The River Echoes with Laughter: how children’s ways-of-knowing transform the world and future horizons of Matses people in Peruvian Amazonia

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities

2013

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School of Social Sciences
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Abstract

The River Echoes with Laughter: how children’s ways-of-knowing transform the world and future horizons of Matses people in Peruvian Amazonia

Camilla Morelli
PhD Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, 2013

This thesis discusses the multiple ways of knowing and relating to the world developed by indigenous Matses children in Peruvian Amazonia. Its primary focus is a detailed exploration of children’s lived experiences and understandings, whereby I try to bring out how young Matses develop a sense of their being-in-the-world through everyday interactions, movements and the imagination. I focus specifically on how children participate in and actively contribute to ongoing processes of transformation in Matses society. These include, amongst others, Matses recent shift from living itinerantly in the forest to sedentary life in riverine dwellings; the growing relevance of money, manufactured goods and the national market economy; and increasing exchanges with nonindigenous peoples and travels to their settlements.

Accordingly, this research explores how children living under radical conditions of change develop new possibilities of being amidst the opportunities and constraints of the present. I argue that far from being simply caught up in wider social processes, the children become active agents of transformation within Matses society and play a profound role in directing the course of social life towards certain directions and away from others. This is not, I argue, because children exert political, outspoken control over the wider community, for instance by making decisions for the adults or by publicly expressing their opinion to the adults. I argue, instead, that simply by developing original ways of knowing and making sense of the world, the children actively move away from the lifestyle and knowledge of old generations and set up tangible conditions for alternative possibilities of life in the future.

The thesis therefore attempts to put forward a view of social transformation in which children are recognised as dynamic agents of change, and in which changes are addressed not just in terms of an intergenerational comparison, that is, in considering how life in the present is different from the past or in how children’s knowledge and ways of being differ from those of their elders. Rather, I also consider the future as constitutive of change and attempt to propose an analysis of children’s future horizons in ethnographic terms; which means that I recognise children’s desires and aspirations as triggers of transformation, insofar as by working towards their wishes and expectations the children set up the tangible possibilities for different future livelihoods and in so doing set change in motion.
Declaration

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Finally, my warmest gratitude goes to the Matses people of Peruvian Amazonia and especially the children, who through their enthusiasm, kindness and liveliness made this research possible and changed my life: cum bacuêbo, mibi tantiembi!
# Glossary of Matses Terms

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<td><strong>acate</strong></td>
<td>type of poisonous tree frog</td>
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<td><strong>adac tita tiednantan nidosh?</strong></td>
<td>has your mother gone to the field?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ambembi</strong></td>
<td>just for fun, for the sake of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>anquiadshun</strong></td>
<td>to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bacuê</strong></td>
<td>child between five and twelve years of age (it refers specifically to boys but can also be used in a neutral sense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bacuêbo</strong></td>
<td>plural for bacuê (it refers to girls and boys indistinctively)</td>
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<td><strong>bacuêmpi</strong></td>
<td>baby; toddler; child between two and five years of age (it refers specifically to boys but can also be used in a neutral sense)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>bedec</strong></td>
<td>to take; to marry (i.e. to take someone as one’s spouse)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>bëdapatsë</strong></td>
<td>beautiful, good-looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bënë</strong></td>
<td>husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>borrachoec</strong></td>
<td>to get drunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bunec</strong></td>
<td>to be hungry, to be hungry for meat; to want, to desire; to desire someone sexually; to love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bunquioebi</strong></td>
<td>I really want; I am hungry; I love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bunquioebi, tita!</strong></td>
<td>I’m hungry, mum!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cambiauaic</strong></td>
<td>to exchange; to be exchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cemento</strong></td>
<td>concrete; tarmac; concrete path/s; tarmac street/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>champi</strong></td>
<td>girl between five and twelve years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chido</strong></td>
<td>woman; wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chido dapa</strong></td>
<td>fat woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chido ushu</strong></td>
<td>white woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chidompi</strong></td>
<td>little girl, baby girl; child between two and five years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chinerita</strong></td>
<td>money (word made up by children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>chishpida</strong></td>
<td>naughty, mischievous girl (if referred to adult women it means flirtatious, vain or promiscuous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chëšhë</strong></td>
<td>black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>choec, choec!</strong></td>
<td>she/he is coming!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chotac</strong></td>
<td>nonindigenous person/people (it can also be used as an adjective, i.e. <em>chotac</em> woman, nonindigenous woman; or <em>chotac</em> man, nonindigenous man)</td>
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<td><strong>chotac yacno</strong></td>
<td>nonindigenous settlement (i.e. place where the <em>chotac</em> live)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>coca</strong></td>
<td>cocaine; drug traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>compraualic</strong></td>
<td>to buy with money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cudas</strong></td>
<td>stingy, greedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cuididi</strong></td>
<td>naughty or mischievous boy, troublemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cuididimbo</strong></td>
<td>really naughty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cuididiquenda!</strong></td>
<td>stop misbehaving, stop acting naughtily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cum bacuëbo</strong></td>
<td>my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dacuëdën</strong></td>
<td>to fear, to be scared of; to be intimidated by; to be embarrassed or shy with some one or something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dadambo</strong></td>
<td>real man, very much of a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dayac</strong></td>
<td>hard-working (it refers only to women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ënden</strong></td>
<td>in the past, before, back then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ganauic</strong></td>
<td>to win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gastauaic</strong></td>
<td>to spend money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>lluvi-lluvi</strong></td>
<td>crybaby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>macho</strong></td>
<td>old woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mamënec</strong></td>
<td>to play; to laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mata-mata-pambo</strong></td>
<td>all muddy, painfully muddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>matses ushu</strong></td>
<td>white person/people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mayan</strong></td>
<td>forest spirit/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mayu</strong></td>
<td>non-Matses indigenous person; ‘Indian’ (derogative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mëntado</strong></td>
<td>male cross-cousin; boyfriend, lover</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mibi cudasec</td>
<td>you are greedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mibi cuesembi</td>
<td>I will beat you up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mibi mamënshunanec</td>
<td>because you make them play/lough, because you play/lough with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midambo tita icquec?</td>
<td>where is your mother?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>min piucquid dadpen icquec</td>
<td>you have plenty of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natiec</td>
<td>unable to do anything, paralysed with embarrassment and discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nēïsha</td>
<td>angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>niana</td>
<td>she/he left, abandoned (someone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nidbëdosh</td>
<td>there wasn’t any (usually said by elders who return empty handed from hunting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pa</td>
<td>daddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perdeuacic</td>
<td>to lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pete nidbëdec</td>
<td>there is no food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piucquid</td>
<td>money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piucquid nidbëdec</td>
<td>to have no money; there is no money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shanu</td>
<td>female cross-cousin; girlfriend, lover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tantia</td>
<td>to hear, to listen to; to know; to remember; to think about, to miss (someone); to imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tantienquio icombi</td>
<td>I could not think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tita</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tita ubi dayunta</td>
<td>mum, hug me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titeiquin!</td>
<td>I’ll slit your throat!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tsitsupa</td>
<td>big bum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uaca!</td>
<td>say ‘ua’ (i.e., cry!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncate</td>
<td>paddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendeuaic</td>
<td>to sell</td>
</tr>
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## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>SIL</td>
<td>Summer Institute of Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDESEP</td>
<td>Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon)</td>
</tr>
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Introduction: Matses children as agents of transformation

This thesis discusses the multiple ways of knowing and relating to the world developed by indigenous Matses children in Peruvian Amazonia. Until the end of the 1960s, Matses people lived itinerantly in forest dwellings and had only violent, irregular contact with non-Matses people. However, over the past four decades the Matses have been dealing with substantial transformations that have had a significant impact upon their ways of knowing and being in the world. For instance, they moved from living itinerantly in inland forest areas to settling down along navigable watercourses, and established an increasing level of contact with nonindigenous peoples as they became gradually reliant on monetary exchanges, the market economy and journeys to urban settlements. These processes of transformation are ongoing and Matses children have to actively make sense of them.

Accordingly, this research seeks to address the following questions: how do children living under radical conditions of change come to know the world wherein they dwell? How do they make sense of their possibilities of acting and being in relation to their perceived futures and within the constraints of the present? And what part do children play within the process of social transformation? The major focus of the thesis are children’s lived experiences and understandings, whereby I try to bring out how young Matses develop a sense of their being-in-the-world through everyday interactions and imaginative lifeworlds. In answering the above questions, the thesis attempts to contribute to anthropological theory in three main regards:

(i) In proposing an analysis that addresses children as the primary research respondents and explores how they come to know the world and become emotionally attached to it through everyday movements, the imagination, bodily interactions, and sensory perception; which, I argue, is a very limited approach in work with indigenous peoples and is especially lacking in Amazonian anthropology.

(ii) By expanding the analysis on childhood within a focus on knowing as a situated activity (Harris 2007, Marchand 2010), whereby I emphasise the
modalities of children’s knowing and especially their forms of desire as the ground for potential transformation;

(iii) By putting forward an analysis that stresses children’s dynamic capacity for influencing the course of social life towards certain directions, and thereby addressing social change not just in relation to the past—as a process of comparing children’s knowledge to that of older generations—but also to the children’s future horizons.

The thesis is based on fourteen months of fieldwork with Matses people in Peruvian Amazonia, where I primarily worked with children aged approximately six to twelve years old. By discussing ongoing transformations in Matses society, my aim is to show how children are not simply caught up in these changes but actively influence the course of social life. My approach is based on the assumption that children are not ‘passive recipients of adult expectations and knowledge’ (Rapport and Overing 2007: 42) but rather ‘actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live’ (James and Prout 1997: 4). I therefore seek to bring out how children are dynamically affecting important transformations in Matses lifestyle, knowledge and practices; and although anthropologists have occasionally claimed that children act as agents of change in a manner such as this, it is seldom sustained through in-depth, ethnographically grounded examples (cf. Lancy 2012a).

My aim is to explore children’s daily experiences through a theory of knowing as a dynamic, situated activity (Harris 2007, Marchand 2010). A focus on knowing is necessary, I argue, because children do not influence social life by making active decisions for the adults; to the contrary, children are often denied access to the same resources and means and power as adults in society (Solberg 1997: 124). Matses children have no official roles in the political organisation of the wider community: they are not allowed to speak at village meetings, they are seldom if at all interrogated on what they desire or think regarding social issues, and they have no direct access to money and manufactured goods. However, I argue that simply by developing original ways of knowing the world (Harris 2007), the children are moving away from the lifestyle of older generations while also setting up the conditions for new possibilities of life in the future.
Here knowing is understood not as passive receiving of information, but in a Heideggerian sense: as a way of actively engaging with the entities that are known (Heidegger 1962: 88-89) and as a situated activity that unfolds through ‘being in the world as opposed to the individual confronting a world ‘out there’’ (Harris 2000a: 49; Ingold 2000). As such, knowing is always accompanied by modalities of some sort, so that while coming to know the world in certain ways the children develop a taste for some aspects of it and become affectively attached to these rather than others. I consider first and foremost how children develop affective relations with and forms of desire towards: (i) the river environment, which Matses people avoided until recently while dwelling in inland forest settings; and (ii) the world of the chotac, ‘nonindigenous people’, which is comprised of cities, urban life, television, cars, concrete, electric light, packaged food, manufactured goods, and so forth (since the river constitutes the physical, material way to access the nonindigenous world, these two aspects are entangled). Whereas elderly Matses do not show the same enthusiasm for these parts of the world, the children attend to the river and, in an even more intense way, the nonindigenous world, through modalities of fascination and desire. At the same time, the children show little interest in developing the knowledge and practices of elderly people, including learning about the forest, medical plants or the world of spirits. In doing so, the children are actively moving away from the lifestyle of older generations and reinventing the world in which they dwell.

My aim is, therefore, to propose an analysis of change that places children’s knowledge and experiences within an intergenerational comparison, so as to emphasise how children develop new meanings by choosing to move away from the ways of acting and being of previous generations. But I also look at social change with regards to the future, whereby I emphasise how children develop desires and expectations amidst the political-economic constraints of the present. In this view, human knowledge is at once the product of a shared collective past, insofar as ‘what one attends to is a function of one’s history’ in relation to others (Toren 1993: 468), as well as a function of how human beings are always projected towards the future, moving beyond and ahead of themselves (Rapport 2013) towards new horizons. My aim is thus to explore how children’s desires and expectations towards the future set in motion the possibilities for new forms of life and thereby trigger the process of
transformation, although always in negotiation with the limits and constraints they find in the present.

Introducing the Matses

The Matses are an indigenous people living in northwest Amazonia and classified under the Panoan linguistic family (Fleck 2003; Romanoff 1984; Erikson 1994).\(^1\) The term *matses* is originally a noun that means ‘person’ or ‘people’ (as it can be either singular or plural). It was first used an ethnonym by Romanoff (1984) but following contact with the *chotac*, ‘nonindigenous peoples’, the Matses themselves started using it to define their population in relation to others. In this thesis I will use the term as an ethnonym; as an adjective (for example in the expression ‘Matses lifestyle and practices’); and as a noun to indicate the language spoken by Matses people, also called ‘Matses’ (Fleck 2003).

The Matses occupy a contiguous territory in eastern Peru and western Brazil. Fleck (2003: 22-24) provides a detailed description of the physical characteristics of this territory, including that ‘the area around most Matses villages is primary rainforest’ and this can be divided into ‘two main terrain types, low-lying relatively flat floodplain forest, and non-flooding upland forest in the areas between the rivers’ (*ibid*: 23-24). The weather is generally hot and uniform throughout the year, with an average annual temperature of 25.9°C (*ibid*: 23) and a considerable difference between day- and night-time. The year can be divided into a dry season between May and September, and a rainy season from September to April.

