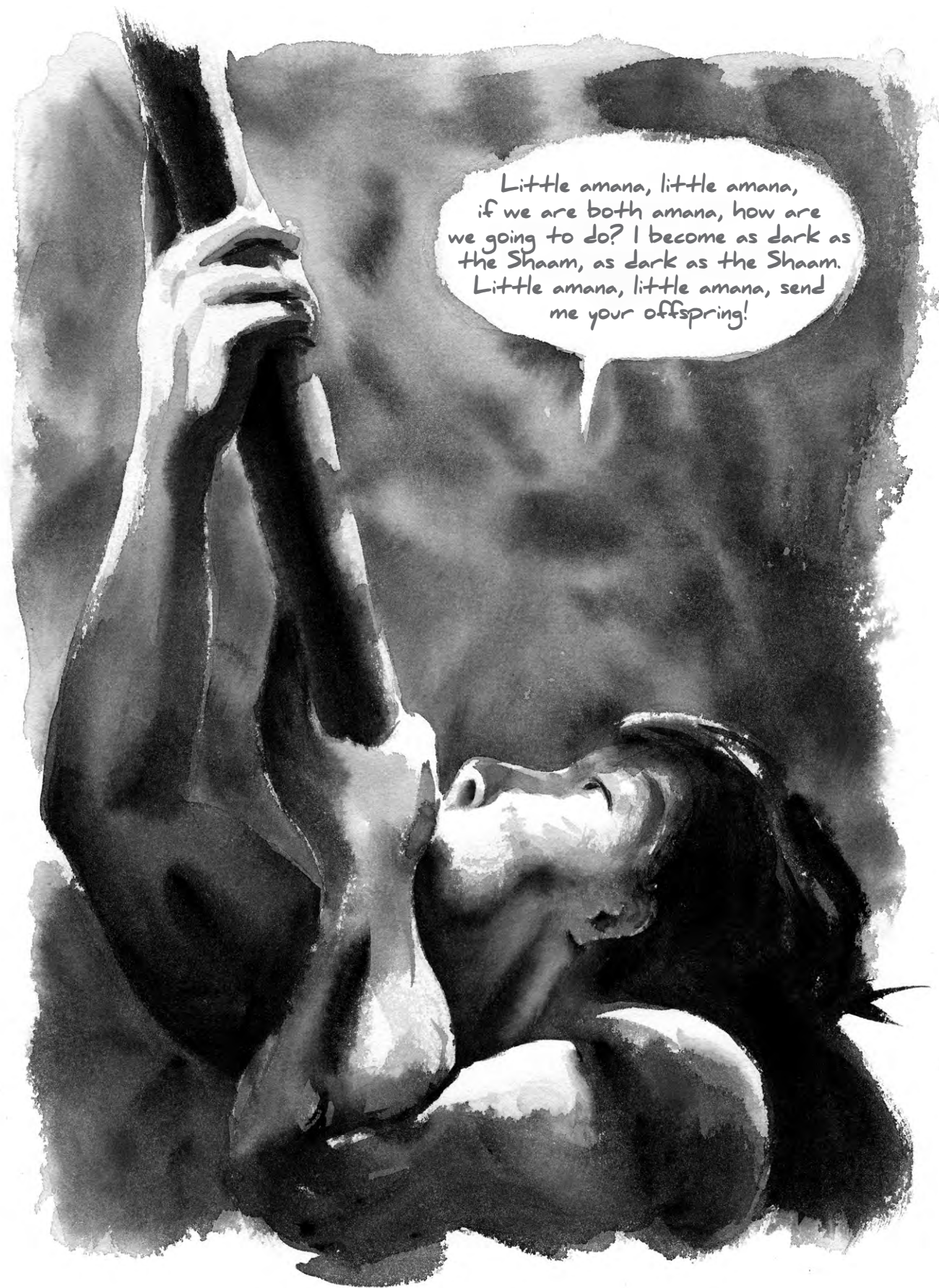


"Nature doesn't always prevail everywhere...

This radical schism, established a long time ago by westerners between the world of nature and the world of human beings doesn't mean much for other people who value plants and animals as part of social life, and see them as subjects rather than objects. Therefore they couldn't be isolated in a separate realm, left to mathematical laws and slowly enslaved by science and technique.



To say that Indians are "close to nature" is a contradiction in a way, since they treat it and its beings with as much reverence as they treat their own people, and not differently. To be close to nature, nature needs to be a separate entity, an exceptional disposition that modern humans created, and which makes our cosmology more obscure and less friendly than those of all prior cultures."



Little amana, little amana,
if we are both amana, how are
we going to do? I become as dark as
the Shaam, as dark as the Shaam.
Little amana, little amana, send
me your offspring!



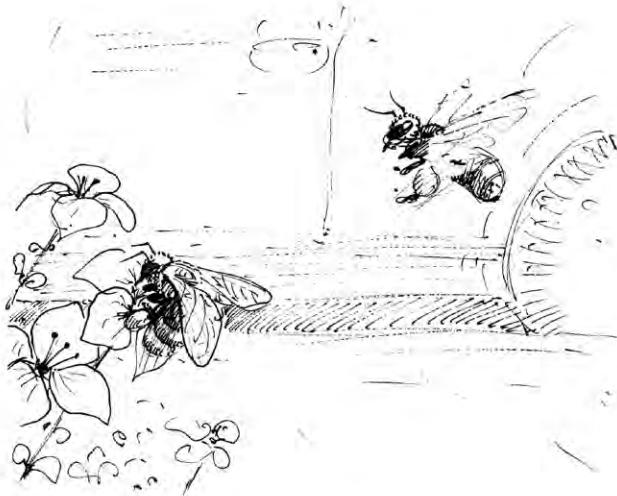
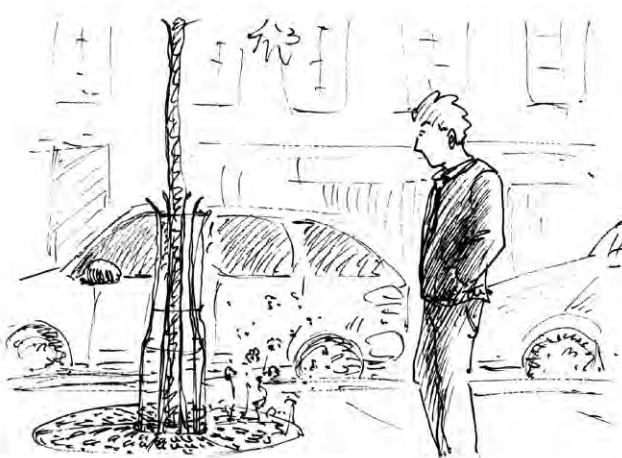


After my first teenage-hood experiences, I came back several times in Amazonian communities, to draw birds.



Only years later, reading Spears of Twilight, did I realize what I had missed.

I decided to go back to Ecuador, full of this new thirst, to find a way to reach an Achuar community.



*La traduction de cet extrait a été réalisée avec l'aide du CNL /
The translation of this excerpt was possible thanks to a grant from the CNL.*

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