Ethnographic sources on Matses people are limited. The most extensive literature is provided by Romanoff’s doctoral thesis (1984) and articles (1976, 1983), based on his fieldwork in the mid-1970s; and the Fleck’s grammar (2003) and other works (2001, 2002, 2007) on Matses language. Further references are provided by Erikson’s (1994, 1999) work on the Matis (Matses neighbours who shared some commonalities with them such as ritual practices and body painting); Matlock’s doctoral thesis (2002); a recent work by Romanoff et al. (2004) on Matses practices.

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\(^1\) Here I only address Peruvian Matses. References on the population living in Brazil are provided by Fleck (2003: 47).
in the past; and Kovasna’s masters dissertation (2009). The missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) also produced some written work concerning the Matses, whom they contacted and started living with in 1969. With two exceptions (Fields and Merrifield 1980, Kneeland 1994), these documents are ‘unedited and often illegible’ (Fleck 2003: 47) and without exception, I would argue, they are also frustratingly biased and not fully reliable.

In Peruvian Amazonia, Matses villages are formally located within the Yaquerana district, which is itself part of the department of Loreto, northern Peru (the capital city of Loreto is Iquitos—shown in the map below). The seat of the Yaquerana district is Colonia Angamos, the closest nonindigenous settlement to Matses villages in Peruvian territory. This was initially born as a military garrison but then expanded and grew into a small rural town.

Figure 1. Loreto department, Peru.
Matses villages are very remote from Peruvian cities and nonindigenous settlements. In order to reach Matses territory from Lima, the capital of Peru, one needs to fly first to Iquitos and then to Colonia Angamos. Flights should take place twice a week, but in case of heavy rain they can be suspended for several days, or even weeks, which makes Colonia Angamos difficult to reach. Alternatively, one can reach Colonia Angamos by boat from Iquitos, which can take between seven to ten days depending on the level of water. From Colonia Angamos, the villages are reached on motorised canoes; it takes eight to twelve hours to reach the village where I worked.

In Peruvian Amazonia, Matses people numbered approximately 2200 individuals in the early 2000s (Fleck 2003: 5) and they are currently distributed in fourteen villages (shown in the map above) along the Galvez River; the Upper Javari River, which is locally termed Yaquerana; and the Chobayacu Creek, a tributary to the Yaquerana.
River. The village where I worked is settled along the Chobayacu, but for reasons of anonymity I will not disclose its specific name.

Here I will offer a minimal background to the Matses and provide further information in the rest of the thesis. I will start by introducing Matses history as it is presented by Romanoff (1984) and by referring to what elderly Matses reported to me.

**Matses history**

Romanoff (1984: 26-61) documented Matses history from the 1970s up to the beginning of the 20th century and divided it into four periods according to the nature of Matses relations with non-Matses peoples, as I summarise below:

**From the turn of the century to the 1920s: ‘The period of Avoidance’**

From accounts of his elderly informants ‘reporting what their parents told them’ (ibid: 26), Romanoff suggested that at the turn of the century the Matses lived differently compared to how he saw them in the 1970s. Their population was higher and they lived in inland forest settings avoiding all contact with outsiders. Their economy was largely based on hunting but instead of bows and arrows they used blowguns, which are no longer used. They also used different body ornaments and other tools such as stone axes for horticulture and cutting tools made of rodent teeth, also no longer used.

**The 1920s and 1930s: ‘The period of Intermittent Contact’**

During this time Matses people had irregular exchanges both with different Amerindians, such as the Brazilian Marubo, and nonindigenous rubber tappers. Contact with nonindigenous persons was partial and irregular and followed the same pattern:
(i) They never involved a whole Matses group, but rather a few adult men who would extract rubber latex for rubber tappers and were remunerated with steel tools such as axes, machetes and knives;

(ii) These encounters were mediated by different Amerindians who had already established regular contact with nonindigenous peoples, and acted as interpreters for the Matses;

(iii) In all cases, contact was intermittent and quickly broken (ibid: 36).

By the end of this period the Matses had started using tools to perform basic daily activities such as horticulture, suggesting that their exchanges had important consequences in their daily lives. They nonetheless showed no interest in establishing permanent contact with the chotac, ‘nonindigenous peoples’ and their relations soon deteriorated.

**From the 1930s to the 1960s: ‘The period of Raiding’**

In this period of time the Matses engaged in systematic and reciprocal attacks both with different Amerindians including the Marubo and Spanish speakers (i.e. nonindigenous Peruvian citizens). They raided ‘Spanish speakers for tools and women’ and took ‘captives from other Amerindian groups’ (ibid: 40; see also Fleck 2003: 32). A few of my oldest respondents participated in raiding against the chotac when they were very young and recount how they fired arrows at the men’s chests, stole their machetes and shotguns, and took the younger women away with them. However, the Matses were themselves attacked by Amerindians and nonindigenous people to the point of engaging in a real war against the Peruvian military. Warned about Matses attacks on civilians, but also looking to find new transport routes through the forest (Romanoff 1984: 43), the Peruvian government organised a military expedition into Matses territory which culminated in army reinforcements invading the forest and Peruvian bombers attacking the Matses. Although no Matses died, many fled the territory and moved to neighbouring areas of the forest in Brazil.
My elderly respondents recounted this period as a time of fear, hunger and strenuous fatigue. The Matses had to move their settlements more often than usual for fear of attacks, which was tiring and made it difficult to practice horticulture for subsistence since the fields had to be quickly abandoned. Furthermore, several Matses died of illnesses contracted through contact with outsiders. This is why they were so keen on accepting the missionaries who contacted them in 1969, which in Romanoff’s (ibid: 40) account inaugurated the most recent period of Matses history.

From 1969 onwards: ‘The Period of Non-Violent Contact’

In 1969 two missionary women from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an evangelical organisation based in the United States, approached the Matses and established peaceful contact with them. Elderly Matses recount to me that the missionaries started flying over their settlements with an airplane and throwing down goods including a radio, which the Matses had never seen and broke into pieces using its wires to craft bracelets. The two women then approached the Matses on the ground and spoke to them in Matses, which as reported by Romanoff, they had learned from ‘a Spanish-speaking captive woman who had fled her Matses captors’ (ibid: 50).

I often asked Matses elders why they accepted the missionaries so peacefully, for which I was given three main reasons: (i) because they brought medicines to cure the illnesses incurred after raiding outsiders; (ii) because they promised peace and protection from further external attacks, hence posing an end to a period of hunger and intense warfare; and (iii) because they brought in brand new machetes, cooking tools and other objects of extraordinarily good quality.

The missionaries established a community along the upper Chobayacu Creek, where an increasing number of Matses decided to settle down, abandoning their itinerant life in the forest. The Matses also started intensifying contact with nonindigenous Peruvians such as timber workers and the inhabitants of Colonia Angamos. Matses people recall the period of contact as a time of major change, and as instrumental to the development of a whole range of new practices and forms of knowledge. For instance, they started using a whole new series of tools and objects brought in by the
missionaries such as clothes, flashlights, pharmaceuticals and new types of food produced by nonindigenous people, such as salt, sugar and oil; but also better shotguns and machetes than those that were stolen through raiding. At first, the missionaries distributed these items for free, but as time went on, they began to sell them to the Matses. This was made possible since the missionaries also bought handcrafted tools such as bows and arrows from the Matses, which meant that, for the first time, they now had access to money, which could be used to buy industrial goods from the missionaries. By doing so, the missionaries initiated the Matses into their first forms of monetary exchange and capitalistic economy. The missionaries also taught the Matses how to read and write and introduced them to calendar time as well as evangelical religion. The Matses also started abandoning many established practices including body tattooing and painting, myth telling, chanting and other rituals. In Romanoff’s words, ‘within five years of 1969, the social environment of the Matses had changed dramatically, and there were indications of even greater changes to come’ (1984: 49).

Important changes since Romanoff’s fieldwork in the 1970s include a significant increase in Matses population and the number of villages. At the time of his research the Matses numbered approximately 800 individuals, distributed in two villages in Peru and two in Brazil. In the early 2000s, the population numbered about 2200 individuals counting the Peruvian side alone and was distributed in fourteen villages (Fleck 2003: 5). The missionaries left Matses territory in 2003, and the community they originally founded no longer exists, whilst many other new ones have been founded. Another major change, I argue, is Matses progressive and ongoing movement towards wider bodies of water and nonindigenous settlements, as I will now outline.

2 In the thesis I will not address evangelism, partly because I did not research religious practices in depth and partly because I do not regard religion as relevant to my analysis. Although every village has a church and one or two men acting as preachers, the missionaries are no longer present in Matses territory and the importance of religion varies in different villages. In the one where I worked many people go to church but most of them are not too concerned about religion in their everyday dealings, especially children. I have never heard a child mentioning religious matters spontaneously or expressing a will to go to church if their parents go, and they are not required to do so.
The map above shows the location of the first Matses sedentary village, established together with the missionaries, and the most recent ones established in close proximity to the wide Yaquerana River and the nonindigenous settlement Colonia Angamos. The very first sedentary village established in 1969 was not yet built on the banks of navigable rivers, and the missionaries created an airstrip nearby in order to reach it. In the following years, the Matses founded new villages moving closer to navigable bodies of water. Whereas first villages were built further upriver and along smaller bodies of water (i.e., down south on the map above), with time the Matses started moving downriver and establishing new villages closer towards the Yaquerana and Javari River (i.e., up north on the map), which also involves being closer to Colonia Angamos. A few Matses families have also established a small community right on the outskirts of Colonia Angamos, named Fray Pedro, and live there permanently, whereas other Matses only spend temporary periods of time there.
This movement expresses how Matses people have become increasingly dependent upon the river as a source of nourishment and transportation, as well as increasingly dependent upon exchanges with nonindigenous people and places, which are reached via river. In the thesis I will address this process of movement and transformation, including the growing importance of riverine environments and the nonindigenous world in Matses life, which I explore from the children’s perspectives. Like Romanoff, I emphasise Matses people’s relations with outsiders and the impact that these have on their social world. But whereas Romanoff frames this process in terms of ‘Matses adaptation’ to a social environment (1984), here I will emphasise the relation with the riverine environment and the nonindigenous world in terms of desire, fascination and yearning. My aim is to investigate the role that children play in the process of social change and to bring out their agency in this process, in an effort to fully recognise children not just as passively adapting to adult choices but rather as dynamically contributing to direct the course of social life towards certain directions.

Fieldwork for this research was conducted in a village settled along the Chobayacu Creek, which counted approximately two-hundred individuals, and it was divided into a one-year period in 2010 and two additional months in 2012. The thesis is based primarily on material gathered during my first stay with the Matses, hence the age of children reported here indicates how old they were in 2010. For the first two months of fieldwork and the last three or so, I lived in the house of the village chief who was spending time in Iquitos with his family and let me stay in his house by myself. For the rest of the time I lived with different families, so as to gain access to children’s experiences in the household and outside. My main respondents were eleven girls, aged between six and eleven, and sixteen boys, aged between six and twelve. I nonetheless worked more with boys than with girls, for various reasons. This was partly because in the village there were more boys than girls; partly because girls are much more reserved and shy than boys, which makes it more difficult to interact with them; and partly because the average age of the girls I worked with was lower than the average age of boys, and older children tend to be more outgoing than younger ones and louder in the peer group. So whereas boys were always more vocal and keen on interacting with me, girls were quieter and reticent. When I returned to the field in 2012, the girls I had previously worked with had grown up and were
much more vocal, confident and keen on chatting with me; I therefore hope in the future to be able to return to the field and carry out further work with girls.

In the thesis I will generally address my respondents as ‘children’, which translates the Matses term *bacuëbo* and includes girls and boys between five and twelve years of age. I will often refer also to the category of ‘Matses elders’ or ‘elderly people’, by which I mean women and men who were born and spent their first years of childhood before 1969, the year of missionary contact. For reasons of anonymity, the name of the village where I worked will not be revealed and all personal names have been modified to protect the privacy of my respondents.

**Children’s ways-of-knowing**

This thesis is intended to expand on existing theories of childhood. In particular, I aim to bring together: *(i)* theories that address children as agents who develop original forms of knowledge (Bluebond-Langner 1978; James 1993, 1998; James and Prout 1997; James et al. 1998; Christensen and James 2000; Corsaro 2003; Corsaro and Rizzo 2008: 241), with *(ii)* ethnographic analyses that emphasise children’s active participation in adult activities and thereby challenge ethnocentric views of childhood as a given category (Montgomery 2001, 2007; Lancy 1996, 2008: 76-111, 2010; Rogoff et al. 2003; Gaskins 1999, 2003; Gaskins and Paradise 2010). I will expand on such theories by bringing in a focus on ways-of-knowing, social transformation and the future, as well as by proposing a range of methods to explore children’s understandings.

**Defining childhood: an Amerindian case**

Any analysis of childhood requires first of all a definition of the concept, for as researchers generally agree, ‘childhood is a social phenomenon’ (Montgomery 2009: 50) which acquires different meanings according to local understandings. Or as Mead put it, ‘as a theoretical concept, ‘the child’ is a fiction’ (1977: 18). In the thesis I will document how Matses understandings and experiences of childhood can be significantly different from those of other societies across the world, and as such I
agree that the category of childhood must be defined in relation to cultural, historical and class contexts (James and Prout 1997: 3, Lancy 2008). Ariès’ (1962) renowned thesis that ‘in medieval society the idea childhood did not exist’, meaning that there was no awareness of a ‘particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult’ (ibid: 128), has been largely influential but equally challenged by scholars (Lancy 2008: 3-4, Montgomery 2009: 51). However, his underlying assumption that childhood is historically situated and can only be theorised as such remains unopposed.

By defining childhood as locally, historically and class situated, scholars have challenged ‘the ethnocentric lens that see children only as precious, innocent and preternaturally cute cherubs’ (Lancy 2008: 2, italics in original). Zelizer argued that North-American children became ‘economically ‘worthless’ but emotionally ‘priceless’’ only from the late 1870s (1985: 3). Prior to then, child labour was considered a ‘morally righteous institution’ (ibid: 59) and children contributed to household production. By the mid-twentieth century children were ‘kept off the market, useless but loving, and off the streets, protected and supervised’ (ibid: 210), through a process that Zelizer terms ‘the sacralization of child life’ (ibid: 22).

Ethnography offers considerable evidence of how the idea of children as vulnerable pupils is not just a function of historical times but also of social and cultural difference. For example, Lancy documents that in many non-western societies children are seen as ‘chattel’ (2008: 2-3), that is, as useful resources to the household economy. Working in Liberia with Kpelle people, Lancy asked his informants ‘what makes a good child’, to which one responded: ‘if you ask her to bring water, she brings water. If you ask her to cook, she cooks, if you tell her to mind a baby, she does’ (1996: 76). This does not necessarily entail a lack of affective engagement between children and parents or reduce children to commoditised property, but recognises that ‘parental investment in childhood is not an unquestioned biological fact but one that varies according to circumstances (Montgomery 2009: 51). For example, Montgomery’s (2001, 2007) work on child prostitution in Thailand challenged the shared prejudice that such a practice is induced by unloving and uncaring parents. Although every child should have different alternatives to selling sex, in order to fully understand the motives that induce some children to do so we
must consider the local values of childhood and children’s will to ‘fulfil filial obligations through work for cash’ (2007: 424).

Rogoff et al. (2003) suggest that in certain environments ‘children have access to learning from informal community involvement’ and ‘their collaborative participation is expected when they are ready to help in shared endeavors’ (ibid: 176). They termed this informal way of fostering learning ‘intent participation’, which they see as ‘prominent in many indigenous American communities’ (ibid). Gaskins provided an ethnographic example in relation to Yucatec Mayan children, who are encouraged to be ‘legitimate participants in the work of the household’ by carrying out manual and often hard chores (2003: 250). In her view, ‘children’s ongoing presence and integration in adult activities is related to the society’s mode of economic production’, whereby ‘in the family-centred economic system typical of most non-industrialised societies, children are highly valued as current and potential labour’ (Gaskins and Paradise 2010: 93).

Amerindian societies offer particularly interesting ground for an analysis on childhood, where the meanings and possibilities of what it is to be a child are defined in often substantially different terms than in several industrialised societies across the world. However, there are no substantial works primarily concerned with children in Amazonian literature and the few references to childhood are scattered throughout ethnographies dedicated to different topics (e.g. Maybury Lewis 1974: 67-74; Gow 1989, 1991: 150-178; Rival 1997, 2002: 152-176; McCallum 2001; Uzendoski 2005: 35). Moreover, there is little or no evidence of ethnographers engaging directly with children in the field, asking them questions and trying to explore the world as the children experience it; children are instead represented as ethnographic objects viewed from an adult perspective (even if this perspective is that of indigenous adults and not just the ethnographer’s).

To give an example, in his monograph on the Shavante of Amazonian Brazil Maybury-Lewis (1974: 67-74) briefly describes child-rearing practices and suggests how Shavante understandings of childhood are different from his own. Having travelled with his wife and son to the field, Maybury-Lewis reports that the ‘Shavante were shocked by the way in which we smacked our child in order to discipline him’ and ‘they would give him a stick to retaliate with’, concluding that
the ‘Shavante never intervene in children’s affairs’ (*ibid*: 71). His reference to childhood, however, is aimed at adding details to the ethnographic description of Shavante society rather than at exploring understandings of childhood, and children are not directly interrogated.

Another example is Gregor’s (1977, 1985) references to children in his works on the Mehinaku of Brazil. For example, he describes a children’s game that he names ‘Women’s Sons’ (1977: 112-113); In this game girls and boys pretend to be married and hold a pretend-baby made from a clump of earth, the baby is then said to sicken and die, and the children bury it and mourn it in great excitement. For Gregor,

> ‘This game provides a tragic commentary on Mehinaku life—death in infancy and early childhood is all too common in the village. The helps the children prepare for the time when they may lose a sibling and, later on, an offspring of their own. It also teaches them how to express and cope with grief through the medium of ritual crying.’ (*ibid*).

The interpretation of the game remains nevertheless that of Gregor and not of the children, so that he ‘may well have given a different account of the game had he asked the children’s view of what they were doing’ (Montgomery 2009: 147).

Children are also mentioned in Gow’s (1989) work with Amerindian people of the Bajo Urubamba, which argues that kin and gender relations are constituted through mutual giving as well as requests for food and sex, and that children’s requests for food to parents are foundational to the child-parents relationships and to the family economy. Gow supports his position by describing the adults’ expression of anger and their moral reproaches towards those ‘perverse children’ that express desire for eating earth (a quintessentially anti-social behaviour): ‘from an adult perspective, the eating of earth is a sort of attack by the child on the future of the subsistence economy’ (*ibid*: 579). However, it is an analysis in which children are denied their own voice and interpreted solely from the perspective of their parents who, in Gow’s words, recognise children as ‘passive recipients of the products of adult labour’ (*ibid*).

McCallum 2001: 15-40), examine the process of ‘shaping children’ into fully formed or proper social individuals, but again, do so without engaging with children directly. For example, among the Enxet people of Paraguay, speech is seen to instil knowledge and children are considered ‘to be passive learners while agency is placed on the adults who speak to them’ (Kidd 2000: 116), while in Amazonian Peru ‘the Airo-Pai’s notion of ‘upbringing’ means ‘transforming [the child] into the beautiful and good’ (Belaunde 2000: 211). In these works, children are again understood from the adult perspective, which is then used to support theories about the broader social and economic context in which the children are participants. No reference or consideration is given to what children think, say or feel, and no evidence is provided of any direct ethnographic engagement with the children themselves. Likewise, and lastly, Rival’s (1992, 1997, 2002) and Aikman’s (2002) works on Amerindian schooling consider the impact and threats that school education pose to local knowledge and practices, but do so without addressing the children directly so as to bring out their own experiences of schooling.

Consequently, such approaches inherently fail to acknowledge children as active agents who interpret and represent themselves in their own terms, and instead reproduce a social model in which childhood is something that is looked back upon and understood retrospectively rather than something that exists in the present and opens up onto the future. In doing so, children’s own understandings are marginalised and the social world is largely seen and understood from the positionality of adults rather than explored from a perspective that engages with children’s understandings.

A major attention to children seems necessary when approaching a people whose young generations constitute a tremendously high percentage of the whole population (INEI statistics from a 2007 national census estimate that in the Yaquerana district, where Matses communities are located, over 48% of the population is under 14 years of age, and over 61% under 19 years of age). In the village where I worked, out of two hundred inhabitants that I counted at time of fieldwork, seventy were children under fifteen years of age. I therefore attempt to fill

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a gap in the regional literature by approaching children’s lifeworlds as a main research topic and by addressing children directly as research respondents.

**A child-centred theory of childhood**

By recognising children as active agents who should be addressed in their own right, I attempt to place this thesis within what Montgomery terms a ‘child-centred anthropology’ (2009: 43). This comprises of theories that identify ‘children as competent social actors’ (James 2007: 261) and which started emerging between the late 1970s and 1990s in anthropology, sociology and other social sciences (e.g. La Fontaine 1986; Richards and Light 1986; James 1993, 1998; James and Prout 1997; James at al. 1998; Thorne 1993; Corsaro 1997).4 These child-centred approaches shared the aim of carrying out research ‘with children rather than on children’ (James 2007: 262, my italics). As such, they responded to a long history of childhood studies which had thoroughly investigated family relations, child-rearing practices and socialisation, but had always done so without addressing the children’s own perspectives (e.g. Whiting and Child 1953; Whiting 1963; Caudill and Weinstein 1969; Caudill and Schooler 1973; LeVine 1977).

Hardman (1973) offered a first, pioneering critique to such adult-centric approaches. She argued that children should be regarded not ‘as helpless spectators in a pressing environment which affects and produces their every behaviour’ but addressed ‘in their own right and not just as receptacles for adult teaching’ (ibid: 87). Shortly after, Bluebond-Langner (1978) proposed a ground-breaking work on terminally ill children in a North American hospital and showed that despite parents’ careful attempts to hide their illness, the children were fully aware of their terminal condition but in turn made an effort to conceal such awareness from their parents.

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4 Much of this child-centred research emerged from within sociology (e.g. James and Prout 1997, Corsaro 1997) and developmental psychology (Richards and Light 1986). These works are nonetheless based on rigorous ethnographic methods and enter in conversation with anthropological studies; therefore, they become relevant to the anthropology of childhood.

5 Detailed reviews of these early approaches are offered by Montgomery (2009: 17), James (2007: 263-264) and Lancy (2008: ix). A relevant exception was the work of Margaret Mead (1928, 1932) on children’s thought and practices, who is still credited as ‘one of the first anthropologists to take children ... seriously’ (Montgomery 2009: 23).
She therefore emphasised that children are ‘wilful, purposeful individuals capable of creating their own world as well as acting in the world others create for them’ *(ibid: 7)*. Similarly, sociologist Corsaro (1979) proposed an innovative study on how nursery-school children negotiate friendship and develop strategies to access the peer group, at a time when childhood researchers knew ‘little about how children gain interpersonal access in settings where adults are not present’ *(ibid: 316)*.

Only in the 1990s, however, the efforts to bring out children’s voices started taking a systematic approach and came to occupy a predominant position in childhood research. This innovative line of analysis was referred to as the ‘new paradigm’ and defined as ‘a call for children to be understood as social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances’ (James et al. 1998: 6). James (1993, 1998) applied this approach to the study of childhood identities, friendship and play in a British primary school, aiming to explore ‘children’s experiences of childhood and ... the difficulties which some children encounter in being children’ (1993: vii). She showed that while adults might dismiss peer group activities such as mocking or play as having little relevance, these are extremely important and often painful for children *(ibid, see also James 1998)*. Only by engaging with children directly, therefore, is it possible to fully explore their lifeworlds and knowledge.

This is not to claim that children and adults live in separate worlds but that children should be recognised in their capacity for creating new meanings and reinventing social knowledge: as Thorne put it, ‘there is much to be gained by seeing children not as the next generation of adults, but as social actors in a range of institutions’ (1993: 3). These child-centred approaches also moved away from traditional concepts of socialisation, which imply ‘that children are to be seen as a defective form of adults, social only in their future potential but not in their present being’ (James et al. 1998: 6; see also Goodwin 2006: 22-23). This means recognising that while children may not have the same means of power as adults, ‘they do not passively adapt themselves to what their elders say and do’ (Solberg 1997: 124) and that ‘children’s interactions are not preparation for life; they are life itself’ (Thorne 1993: 3). This has been documented, for example, in Corsaro’s (1997, 2003) works on how Italian nursery-school children reinvent adult meanings through play; in Thorne’s (1993) study of children’s construction of gender in a North American
primary school; and in Solberg’s (1997) work on how children negotiate family relations in Norway.


Here I propose to address children as agents by exploring both their relations with, and active contributions to, the process of social change, which have only been explored in a limited fashion and have rarely been documented through in-depth ethnographic examples (cf. Lancy 2012a: 16). Furthermore, most of the studies mentioned above have been carried out in school environments and within industrialised societies in Europe or the United States, whereas much less has been written about ‘children’s peer cultures in non-western societies’ (Corsaro 2011: 308). This thesis attempts to expand upon the above debates by providing an in-depth ethnographic analysis of indigenous Matses children which was mainly carried out by spending time with them, not in school, but in the open spaces of the village, the surrounding bushy areas, and the riverine settings where children play and spend time away from adults. Although I also worked with children in school, I only started after two months of fieldwork and the classroom constituted only a minor location for our shared interactions. Accessing children’s groups informally rather than through an institution, such as the school, helped me grasp insights into and knowledge about the everyday lives of children that to some extent exceeded even those of the children’s parents, who do not spend time playing with groups of children. However, it also posed considerable difficulties to my study and prompted...
me to develop research methodologies to stimulate children’s participation, as I will now outline.

‘Giving voice to children’s voices’ and creative methodologies

A firm assumption that has become commonplace in child-centred research is the necessity of ‘giving voice to children’s voices’ (James 2007: 261). This emerged as a constitutive feature of the ‘new paradigm’ of childhood (James 1993, James at al. 1998) and in response to the problem that children’s voices had for a long time been ‘muted’ in childhood studies (Hardman 1973). Bringing out children’s voices is at once a political, theoretical and methodological effort. Political, because children’s ability to speak for themselves is seen as potentially helpful to promote the rights of children and ‘rescue them from silence and exclusion’ (Alderson 2000: 243; for a critique of this political effort, see LeVine 2003: 5). Theoretical, because it is argued that childhood-centred theories should move from what children have to say rather than from an external, adult viewpoint (James 1993, 2007). And finally, methodological, insofar as researchers proposed new methods to investigate but also to represent children’s voices in their works. These consisted, for instance, in reporting children’s dialogues and own words in the text (e.g. Bluebond-Langner 1978; James 1993, 1998; Corsaro 2003; Connelly 2004); distributing voice-recorders to street children and asking them to interview each other (Hecht 1998); or using video to record children’s speech and play (Goodwin 2006: 4).

Although I fully agree on the importance of hearing children’s voices and opinions, and my primary aim will be to bring out Matses children’s perspectives, I also intend to move beyond the concept of ‘giving voice to children’ simply intended as listening to what the children say. My aim is to move beyond words and explore implicit ways of knowing that cannot be fully expressed through speech, whereby giving voice to the children means not just reporting what they say, but also bringing out their lived experiences and understandings that take place beyond verbal communication.

Authors have often emphasised the need to go beyond explicit meaning and explore knowledge that ‘goes without saying’ (Bloch 2012: 143). In the words of Bourdieu,
‘It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. The habitus ... causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’’ (1977: 79, my italics).

Or as Bloch put it, the ‘types of knowledge which are ... less easily accessible to the consciousness of the actor ... are, in many ways, the most important since they are what enables people to operate in the world’ (2012: 144). Therefore, anthropologists should avoid ‘reducing what people know to what they say’ (Harris 2007: 13) and venturing beyond the limits of ordinary language so as to grasp imaginative and unspoken lifeworlds (Irving 2011: 22). By applying this argument to childhood research, I will seek to explore children’s implicit ways of knowing and feeling while trying not to limit the analysis solely to their spoken words.

This objective nevertheless poses a theoretical, methodological and even ethical dilemma. For how can I ever gain access to, or make claims about, children’s consciousness or knowledge if these are not put into explicit words? One might argue that since direct access to children’s own consciousness is obviously impossible, it is never possible to fully understand what children know and think or how they feel about themselves and the world. But as Michael Polanyi observed,

‘No one but ourselves can dwell in our body directly and know fully all its conscious operations, but our consciousness can be experienced also by others to the extent to which they can dwell in the external workings of our mind from the outside’ (1965: 807).

I will therefore focus on children’s actions, reactions and interactions in order to offer a glimpse of their own understandings and ways of knowing, and how these are mediated by relationships with adults and other children, as well as embedded within specific social, material and sensorial environments. My aim is thus to explore children’s ways of knowing and being within our ‘merging horizons’ (Salmond 1982), whereby knowledge is defined not as given but rather as continuously generated within a space of ‘embodied intersubjectivity’ (Moore 1994: 3) and through bodily and emotional exchanges between persons in their material environments. This includes the anthropological knowledge that is mutually
constituted during fieldwork, whereby the anthropological project is itself grounded in bodily experiences and the body plays a crucial role in how shared knowledge is mutually constituted (Jackson 1983, Csordas 1990). Jackson urged anthropologists to move beyond ‘the tendencies to explain human behaviour in terms of linguistic models .... or symbolic meaning’ and to ‘take anthropological understandings to be first and foremost a way of acquiring social and practical skills’ (1983: 339). This implies a full use of the body as a methodological tool, so as try and access the embodied knowledge of the research respondents. As Jackson put it, ‘to participate bodily in everyday practical tasks was a creative technique which often helped me grasp the sense of an activity by using my body as others did’ (ibid: 340, my italics).

Recent studies have expanded on this view by proposing ‘an artisanal approach to anthropology’ (Harris 2007: 12), whereby the developing of anthropological knowledge is recognised as itself a form of making (Herzfeld 2007) which emerges through sensorial engagement and shared movements between the researchers and her respondents (Ingold 2011, Downey 2011). Several authors emphasised the value of apprenticeship ‘as both a mode of learning and a field method’ (Marchand 2010: S3) that allows for an exploration of knowledge beyond words. For example, by learning to perform capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian dance and martial art, Downey (2007, 2010, 2011) could gain deeper insights into how performers develop knowledge through a coordination of body movements, vision, the brain, and the nervous system while acting with others in a shared environment. Similarly, by training and labouring with minaret builders in Yemen and mud masons in Mali, Marchand could better acknowledge how ‘craftspeople ‘silently’ acquire their myriad of skills on the job’ where ‘ideas took shape in the coordinated activities of eyes, ears, hands and tools’ rather than through verbal communication of propositional concepts (2008: 248). And in her school-based ethnography, Evans (2006: 133-135) refers to how playing football with young boys allowed her to share their emotional involvement in the school playground and gain their trust and acceptance.

In my research, a theoretical/methodological endeavour based on apprenticeship and the learning of bodily skills proved highly problematic and ultimately unattainable. My body and skills were in a sense irreconcilable with those of my respondents, for a twofold reason: firstly, because my body is inherently different to that of a child, and as such it immediately identified me as a different type of being compared to my
young respondents; and second, because Matses children and adults are tremendously skilled and agile, in a way that I never was and likely never will become. Compared to the Matses I was clumsy, slow, big, fat and also white, as they themselves pointed out.

My body, therefore, became a key interpretative tool not so much for the sharing and performing of similar activities, but rather for the explicit, irreducible differences between my body and those of Matses children and adults. The Matses themselves created a discourse around our different bodies, which in their view emphasised the tangible expression of our different ways-of-being and revealed how these are informed by certain political and economic factors. For example, my being fat and white became the tangible sign of non-indigenousness, economic wealth and also beauty, as I will explain. Such differences were not just disclosed in verbal expression (e.g. ‘Camilla, you are so fat!’ or ‘your skin is white and pretty’). They also came to constitute an underlying, embodied feeling of being different that accompanied me throughout fieldwork and was made manifest in the way the Matses addressed me not just verbally, but also through actions: in the way they looked at me, approached me, spoke to me, established physical contact, and so forth. In this view, the body, its movements and physical specificities only exist as intertwined with people’s understandings of and references to them, or in other words, within a wider socio-political ‘discourse’ (Butler 1993: 10), as I will show throughout the thesis. As such, the body becomes the ground of shared understandings predicated upon difference and idiosyncrasies (Irving 2011).

However, the thesis does not intend to offer a thorough reflexive analysis or to stress my own positionality as paramount to the theoretical arguments I advance. My attention is directed first and foremost to the experiences and understandings of the children, who are the main research respondents. But in order to better render the process of mutual exchanges through which knowledge was generated and communicated through the body during fieldwork, I decided to pay special attention to my own perception and positionality in two chapters of the thesis. In Chapter Three, I discuss the multiple possibilities of being a woman and how understandings of womanhood, including my own, were generated through bodily encounters between me and Matses women and the recognition of our bodily differences; and in Chapter Seven, I propose an analysis of schooling based on my teaching activity in
the village school and on the multiple, bodily experiences of schooling in the material space of the classroom.

My attempt to grasp children’s knowledge beyond words was also facilitated by a range of methods that I applied to better explore children’s fluid imaginaries, but also to encompass language difficulties that at the beginning of fieldwork posed a barrier to our mutual understandings. Most Matses people are monolingual and only a few of them understand and speak Spanish fluently, excluding children under twelve years of age who generally only know a few Spanish words. Therefore, although I started playing with children very early in my fieldwork and the children came to look for me every day to play and make drawings, it took much effort to properly engage in conversations and become familiar with them. Even after I learned Matses and was fully able to communicate with people, talking with the children was much more difficult than with adults. The children were reluctant to engage in long dialogues or conversations, and whereas the adults would patiently take time to explain things and repeat what they had said if I did not understand, the children would not do so. Matses children are extremely dynamic and they would much rather play with me in the river or around the houses than sit down and chat. Ethnographers openly recognise the difficulties of working with children in general and especially with indigenous children who speak a significantly different language from that of the ethnographer (James, personal conversation; see also Montgomery 2009: 46). In my case such difficulties were initially so frustrating that I considered abandoning my interest in children and working with the adults instead.

Creative methodologies of research partially helped me to overcome such difficulties and allowed me an entry point into the children’s understandings beyond words, so that even after I learned Matses, I kept applying visual methodologies as these stimulated children’s enthusiasm and participation much better than standard methods such as semi-structured interviews. The methods I applied include drawing; image-elicitation; modelling and painting mud or wood into shapes; and also distributing digital cameras to the children and asking them to film or take photographs. In the thesis I will discuss further these methods by integrating visual material with the text, so as to bring out a vivid sense of children’s experiences and shared understandings.
Since my attention in this thesis is primarily devoted to bringing out children’s perspectives and lived experiences, I intend to discuss broader issues concerning Matses society only insofar as these affect the children in their everyday dealings. For instance, I will not propose a systematic, macro-analysis of Matses people’s relations with the Peruvian State, national capitalistic economy, NGOs and processes of globalisation or modernity. This does not mean that I avoid addressing Matses political-economy or social organisation, but rather that I do so while trying to give primary relevance to the children’s experiences and perspectives. Broader issues such as the impact of globalisation or the media, the influence of the market economy and processes of modernity are therefore addressed to the extent to which the children encounter them—in different modalities and to varying degrees of awareness—in their daily lives. My primary aim is thus to bring out children’s ways-of-knowing, which I define in the following section.

**Ways of Knowing, Social Transformation and Future Horizons**

The main theoretical approach of my research draws upon Heidegger’s (1962) theory of knowing, which I apply in ethnographic terms so as to understand how Matses children make sense of the world they inhabit. For Heidegger, knowing is not a process of fixed internalisation of information through which notions are ‘stored up in the cabinet of consciousness’ (*ibid*: 89), but instead a dynamic way of being-there with the entities that are known, bringing them to life and making the knowledge of these anew. In his view, knowing cannot be interpreted

‘as a ‘procedure’ by which a subject provides itself with representations of something that remains stored up ‘inside’ as having been thus appropriated, and with regard to which the question of how they ‘agree’ with actuality can occasionally arise’ (*ibid*: 89-90).

The same can be affirmed for thinking about or *expressing* what is known, which also becomes a way for establishing dynamic relationships with the known and represented entities. In Heidegger’s words,
‘If I ‘merely’ know about some ways in which the being of entities is interconnected, if I ‘only’ represent them, if I do no more than ‘think’ about them, I am no less alongside the entities outside in the world that when I originally grasp them’ (ibid: 89, italics in original).

Knowing is thus a way of being alongside the known entities or ‘amidst’ them, as Dreyfus renders it (1991: 44-45). The aim of Heidegger’s philosophical project was to bring out the most basic, implicit and ‘closest to us’ type of knowing. In this view, knowledge cannot be reduced to purely cognitive representations but must be understood within an attention to ‘everyday coping skills as the basis of all intelligibility’ (Dreyfus 1991: 2-3). In doing so, Heidegger aimed at bringing out a type of knowing that develops through people’s everyday, practical engagement with the world, which is often practice-based, non-propositional, unspoken and taken-for-granted.

This Heideggerian approach is echoed by recent anthropological works that replace traditional inquiries on human knowledge with an attention to ‘ways of knowing’ (Harris 2007) or ‘making knowledge’ (Marchand 2010). These recent lines of analysis share the purpose of asking not just what people know but also ‘how we come to know as humans’ (Marchand 2010: 3, italics in original) and they stress that ‘knowledge-making is a dynamic process arising directly from the indissoluble relations that exist between minds, bodies, and environment’ (Marchand 2010: 2; Ingold 2001). Taking part in this inquiry, Dominic Boyer provocatively expressed doubt that ‘there is anything so radical about the anthropology of knowledge’ (2007: 27) and the focus on practice-based, implicit forms of ‘everyday knowledge’ makes no exception especially since Bourdieu’s theorisation of the habitus (cf. Marchand 2010: Siii). Implicit and non-symbolic forms of knowing have been theorised in various modes in social research, as summarised by Harris (2005: 216-217), and include the notion of ‘habitus’ as a ‘system of structured, structuring dispositions’ (Bourdieu 1990: 52); ‘implicit and unexpressed’ knowledge (Bloch 2012: 43-85); embodied cognition (Toren 1990, 1993, 2001); the ‘preobjective’ that seeks ‘to capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins’ (Csordas 1990: 9); and ‘direct perception’ (Ingold 2000, 2001), where knowing is produced through engagement with the environment.
The recent approaches to ‘ways-of-knowing’, however, offer original contributions insofar as they focus explicitly on knowing and address the process of knowledge-in-the-making in its own terms. Here practiced-based forms of knowledge, or the *habitus*, become ‘the object of research, not merely the explanatory bridge to resolve theoretical problems, such as the relationship between structure and agency, or the endurance of class difference’ (Downey 2007: 237). The focus on knowing is further expanded by forging links with different disciplines including neuroscience (Downey 2007, 2010; Marchand 2007, 2010), philosophy (Boyer 2007, Kresse 2007), and visual and sensory studies (Grasseni 2007, 2010; Willerslev 2010; Ravetz 2007; Stoller 2004, 2007). In doing so, these theories also attempt to reconcile an established dichotomy between cognitive or propositional knowledge on one side, and embodied practice-based forms on the other (cf. Harris 2007: 14).

Drawing on these recent approaches, this thesis addresses ways-of-knowing as a primary object of inquiry and with regards to Matses children’s everyday lives. My aim is to explore how children develop practice-based and often implicit modes of knowing the world wherein they dwell, and how they become familiar with their everyday environments while developing unspoken perceptions of their being-in-the-world with others. At the same time I recognise that ‘the differentiation between embodied knowledge and propositional or conceptual knowledge is not as deeply entrenched as once supposed’ (Marchand 2007: 184). For as recent theories of cognition propose, cognitive thinking cannot be equated to the process of ‘a computer ... processing information’ (cf. Harris 2007: 2), but rather, we must recognise that the ‘mind is a function of the whole person constituted over time in intersubjective relation with others in the environing world’ (Toren 1999: 12, italics in original; see also Toren 1993, 2001; Ingold 2001; Bloch 2012).

Accordingly, I also intend to put forward a view of propositional and practiced-based knowledge not as strictly separate domains, but rather as merging in people’s everyday experiences. For instance I will show how the process of learning information about riverine life and that of developing riverine skills are both developed through children’s practical, dynamic engagement with the river environment. However, my aim is not to enter in conversation with theories of cognition such as Sperber’s (1985) on the transmission of knowledge (see Ingold 2001 for a critique); to address in detail recent approaches to embodied cognition
proposed by Toren (1990, 1993, 1999) or Bloch (2012); or to thoroughly classify different modes of knowledge and trace the relations between propositional and practiced-based forms. My aim is instead to emphasise the *worldliness* of knowing and to explore its situated modalities, whereby knowledge is understood as always being-there amidst what is known. Or as Harris put it,

‘knowing is always bound up in one way or another with the world: a person does not leave their environment to know, even when she is dealing with the most abstract of propositions’ (2007: 1).

In this view, knowing always unfolds in-the-world and through relational, sensorial, emotional and bodily modalities of some sorts. I argue that exploring these modalities of knowing is essential to understand Matses children’s active contributions to social transformation. This is because by knowing and attending to the world through original modalities and according to their passions and preferences, the children become attached to certain parts of it while leaving others behind, and this often implies a shift of attitudes and knowledge from older generations. For example, whereas elderly Matses attend to the forest through modalities of interest and self-satisfaction, the children view it as a boring and frightening place and choose to stay away from it. At the same time the children know and attend to the nonindigenous world through modalities of fascination and excitement, whereas old Matses are not so keen on and even critical of it. Since these modalities of knowing the world and their choices to attend to it in certain ways are not always put into words but often implicit and revealed through bodily action, it is necessary to explore knowing beyond words and in its practiced-based forms.

My analysis of social change, however, is not just limited to an intergenerational comparison in which I consider how Matses children differ from their elders or how experiences of childhood have been changing in recent years. I propose that not just the past but also the future must be taken into account in order to understand processes of transformation, whereby I try to grasp how children develop desires and expectations for their future lives and consider how they work towards them. In this view, ‘the human reveals itself as a kind of going beyond’ (Rapport 2013: 3, italics in original), or I might say, as a going forward, whereby people’s ‘activity is directed into the future even when they are not pursuing conscious goals’ (Dreyfus 1991: 68-
This implies that social change is not a sudden rupture in the course of events but that life is in itself ongoing movement and transformation (Ingold 2011), so that human beings are always projected towards future horizons and this informs their ways of experiencing the present. Accordingly, the children’s lives are stretching away from the past and projected towards new horizons, and the future becomes constitutive of social transformation.

The future is here addressed in ethnographic terms, which means that I will outline the political-economic constraints of the present as the material ground upon which the future is going to emerge. This ethnographic analysis is complicated not just by the fact that Matses people do not have a word for ‘future’ but also because the future is largely undetermined and open-ended, which makes impossible to fully anticipate how children will live as adults. It is nonetheless possible and necessary, I argue, to look at how children set up certain tangible conditions in the present and in so doing open up or close off certain possibilities for their life as adults. This means that I will look at how children develop certain forms of desire and expectations, and how these inform their life in the present by affecting children’s ways of knowing themselves, and set up concrete ways of acting and working towards the future they desire. Accordingly, I will outline: (i) the material conditions of the here-and-now in relation to indeterminacy and unpredictability of the future; and (ii) how possible futures are continuously brought into the present, informing how children understand who they are but also how they develop aspirations, desire and expectation on who they will be. In doing so, I also attempt to contribute to a significant lack of anthropological literature concerned with the future. Whereas authors have focussed on the future of anthropology as a discipline (e.g. Firth 1944, Lévi-Strauss 1966, Moore 1996, Srivastava 1999, Comaroff and Kohl 2010), little attention has been paid to the future as an ethnographic object, as outlined above.

In the last part of the introduction I will refer to theories concerning knowledge of the world and environmental relationships in Amazonia, which I propose to expand upon with a focus on ways-of-knowing in relation to children.
Persons and the Environment in Amazonia

The thesis aims at contributing to Amazonian anthropology not just by taking childhood as a key focus and addressing children as the main research respondents, but also by proposing the approach to ways-of-knowing that I outlined above, which has only minimally been applied in Amazonian studies. The different approaches to Amazonian knowledge can be identified and summarised by looking at how authors have theorised Amerindian people’s relationships with and conceptualisations of their environments, which has constituted a major topic of interest in the regional literature (Viveiros De Castro 1996). I suggest that authors taking part in this analysis—although with some relevant exceptions that I will address—have defined indigenous knowledge either as determined by external environmental factors, thus denying indigenous agency; or as symbolic representations at the level of thought, leaving little space to the importance of the material environment.

Theories that address the relationship between persons and the environment in Amazonia remained for a long time divided into two separate schools, which nevertheless encompass diverse and at times overlapping positionalities so that any strict distinction will be always approximate.6

The first school includes theories of cultural-ecology, which can be seen as directly influenced by Steward’s *Handbook of South American Indians* (cf. Viveiros De Castro 1996: 181). This approach initially consisted of socio-ecological theories that examined environmental possibilities and constraints as being generative of social structure and knowledge, which might be termed as ‘the paradigm of adaptation’. Anthropologists writing from within this paradigm stressed how Amazonian environments influence and at times determine socio-cultural practices and actions, for instance as the outcome of and responses to limiting environmental factors (e.g. Meggers 1971, Hames and Vickers 1983). A tangible example is how game scarcity is understood as being a principal cause in the ascription and maintenance of food taboos (Ross 1978), as well as settlement and mobility patterns (Gross 1979).

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6 In reconstructing this debate I use as a term of reference Viveiros De Castro’s well-known review on ‘nature and society in Amazonia’ (1996). But for practical reasons I propose a more stylised model and include several recent theories, including Viveiros De Castro’s (1998) own work on perspectivism.
Theories of adaptation were later criticised for overemphasising environmental factors while dismissing historical processes including the impact of European conquest, which led Lathrap (1973) and Roosevelt (1991, 1993) to elaborate a model of ‘historical regression’. Supported by archaeological findings, this model argued that Amazonia societies were evolving into technologically advanced and structurally complex chiefdoms up until European conquest that ‘relegated Indians to ecological and societal marginality’ (Roosevelt 1993: 255). This view was later expanded by theories of ‘historical ecology’ (Balée 1993, 1995; Posey 1984; Posey and Balée 1989; cf. Rival 2006), which sought to bring together ecological and historical approaches to the study of indigenous knowledge and social organisation. Balée supported this position and advanced the innovative thesis that the Amazonian forest is ‘anthropogenic’ (1993: 231), that is, not a pristine background that imposes itself on people but itself shaped by intentional human activity through history. Although his position was criticised insofar as ‘what he really means by history is indigenous adaptation to the Spanish Conquest and to post-Conquest biological and political dynamics’ (Rival 2006: S84), Balée nonetheless started proposing a more dynamic and interactive view of people’s relationships with the environment.

Working with Matses people in the 1970s, Romanoff (1984) entered into conversation with theories of adaptation and argued that in order to understand Matses social structure and practices it would be necessary to look at historical and social factors rather than environmental constraints. These social factors include first and foremost their relations with the chotac, nonindigenous people, especially since ‘the social environment of the Matses has presented more critical and life-threatening dangers than has the natural environment’ (ibid: 3). Their very social structure (small, scattered, dwelling in inland forest areas) is understood as a consequence of the impact of the rubber boom on Amerindian peoples: ‘When rubber tappers destroyed Amerindian groups throughout the region, they created many small remnant settlements. The Matses core was itself part of this social flotsam.’ (ibid: 40-41).

The second school of thought in Amazonian studies concerns the socio-anthropological study of indigenous societies and descends directly from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1968, 1972). This paradigm mainly addresses indigenous knowledge of and relations with the environment in terms of symbolic representations and cosmological classifications, thereby ‘privileging the symbolic
ordering of nature by culture (and thereby the cognitive interface)’ (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 182, brackets in original). Initial theories within this field offered a structuralist approach to the study of kinship and social organisation (e.g. Maybury-Lewis 1979; Turner 1979; Riviére 1968, Overing 1975).

Among the major contributions to this paradigm are the cosmological theories offered by Descola (1992, 1994), Århem (1996) and later Viveiros De Castro (1998, 2001). These approaches stress that Amerindian knowledge and cosmologies are predicated upon different ontological premises than western worldviews, which is suggested by how native Amazonians know and relate to the environment—including the vegetal, spiritual and animal world.

Through rigorous ethnographic analysis on the Achuar of Ecuador, Descola challenged theories of adaptation and attempted a synthesis between ‘ecological and sociological views of the relations between nature and society in Amazonia’ (cf. Viveiros De Castro 1996: 190). However, his major contributions concern his theory of ‘symbolic ecology’ (ibid) and the notion of animism (1992, 1994; see also Århem 1996). This postulates that indigenous Amazonians regard plants and animals as ‘attributed with culture’ and thus ‘use the elementary categories of social life to organize (…) the relations between human beings and natural species’ (Descola 1992: 114). In Descola’s words,

‘Animism is the belief that natural beings possess their own spiritual principles and that it is therefore possible for humans to establish with these entities personal relations of a certain kind- relations of protection, seduction, hostility, alliance or exchange of services’ (ibid: 114).

In this indigenous model, society and nature coexist in a relation of *reciprocity* as parts of a wider cosmological system whereby energies and substances are continuously flowing and interchanging (Århem 1996: 185). Viveiros De Castro (1998) took part in the discourse by challenging its very basis, arguing for the need of a readjustment of the environmental categories taken into account—such as ‘humans’, ‘animal’, ‘spiritual’ and so forth. By using the concept of Amerindian perspectivism, Viveiros De Castro argues that for indigenous Amazonians such categories are not given and objective, but instead continuously transforming according to the standpoint of the observer. Therefore,
‘humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans’ (ibid: 470).

In his view, for Amerindian people humanity is not a given, ontological condition of our species, but rather a condition of existence applicable to various forms of life according to different perspectives. Consequently, anthropologists should reconsider the western definitions of ‘social’ and ‘natural’ world and replace these with interpretations of indigenous knowledge wherein sociality is extended to different realms of existence (cf. McCallum 2001).

The theory of perspectivism has become a dominant paradigm throughout contemporary Amazonian anthropology (e.g. Villaça 2002, 2005; Belaunde 2007; Gow 2007; Fausto 2007) and its influence also extends to the anthropology of other regions (Willerslev 2007, Holbraad and Willerslev 2007, Pedersen 2001). By largely overlooking historical and cultural specificities, however, perspectivism reduces the vast and heterogeneous indigenous population in Amazonia to a ‘generic Amerindian’ and like structuralism it risks reducing ‘the enormous indigenous diversity … into formulas and principles of an alien philosophy’ (Ramos 2012: 483; Turner 2009). Perspectivism also presents a view of knowledge as given mental content rather than looking at the embodied, practical engagement through which knowledge is constituted in time. As such, it often ‘remains an abstract model, detached from the real experiences of people in a lifeworld’ (Willerslev 2007: 95). For as Viveiros De Castro admitted himself, ‘[m]y strong (or weak) point has always been the synthesis, generalization, and comparison rather than the fine phenomenological analysis of ethnographic materials’ (quoted in Ramos 2012: 483, brackets in original).

The two lines of analysis that I outlined above—cultural ecology on one side, and the symbolic-cosmological studies on the other—are very broad and encompass various theories. While the first school has been rightly criticized for its materialist, environmental or historical determinism that ‘leaves no place for sociocultural processes’ (Rival 2002: 15, 2006; Viveiros De Castro 1996), it nevertheless takes seriously the Amazonian landscape as a challenging presence that has an impact on
indigenous knowledge and social life. Cosmological theories, on the other hand, favour symbolic representations over practical action and approach environmental relationships through the prism of conceptual and symbolic understandings. This cognitive and symbolic line of analysis, while influential in its analysis of the relationship between Amazonian peoples and their surroundings pays less attention to the environment as a tangible, living and dynamic presence that interacts with human beings. Having lived for over a year in a village settled in the Amazonian rainforest, I have come to realise that the Amazonian landscape can often be challenging and hard-work to deal with and this should be taken into account when outlining a theory of indigenous knowledge. I argue, therefore, that while the environment cannot be overstated as deterministic of social behaviour, so the complexity of Amerindian people’s relationship with their material surroundings cannot be reduced to conceptual classification and mental content.

Both lines of analysis do not fully consider how persons come to know the environment by actively moving around and living within it. Or as Ingold might argue, they do not engage with how ‘the acquisition of environmental knowledge is inseparable from productive practice’ (1992: 53) or how persons and the environment coexist in a synergetic relation of mutual exchanges (ibid: 45, 2000). Only recently have authors attempted a more substantial synthesis between the two approaches. Two of the most notable examples are Rival’s work on the Huaorani of Ecuador, which considers how people’s relationships with the forest environment is constituted through dynamic action and direct engagement (1993, 2002); and Stang’s (2011) attempt to grasp how Amerindian people’s knowledge is embodied through direct perception and physical action.

A consistent synthesis between ecological and sociological approaches has also been offered within studies of nonindigenous inhabitants of the Amazon floodplains (Harris 1998, 2000b, 2005, 2006; Nugent and Harris 2004; Posey and Balick 2006). These recent works explore how persons make sense of the world by proposing a synthesis of ecological relationships, political and economic dynamics, historical processes and social transformations, so as to provide a more holistic account of Amazonian societies in their environments. In the thesis I will look particularly at Harris’ (2000b, 2005) work on Brazilian floodplain dwellers and their relationship with the river environment. For although the Matses have until recently resided in
inland forest areas, they recently settled down along major watercourses and started sharing commonalities with other riverine dwellers, whereby the river plays a major role in how the Matses are developing new ways of knowing and engaging with the world. By combining a focus on environmental relationships with recent works on ways-of-knowing (Harris 2007, Marchand 2010), my aim is to explore how Matses children feel and develop a taste for the world, including how they establish affective relationships with the environment and become emotionally attached to it.

The thesis is divided into three parts and structured as follows:

Part I. The first part of the thesis includes two chapters and discusses how children come to know the world by acting and moving in different types of environments, and how they experience and actively contribute to processes of social, economic and environmental transformation. In Chapter One, I address how children engage with the river environment through movement and daily practices. By showing how children become familiar with and affectively attached to the river, I will stress children’s active contribution to processes of environmental change in Matses life. In Chapter Two, I show how this process of transformation is linked with economic changes at the level of the household and particularly the growing importance of capitalistic, monetary-based forms of economy. By comparing two twelve-year-old boys to their fathers, I show such emerging socio-economic transformations are opening up different possibilities of being and understanding the world as a Matses boy.

Part II. This also comprises of two chapters and focuses specifically on ways-of-knowing in terms of existential questioning and self-understanding. Moving from within a view of existence as a continuous interpretive act, I try to grasp the unspoken process by which young women and boys make sense of their existence in relation to others and in light of recent social transformations. In Chapter Three, I carry out the analysis from the perspective of young Matses women and address how they come to question and know themselves in relation to emerging images of nonindigenous female bodies. Chapter Four specifically addresses boys and how they come to question and understand their own being in relation to others through
the creative use of spoken words, namely verbal confrontations, quarrelling, mocking and insults.

Part III. The final part of the thesis includes three chapters and addresses children’s ways of knowing and relating to the nonindigenous world. I consider how children relate to places, material tools and practices that are perceived as pertaining to the world of the chotac and how, in doing so, they develop certain forms of self-perception and expectations for the future. Chapter Five considers children’s imaginative relations with the urban world through the children’s drawings. I discuss how by giving attention to the nonindigenous world through modalities of fascination and desire, the children learn to understand themselves as unprivileged and poor. In Chapter Six, I focus on children’s perceptions of money, which the children come to know through desire and invest with value; and this, as I will show, has important relevance on children’s understandings and daily experiences. Finally, Chapter Seven addresses children’s experiences of schooling in relation to their perceived future horizons, skills and ways-of-knowing the world.

Included between the three parts of the thesis are two visual interludes that present a selection of photographs, most of which were taken by the children with digital cameras that I provided. The photographs show the children playing, carrying out daily activities and spending time together. The aim of the interludes is to offer a glimpse into the children’s everyday lives, and to render a more vivid sense of their dynamism, liveliness and personalities through a visual medium.
Part I: Knowing through doing and active engagement
Introduction to Part I

In this opening part of the thesis I will discuss ways-of-knowing that unfold through doing. My aim is to consider how children develop a sense of the world and themselves through movement and dynamic action in different types of environments, more specifically: the river environment (Chapter One) and the household (Chapter Two). I will therefore look at children’s skills, everyday practices and uses of tools in order to grasp how the children come to know the world and come to favour certain aspects of it rather than others. By comparing children’s ways of knowing and attending to the world with those of older generations, I will emphasise how children are actively contributing to significant processes of social change. I will focus especially on their active contributions to: (i) the growing importance of the river environment and fishing for subsistence, and the correlated decline in hunting practices and forest knowledge; and (ii) the growing importance of capitalistic, monetary-based forms of economy and how these have an impact on changing understandings and experiences of childhood.

The analysis will focus on the skills and types of bodies that children have to develop in order to become competent participants in their ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wegner 1991), that is, how they develop the ability to perform basic activities for survival and come to move skilfully in everyday dwelling environments. This is what in the anthropology of childhood has been referred to as a ‘basket of competencies’ (Bock 2002): ‘the set of skills and knowledge’ developed by children to survive in the world, and which are ‘added or discarded through life span or between generations’ (Zarger 2010: 345). But as Harris (2005: 199) points out, ‘a skill resides in the act itself (as opposed to being an instrument in a toolbox), and emerges in the coordination of bodily movements’ (2005: 199, brackets in original). Or as Downey argues, ‘we cannot ... assume that ‘bodily knowledge’ is just another form of stored information like explicit knowledge’ (2006: 2), in the same way that the knowing of a proposition cannot be reduced to an act of storing up information in the mind (Downey 2007: 222; Harris). As suggested by Ingold, we should instead ‘recognize that the body is the human organism, and that the process of embodiment is one and the same as the development of that organism in its environment’ (2000: 170).
I therefore agree with Harris that the learning of skills cannot be likened to the storing up of abilities in a basket and that skills emerge instead through ‘the adjusting of movement between person, technology and material’ (2005: 199) as well as through situated emotional modalities. Accordingly, I propose to explore how knowledge is generated through direct engagement and mutual exchanges with the environment (Ingold 2000) as well as through movement and affective modalities, whereby I emphasise how children become emotionally attached to the environment as they move and act within it. In the following account, I often use the words ‘landscape’ and ‘environment’. Following Ingold (1993: 157) by ‘landscape’ I refer to the everyday surfaces upon which Matses people move, act and dwell, while the concept of ‘environment’ seeks to bring this landscape to life by showing how people exist in ongoing interaction with their surroundings and develop ways of knowing through dynamic and purposeful action in the world.
Chapter One. Canoeing, fishing, playing: Matses children moving through mutable environments

This photograph was taken by Lily, a nine-year-old Matses girl. It depicts an activity that for her is an important aspect of childhood: children climbing a tree by the riverbank. On reaching the top of the tree the children will jump into the water below, shouting and screaming. Some children are already in the water, raucously laughing and shouting ‘Come on! Come on! Jump!’
A view from the ground

The change in visual perspective established when the children climb to the top of the tree, in Lily’s photograph, recalls the opening to Peter Rivière’s monograph on the indigenous people of Amazonian Guiana, *Marriage among the Trio*:

> During my months among the Trio, my world had shrunk to the size of their world. As the aeroplane lifted above the trees, the visual realization of the immensity of the Universe was thrust violently back into my awareness. It was like the reawakening of a long forgotten taste. (...) Could an Indian’s eyes and mind have adjusted themselves to comprehend such a vast and undifferentiated view as the jungle affords from the air? (1969: vii).

As Rivière looks down onto the forest from the airplane, he compares his airborne view-from-above to that of the Indians on the ground below. Having emerged from his fieldwork in the forest, he questions whether Indian eyes could ever adjust to, or indeed comprehend, the change in perspective and awareness that is afforded by the elevated view of the aeroplane. It is implied, in a sense, that viewing from above generates new ways of knowing and understanding the world: seeing and knowing converge, and unequal technological and economic relations transform into uneven vantage positions.

The ‘view from above’ has been critiqued as a characteristic of particular anthropological approaches and power relations, first and foremost structuralism (Salmond 1982: 74-75; Fabian 1983: 52-69; Bourdieu in Bloch 2012: 149). It is perhaps not much of a coincidence, therefore, that Rivière’s account of looking down from the airplane is followed by a classic structuralist analysis of Trio marriage rules and social organisation, which often overlooks the daily experience and embodied, practical negotiation of life in the forest. And while Rivière’s contribution cannot be reduced to *Marriage Among The Trio*, structuralism’s influence still courses through contemporary approaches in Amazonian anthropology; particularly those that focus on Amerindian thought in order to construct elegant philosophical arguments about perspectivism and ontology, and in which the structures of the mind are privileged
over people’s lived experiences and bodily ways of knowing (e.g. Viveiros De Castro 1998, Fausto 2007, Villaça 2005).

My aim in this chapter is to address some of the above critiques and explore how different modes of seeing, sensory perception and knowing can also be generated by the moving body and its sensorial engagement with its surroundings. I thus seek to grasp a type of knowing that is often implicit and unspoken, or as Heidegger termed it, *primordial* (cf. Dreyfus 1991: 184). The term primordial does not imply that knowledge is ‘outside or prior to culture’ (Csordas 1990: 9). It refers instead to modalities of knowing developed through practical engagement and interactions with others, and which largely remain unspoken or cannot be easily articulated in propositional or symbolic form. In Heidegger’s words, it is the ‘kind of dealing which is closest to us … [and is] not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use’ (1962: 95). As mentioned, this type of knowing has been addressed in social studies as ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977, 1990), the ‘preobjective’ (Csordas 1990), or ‘direct perception’ (Ingold 2000), to mention but a few (cf. Harris 2005: 216-217). Here I will refer to this modality of knowing as ‘kineceptive’, a term constructed from the Greek *kinein*, ‘to move’, and the Latin *per—capio*, ‘to grasp by means of’. Accordingly, my aim is to explore a type of knowing in which multiple perspectives and situated understandings are continuously being generated through dynamic action and movement.

This chapter attempts to place the inquiry into kineceptive ways-of-knowing directly into the field so as to offer an experience-near, ethnographic account of how children learn about and understand the world through their day-to-day sensorial and affective immersion in the environment. Methodologically speaking, this inquiry poses a dilemma: namely, how is it possible to ever grasp a type of knowing that is developed through movement, is ‘closest to us’ (Heidegger, quoted above) and that largely ‘goes without saying’ (Bloch 2012: 143-185)? I find a methodological and theoretical way out of this dilemma through the practice-based use of visual media, more specifically, photographs produced by children in the field. In doing so, I also set up a critical investigation into the relationship between seeing and knowing, not so much to rehearse the well-known critique of the empirical contract between vision and truth (e.g. Fabian 1983: 105-142, Pink 2003: 187, Grasseni 2010, Willerslev 2010), but in order to explore children’s lived experiences beyond words and render
a sense of their dynamism. Like Rivière, I incorporate different vantage points into the act of seeing; only in my case seeing is always from the perspective of the childhood body in movement and is aided by the electric circuits of a camera, rather than the technology of flight.

Photography here is used both as a means of research and representation. Collaborative methods based on the use of video and photo-cameras seem to be growing in child-centred research (Hecht 1998, Young and Barrett 2001, Mizen 2005, Kaplan 2008, Burke 2008, White et al. 2010, Kullman 2012). I propose to contribute to these approaches by emphasising the connections between the children’s bodies, photographs and their implicit ways-of-knowing the world generated through movement (kineceptive). I consider how photographs taken by the children allow us to see and understand the world in multiple ways that are predicated on dynamism and the body. The camera is aligned with the child’s body in action and, therefore, each photograph offers a situated perspective onto the world as the children access it in a given circumstance. Photography is thus revealed as a whole bodily activity that is not limited to vision, but encompasses a full physical engagement with the world.

This method offers particular insights in the research with children, insofar as the photographs are shot from varying embodied perspectives and angles that reflect the height and age of the child. As such, the photographs work towards opening up perspectives—and the related ways-of-knowing which are entangled with these—that are not always easy to access for adults and their different-sized bodies.

As mentioned, my emphasis on children’s perspectives should not be confused with theories of Amerindian ‘perspectivism’ (Viveiros De Castro 1998, Stolze Lima 2007), which aim at tracing cognitive models and coherent structures of thought through which indigenous Amazonians theorise and classify the world and its inhabitants. The perspectives I aim to grasp are instead predicated upon movement and embedded in the flow of everyday life. This emphasis on the moving body reinforces how perception is partial, situated and provisional and underlines the fact that ‘the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled’ (Berger 2008: 7). The resulting ethnographic account encapsulates a view not ‘from above’ or directly from inside the indigenous ‘head’ (cf. Salmon 1982: 74), but rather, a dynamic account from the river and its banks, so as to render a sense of the world as it is experienced by the children moving in the river environment.
The chapter builds up a visual narrative in which photographs are combined with language, stories and theoretical text. My aim is to bring to life children’s lived experiences in the riverine environment without reducing them to ‘the static types and social categories that are often required in conventional … anthropological analyses’ (Irving 2007: 204). Each photograph captures a fleeting moment in the dynamic everyday life of a child and, as such, can be taken as a material representation of the children’s embodied perspectives onto the world at a given time and place. However, each fleeting moment captured in the images also extends out of the photograph’s margins and gestures towards the broader world that the children inhabit; both the past life that brought that moment into being; and the future horizons that life is moving towards. Consequently, the photographs open up a story about the broader material and social world wherein the children dwell. Each section of the chapter starts and ends with images taken by one of the children and uses these photographs to call attention to ethnographic details—an action, a tool, an object, a landscape, a body, a social characteristic that was captured in the frame—while the accompanying text analyses how these small details refer to children’s positionality within a rapidly changing Matses society. In other words, the everyday items, materials and events that are photographed by the children are used to open up a window onto (i) the daily environments that children inhabit and (ii) broader processes of social transformation whereby the children come to know their place in the world.

The photographs can only ever represent a fraction of Matses life, and the images I will report offer a partial selection of the ‘vast disorder of objects’ (Barthes 2000: 6) that constitutes the everyday world of Matses children. However, a substantial amount of the photographs I collected in the field and which I selected for this chapter were produced by the children in the river, reinforcing the importance of this type of environment in their daily lives. By using images and text to render Matses children’s engagement with the river environment, namely canoeing, fishing and playing, I show how the children come to know the river as being central to life and document their sensorial, emotional and affective attachments to water. Unlike older generations, who knew little of the river in their childhood, today’s children are not developing forest-based knowledge and skills, such as hunting and tracking. This marks a critical shift and social differentiation vis-à-vis older generations which
carries significant implications and empirical possibilities for the future of Matses society. Thus, by contextualising their activities in terms of an intergenerational analysis, I consider children’s ways-of-knowing not only in terms of the flow and movement of their daily lives, but also as an index of social change. I argue that by engaging with and developing new forms of practical know-how about the river vis-à-vis the forest, children are playing an active role in shaping future possible directions of Matses society and transforming the community’s relationships with the environment over time.

In order to situate children’s lives historically, and provide a window of analysis onto the radical changes that have taken place over the past forty years, the chapter is interrupted with various glimpses on Matses life in the past or what they term as ònden, ‘back then’. This provides a way of situating children’s ways of knowing and being within the broader social history of their parents and grandparents in the village. The ethnographic and historical context of ònden was collected through interviews and informal conversations with elderly people; however, I also refer to written ethnographic accounts provided by Romanoff (1984).

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections: canoeing, where I consider how children develop knowledge about the material properties of the river in relation to skilled action and movement; fishing, which explores knowing and the importance of the river to nourishment; and playing, where I expand upon how children’s emotional engagement with water is contributing to social transformations in Matses society.
Canoeing: the river as central to movement

Figure 5. Emanuel paddling. (Photograph by Nelson, eleven years old).

Figure 6. Children paddling. (Photograph by Lily, nine years old).
The first photograph is of Emanuel, a ten-year-old Matses boy, and was taken by eleven-year-old Nelson, while they were canoeing on the river. The boys are not going anywhere in particular, just paddling around and enjoying themselves as Matses children often do. The sun is high and the light is bright, the air is hot, birds sing from the trees lining the river and the children enjoy the pleasant sensations of moving on the water. The second photograph was taken by Lily (the nine-year old girl who also took the chapter’s opening image of the children climbing the tree) and shows two boys playing in the river. One of them is climbing up a tree, while the other one is manoeuvring a canoe that is full of water and looks as if it is about to sink. The children have great fun when the canoe sinks; they explode laughing, shout for help and pretend to be in serious danger, and eventually find themselves in the water, squirming and screaming as they sink, before quickly pulling up the canoe to prevent it fullysubmerging and descending to the river bed.7

Uncate, ‘paddle’, was one of the very first and most important Matses terms I learned. Broad wooden paddles are a central part of Matses life and paddling is an essential skill to develop. The village is set alongside the Chobayacu, a wide navigable creek. For most Matses people, both children and adults, it is almost impossible to get through a single day without canoeing or moving about on the river. Young children—even as young as three or four years old—start canoeing by following adults on short trips, or more often, are offered paddles by older siblings who encourage them to have a go. By the time they are eight years old, Matses boys and girls are able to paddle skilfully and without much effort. Usually eleven- or twelve-year-olds are skilled canoeists; to the extent that it is quite common for them to set out on day long voyages along the river, for example to reach their parents who might have set up camp or are fishing further downriver.

7 I gave out four digital cameras, in turn, to about fifteen boys and girls aged eight to fourteen approximately. Every child could keep the camera from morning to evening. We then looked together at the photographs on my laptop, and I interviewed the children about the images. There is no electricity in the village where I worked, and all my gear was powered though a solar panel that I bought in Iquitos.
Figure 7. Kenny, three years old, plays with a paddle. (Photograph by Elsie, eight years old).

Figure 8. Three boys aged three, four and ten return from a river trip. (Photograph by Nelson, who watched them from the riverbank).
Being familiar with and able to handle a canoe is intimately intertwined with a broad assemblage of other skills, such as swimming and fishing. These are developed in childhood through action and experience, and are the key means by which children become familiar with the river environment. From a young age, the ability to canoe is essential to participate in social life, and highly developed paddling skills are central to children’s favourite activities such as racing canoes, going on shared river excursions or collecting berries that grow along the riverbank.

Canoeing, suffice to say, is not easy. Paddles are cumbersome, wooden and heavy. Using them to steer a canoe amidst the river’s currents requires considerable strength and is technically hard. Canoeing requires a strong upper-body and arms, hardened hands, physical stamina and resistance, and high levels of bodily coordination: all of which, children start developing from their earliest years of life. The processes of learning and knowing, therefore, can only be understood in relation to the particular types of bodies that must be developed in order to perform basic skills for living and dwelling within riverine environments.

Learning to use a sizable wooden paddle, like developing other riverine skills, is largely a process of ‘learning through doing’ (Willerslev 2007: 162). Matses children learn to navigate and move in the river not through the transmission of semantic or propositional knowledge about how to canoe but through mimetic bodily action and the experience of being on water. Experience—coming from ex, ‘out of’, and perior, ‘to make a trial’ or ‘to test’—can be defined as a continuous process of ‘testing-out’ one’s own possibilities in the world in relation to other persons and materials. It is in this sense that children experience and develop both their bodies and understandings of the river as they continually test out the different possible ways of moving, playing and interacting with the water. This process involves developing the requisite skills through bodily action, such as canoeing, but also extends to propositional and categorical types of knowledge. For example the children learn the names of fish and their movements and habits through interacting with others and playing, whereby the ‘knowing how’ of performing a skill is entangled with the ‘knowing that’ of propositional knowledge (Harris 2007: 3).
Children’s ways of learning and knowing the river can also be effectively elaborated through Bateson’s concept of ‘deutero-learning’ or ‘learning to learn’ (2000: 166-167), which Ingold later defined as ‘a kind of learning [that] aims not so much to provide us with facts about the world as to enable us to be taught by it’ (2013: 2, italics in original). Deutero-learning reveals the ways in which human beings develop ‘apperceptive habits, habitual ways of looking at the stream of events of which our own behaviour is a part’ (Bateson 2000: 165). In this model, knowledge is not understood as the accumulation of a set of schema or blueprints that instruct the person how to cope with a spectrum of different possible situations and contingencies. Rather, knowing involves ‘an education of attention’ (Ingold 2001: 113-153, 2013) through which people learn to test out, adjust and interact with environmental stimuli in the midst of lived experience and movement.

For Matses children, learning to move upon the river and perform riverine activities is part of a wider process of integrating perception and attention with the movements and specific characteristics of the river environment. Their ways-of-knowing the river are largely kineceptive, that is, developed through dynamic action. This process is only partially guided by adults, who for the most part do not play a major role in
helping children develop riverine skills or learn about the properties of water. Children occasionally accompany adults to the river, but for the most part they become familiar with the river by spending time together. By the time toddlers are aged three or four they are already spending large amounts of time in the river with older siblings. And even when adults take children to the river, they mainly do so while carrying out daily activities that they would perform anyway, such as canoeing and fishing, and not with the explicit purpose of instructing the children how to develop riverine skills. As documented across different non-western societies (Lancy 2010, Rogoff et al. 2003), parents do not dedicate a great deal of time to explicitly teaching children how to survive in the world, instead ‘allowing them to (re)discover meanings in the world on their own’ (Willerslev 2007: 164, brackets in original). Learning is thus embedded in the everyday flow of events and children become familiar with the river by experiencing its properties in ways that accord with the etymological root of experience as ‘testing out’.

For example Erik, a two-year old boy in one of the families I lived with, woke up every morning and went washing in the river on his own. In order to reach the water, Erik had to climb down the steep riverbank—shown in the photograph below—keeping his hands on the ground or holding onto small plants along the way. When Erik started going on his morning walks to the river he could barely even talk, still toddled and could not swim. His parents however, like other Matses, were happy to let Erik go and wash on his own.

As soon as Matses children are old enough to toddle, they are free to explore and experience the wider world beyond their houses; and when they are old enough to move and walk properly, they will spend most of their time in groups away from adult supervision. Children have open access to the river and any other spaces that they can physically reach; and they are expected and encouraged to engage with dynamic activities such as canoeing and swimming, from a young age. However, as will later become apparent, the engagement with the river is relatively recent and the history of paddles in Matses society reveals a complex process of social change. For now, it is sufficient to say that the kinds of bodies and knowledge that boys and girls develop in relation to wooden paddles, not only reflect the centrality of the river to contemporary life; but also offer an index of how Matses lifeworlds have been changing over the past decades.
Paddles as equipment and water as movement

Matses children’s habitual, embodied ways of knowing paddles can be theorised in terms of Heidegger’s conceptualisation of ‘equipment’, a term which he uses to describe the tools, materials and things that people are involved with as part of their quotidian daily activities (1962: 97). The definition of equipment or ‘equipmentality’ is not an intrinsic characteristic of a thing in itself, but rather refers to the specific mode of knowing that thing through use and practice. To give one of Heidegger’s best-known examples, when a blacksmith uses a hammer they do not pay attention to or focus upon the hammer as a thing in itself. On the contrary, the hammer is forgotten in action and for the most part, disappears in the act of hammering insofar as the blacksmith’s attention is not focussed on the hammer itself but on the task at hand (Heidegger 1962: 98; Dreyfus 1991: 63-64). Similarly, when the Matses are moving on the river, the paddle itself gets lost in action and becomes one with the movement on the water. Once a certain kind of body is developed, the paddle becomes accessible through this mode of equipment, rather than mere object, and the
child’s attention might be focused on the life and movement of the river or their companions in the canoe but rarely on the paddle itself. For Heidegger, this modality of knowing something as ‘equipment’ is predicated upon *primordial understanding* or *know how* (Dreyfus 1991: 184) that is an embodied and often tacit mode of relating to things.\(^8\)

In his distinction between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’, Ryle contrasts non-propositional and performative types of knowledge as behaviour that is enacted, with those forms of semantic or propositional knowledge that can be articulated and ‘convey meaning’ (Ryle in Harris 2007: 3). However, recent anthropological analyses have attempted to move beyond this distinction by using ethnography to show how ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’ continuously mix and merge in people’s experiences and actions in the world (Harris *ibid*; Marchand 2007; Downey 2007, 2010). This understanding has not only been elaborated in terms of embodied cognition (Bloch 2012; Toren 1993, 1999), but was partially prefigured in Gramsci’s declaration that ‘in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum ... of creative intellectual activity’ (1971: 8).

Although engaging with a paddle as equipment entails a primordial and material understanding that is developed through practical activity, neither the paddle’s properties nor the embodied skills that allow its use can be understood in their own terms. For when a thing is primordially encountered (and thus known as equipment), it necessarily exists in relation to other material things (such as tools and substances) and modes of practical and purposeful activity, insofar as ‘to the being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment’ (Heidegger 1962: 97). Every piece of equipment necessarily refers to an ‘equipmental whole’ (Dreyfus 1991: 63); or to put this in more manageable terms, a child’s paddle cannot be understood in itself but only in relation to movement, the body, the canoe and activity of canoeing, the forest from which it is made and the water and river upon which it is used. Extending out, the paddle is a necessary piece of equipment in the

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\(^8\) Tools are not always encountered as equipment. For instance if the paddle suddenly broke, fell out of the paddler’s hand or got stuck into something, then the paddler would turn attention onto the paddle in itself. In such a case the paddle would be encountered in a different mode, with specific awareness and focus. Heidegger names this modality of encountering things as ‘presence-at-hand’ (cf. Dreyfus 1991: 40); however, this is not the type of knowing I am primarily concerned with here.
maintenance of the cultivated fields that are a vital source of food and nourishment and which can only be accessed via the river. But paddles can only be crafted with machetes purchased in the city, and as such emphasise how subsistence in Matses society is linked to both monetary and non-monetary economies. The paddle is but one part of a much greater equipmental whole of tools, material substances and purposeful actions that extend out from the river and beyond Matses society to the wider political and economic history of the region.

In a similar way that paddles are taken-for-granted pieces of equipment which are entangled within a wider whole of actions and relations, the river is a taken-for-granted and foundational form of movement within a whole of social, economic and material relations. These relations were often made explicit in a question that nearly every child I met would ask me: does your father have a motor for his canoe? When the children imagined my homeland they pictured the river as being foundational to movement, which suggests the central role the river plays in Matses society. Matses people move up and down the river several times a day, for example to find good fishing spots; to access the cultivated fields and bring back food for meals; to reach those areas of the forest where wild fruit and berries are plentiful; to get to the paths that lead to the good hunting spots; to find and transport forest trees for firewood back to the village; and to travel to other Matses villages which are all settled along navigable watercourses.

Not all objects, however, are encountered as equipmental whole and can be therefore used without conscious reflection, including the digital cameras that I distributed to the children. Only one or two children had ever seen a camera—usually in the hands of the very few outsiders that enter Matses communities—and none had ever used one. Whenever I carried my camera, the children gathered around me, followed me and asked me to take photographs of them. And when I started distributing smaller cameras to the children they showed great enthusiasm in taking photographs for themselves. Each morning, a group of children would come looking for me and ask for the cameras, which I would then hand to them. The fact that the cameras were seen as such a novelty and stimulated great interest, considerable enjoyment, enthusiasm and participation, shows that they were not part of the equipmental whole that the children are used to. Unlike using a wooden paddle, the cameras required explicit concentration and would generate much discussion, attention and reflection.
Groups of children would huddle round each camera to discuss the usage of it and give instructions to each other.

Although the children quickly learned how to handle cameras and were soon taking photographs while climbing up trees, playing in and around water or when canoeing; unlike wooden paddles, the cameras referred to a different type of equipmental context. The children often pointed to my camera and asked me ‘how much did you pay for it?’ or ‘did you buy it in Iquitos?’, which is the nearest city to Matses communities and takes a long, hard journey to reach. For Matses children, the cameras were understood as belonging to the nonindigenous world of cities, money, shops, electricity, laptops and western technology. As such, they come from a different equipmental world and appear out of place in Matses dwellings, where there is no electricity to charge batteries; where the high humidity and dust ruin the camera’s electronic circuits; and where there are no supply stores or places where electronic goods can be purchased or fixed (I travelled with a solar panel for charging the cameras and my laptop, and managing my electronic gear was always a struggle).

**Following the materials: a flashback into Matses people’s past**

The following photographs were taken by twelve-year-old Flora, and show her elderly father and one of his two wives in the process of crafting a canoe. The Matses are polygamous and most of the older men have at least two wives. Crafting a canoe is mainly a male task but women also assist, as seen in the second image.

Wooden paddles can only be defined as equipment in relation to a variety of other entities and substances, including canoes and water, which enable them to create movement. Paddles and canoes do not pertain solely to water, insofar as they are both crafted from wood and, therefore, form an essential link between the forest and the river. By ‘following the materials’ (Ingold 2011: 2), in this case the wood that canoes and paddles are made from, it is possible to uncover a significant process of social change that took place over recent years. Moving from the materiality and technology of paddles and canoes from the present time, my aim is to trace back to the point when these tools were first introduced to Matses society.
Figure 11. Crafting the canoe. (Photographs by Flora, twelve years old).
I therefore start with the photographs taken by the children and offer a glimpse of Matses life *ënden*, ‘in the past’ or ‘back then’. This not only contextualises the children’s contemporary ways-of-knowing within the region’s wider social, cultural and political history, but also calls attention to the radical changes that have occurred over the past forty years; changes which have meant that the river has now come to constitute a critical site of knowledge and movement.

Canoes are a primary form of transport and every family owns one or two. In the previous photographs, an elderly man in his sixties is crafting an especially large canoe to use on long river journeys to transport his whole family of two wives (one of whom is helping him with the canoe) and seven children. When elderly Matses—those born a few years before 1969—were themselves children, life was profoundly different from that of today’s children and they spent their entire childhood in the forest. As mentioned, prior to 1969 the Matses had not established peaceful contact with other peoples and kept away from navigable watercourses, rivers and big creeks.

Elderly Matses recount that they were scared of major navigable watercourses, which they associated with the presence of nonindigenous people or the *chotac*. Elderly men told me that they did not see a wide river until they were in their teens, when their fathers took them on long excursions through the forest to show them the ‘big water’. Although they always resided near small streams of water for drinking and bathing, and also poisoned minor creeks in the forest with roots to catch small amounts of fish, it is only very recently that rivers became an integral part of Matses everyday life. *Ënden*, or ‘back then’, the Matses lived in communal longhouses scattered in the forest in groups of a hundred people or much less (Romanoff 1984) and wide rivers were associated with feelings of trepidation and anxiety. The forest constituted the major site of dwelling and nourishment, and trekking through the woods, rather than using canoes, was the primary form of movement.

In 1969 the Matses were contacted by evangelical missionaries, who introduced a wide array of social practices, material goods and new technologies. Elderly people describe how they were encouraged to build houses and dwell on the banks of navigable watercourses as well as to craft and use hardwood dugout canoes and paddles. As such, the wooden paddles and canoes that children use so skilfully, also embody a story of change and the movement of Matses society from the forest to the
river over the course of four decades. This reinforces how children’s kineceptive ways of knowing and relating to the world are not fixed but developing within wider social, cultural and political changes. These changes take place within the lifetime of a person, for instance as Matses elders grew up in a world in which the river was a source of fear but then came to constitute an everyday environment. But they also take place between generations, insofar as the elders’ children were born in a world to which the river was already foundational. The elders adapted to the river environment and developed riverine skills following missionary contact, reinforcing how the processes of learning and knowing are continuous throughout life and not bounded by childhood (Toren 1993, Ingold 2001). For as Harris suggests, people have to continuously negotiate changes and a person’s life-trajectory is entangled with ‘a multiplicity of skills’, whereby ‘person and skill are inseparable … because of the never-ending cycle of the need to learn new skills and relocate oneself in new conditions’ (2005: 207).

Elderly Matses are now skilled at canoeing, fishing, swimming and other riverine activities. However, although they use the river daily like Matses children, the elders maintain a strong relationship with the forest, which they started developing before contact in 1969. Most men and women in their late fifties or sixties trek through the forest every day to hunt, collect wild fruits and berries. Even when they go to the forest they have to use the river, since the entrance to forest paths are generally accessed not by walking from one’s house but only after canoeing up- or downriver from the village. However, besides being skilled paddlers, Matses elders are also skilled at tracking and have a highly developed sense of orientation that helps them navigate through dense forest regions. Although they address the forest as a perilous site populated by deadly spirits, jaguars and snakes, this does not hold them back from venturing through the woods. To the contrary, elderly people seem to enjoy the forest precisely because it is a challenging and physically tough environment.

Matses children, instead, are scared of the forest and although they occasionally trek with adults, for instance to collect wild fruit and berries, they are not willing to develop the forest knowledge and skills that elderly Matses have. Knowledge of the forest is decreasing throughout generations, as becomes clear when looking at young Matses in their twenties or late teens. At this age, boys and girls have started to occasionally trek into the forest, but whereas prior to 1969 they would have been
skilled hunters and trekkers, they are now largely inexperienced with regards to the forest; cannot move as well as elderly people; and are not keen on tracking.

Following Rival (2002), I argue that Amazonian mobility has wrongly been interpreted as a sign of adaptation to environmental constraints, for example game scarcity or even of social regression after outside contact. For Matses elders, trekking in the forest remains a practice that makes life meaningful and they maintain affective relationships with the forest environment even long after settling along major rivers. Although they use the river daily for washing, drinking water, fishing (which elderly men tend to do after daily hunts) and canoeing to reach the entrance to forest paths or cultivated fields, Matses elders continue to move through the forest on most days. When children want to move, it is instead the river, rather than the forest, to which they turn.

Fishing: the river as a source of nourishment

The following photographs were taken by twelve-year-old Diego. The child on the canoe is Francisco, ten years old. He is holding up a gill net to check if any fish are caught in it. The bright light in the photograph, reflected on the water, suggests that it is daytime, the appropriate time to be in the river, because at night, the spirits and caimans come out of the riverbanks and the river becomes dangerous. The boys have built a toy by attaching a tin can to the end of a wooden stick, and when the canoe is moving, as in the third image, the toy makes a loud noise that imitates that of a motorised canoe. The fish caught in the net is a piranha. Francisco stands barefoot on the canoe, and is about to take the piranha out of the net with his hands. The net belongs to his father and is quite far away from the village where fish are more abundant. The boys were hungry and so canoed there to see if any fish had been caught.
Figure 12. Francisco checking a fishnet. (Photograph by Diego, twelve years old).
Matses people often eat piranhas. Protein sources in Matses environments, such as fish or meat, are usually scarce and hard to provide. Catching fish is a cause of joy and piranhas, as well as other types of fish are caught with enthusiasm and delight. The procurement of food is said to be a daily preoccupation for the Matses and other Amerindians (Gow 1989: 567), and it requires hard work and considerable skill. Every day Matses men and women labour in their cultivated fields to provide carbohydrates, mainly manioc and plantains, and also fish or hunt. Protein is considered necessary to make a meal complete, to the point that if people have no fish or meat to eat they say *pete nidbèdec*, ‘there is no food’. Using the previous photographs as a point of departure, I will now discuss children’s understandings of the river in relation to subsistence and fishing.

**Learning through doing and bodily dynamism**

The photographs above show how children are expected to provide fish for the family from a young age. Francisco is ten years old and already a skilled fisherman. However, children mostly learn how to fish through doing, that is, by experimenting, practicing, and largely through their own efforts. Boys and girls from about seven or eight years of age can be found fishing in the parts of the river near the village, whereas those aged eleven or twelve will embark on longer fishing expeditions in canoes in small groups.

Learning how to fish is also a form of ‘deutero-learning’, in which attention is given to the river environment by way of a particular set of tasks and requires educating one’s attention to the river through the coordination of the nervous system, muscles, brain, hands, and the whole body in action and movement. Hooking is the most commonly practiced fishing technique. It consists of tying a hook onto a nylon line, attaching a piece of lead to it, sticking a worm onto the hook, and throwing the line into the water until a fish bites. Hooking can be done standing on the riverbank or better, sitting in a canoe on the river. This type of fishing requires great bodily coordination and skills: good reflexes to be able to feel when the fish bites, physical strength to pull up the fish, firm hands, the agility to move around a small canoe, and so forth. But it also requires knowledge about the types of fish that are good to eat,
where they can be found, and so forth. These ways of knowing are intertwined and mutually developed through experience.

Learning and knowing how to fish also requires the development of a skilled and agile body that pertains to specific needs and environments. The previous photographs show ten-year-old Francisco standing in perfect balance and walking on the thin gunwale of a canoe while it is moving. In fourteen months of fieldwork in which I was canoeing every day, I never saw anyone lose balance and fall into the water, reinforcing how Matses ways-of-knowing are forged through movement and action and the development of particular bodies.

Although the previous images are mostly of boys, Matses girls also start developing muscles, strength, agility and riverine skills and knowledge at a young age. Inés, a seven-year-old girl, took the photograph below while she was fishing with another girl, eight-year-old Elsie. The image shows Elsie gutting a fish that the girls have just caught.
To some extent, learning how to fish responds to an urge: children usually go fishing when they feel hungry and there is no food in the house. Matses children do not simply wait for their parents to provide food but are expected to be autonomous providers from a young age (see Lancy 2008: 76-111, 2010; Zarger 2010; and Rival 1997 for examples in other societies). Children see the river, rather than the forest, as the primary source of food as well as of movement. This marks a major change from life ènden, ‘in the past’, when the now elderly people were children and the forest constituted the major source of nourishment. But whereas elderly people now resort to both the river and the forest for nourishment, as they are skilled at both hunting and fishing, children mainly look towards the river when they feel hungry. Consequently, the following section offers another glimpse into life ènden in order to show how Matses people’s ways-of-knowing with regards to subsistence are changing throughout generations.

A glimpse into Matses past: hunting and life in the forest

Prior to settling along navigable bodies of water, hunting with bows and arrows constituted the major subsistence activity for the Matses. Bows and arrows were handcrafted and people recount how game animals were abundant and could be found at short distance from the houses. The Matses hunted animals relentlessly until no more game was left. Likewise, horticulture was practiced intensively in the area surrounding the houses until the soil became unfertile. When game animals became scarce and the soil no longer fertile, the Matses moved away and settled elsewhere. These ways of exploiting the environment prior to sedentarisation suggest that the Matses understood the forest as a ‘giving environment’ (Bird-David 1990: 190, 2008: 524) in which the forest is perceived as a source of unconditional nourishment.

When the Matses established permanent villages on big rivers, they continued to relate to their new surroundings as giving environments, hunting relentlessly and cultivating the nearby soil intensively. The population in these settlements grew rapidly and soon the soil around the villages became unfertile, while game animals became increasingly scarce. Elderly men describe how when the villages were first established, they hunted numerous kinds of animals in the forests near their houses,
including large prey such as peccaries, deer and tapirs. But throughout the years game has diminished, and hunters now have to trek through the forest for many hours to find game, often coming home empty handed. Skilled groups of hunters often leave in the morning and return at sunset without game, lamenting that *nidbëdosh*, ‘there wasn’t any’. Likewise, the impoverishment of the nearby soil has forced families to cultivate their fields further and further away from the villages, making them harder to reach.

Soon after missionary contact, the Matses began hunting with firearms, which were given away by the missionaries. The Matses now rely on shotguns for hunting and no longer use bows and arrows, other than for children to play with. Shotguns require cartridges, which can only be found in nonindigenous settlements at high prices. Since Matses people cannot often afford to travel to nonindigenous settlements and have no money, cartridges are always scarce and they cannot hunt as often as they would like. Once hunting became compromised by game scarcity and the economics of cartridges, the Matses looked increasingly to the river for protein. They also learned how to fish with hooks, which were also introduced by the missionaries. Fish is not only more plentiful than meat but can be found close to the village; and although fishing tools such as hooks, line and lead must be purchased with money, these are tools that last for a long time unlike cartridges.

This has an implication for women as well. Prior to sedentarisation, Matses women were familiar with the forest and would, on occasion, accompany their brothers or husbands on hunting treks. But like their peers, girls and young women nowadays rarely trek and are instead learning how to fish. Consequently, unlike in the past, when men were the primary providers of protein through hunting, women are now active protein-providers and boys and girls both engage with the river environment from a young age. Children immediately resort to the river when they feel hungry or have to move. By contrast, elderly men will set out for the forest, sometimes accompanied by their wives in order to carry home the prey, even if this often means returning home empty handed.

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9 Prior to 1969 the Matses occasionally accessed shotguns by stealing them when raiding nonindigenous people that set up camp in the forest. But since these shotguns were ‘not very good’, as the elders recount, and they had no regular access to cartridges, they were not used as main hunting tools.
Fish scarcity: looking towards new horizons

The photograph reported below shows Francisco holding a *zungaro*, a type of catfish that he caught a short distance from his house. It is the only photograph in the chapter that I took myself, after his siblings asked me to photograph him with his catch. Fish in the creek around the village are becoming increasingly scarce and it is rare to catch such a big fish near the village. Francisco was praised and respected for his feat and his siblings wanted this moment to be photographed.

Francisco is only ten-years-old and can already catch a big fish. Boys and girls are skilled at fishing, which is generally easier and more productive than hunting. However, fishing near the village is becoming increasingly fruitless due to the depletion of fish in the Chobayacu, which is mainly a consequence of the overexploitation of fish over the past years. When the village I worked in was established in the mid-1990s, fish were plentiful and people fished not only with hooks but also with poison. Poison fishing consists of taking the root of the *ancueste* plant (*Lonchocarpus urucu*), which is cultivated in the fields, and immersing it in
water. The root, whose poison is harmless for people, causes the fish to come to surface in agony and makes them easy to grab with hand-nets.

Figure 15. Francisco holding a catfish. (Photograph by the author).
Poison fishing allows for great amounts of fish to be caught at a time, enough to feed the entire village, but it also led to rapid fish depletion. Prior to sedentarisation the Matses poisoned small creeks in the forest, but fish depletion was not a major concern since Matses people were itinerant, and could settle elsewhere when the nearby resources had become scarce. But since settling in permanent villages, fish poisoning and depletion has started to have major consequences, as the Matses are now reliant on the river for survival. When the Matses realised that fish were decreasing, they stopped using poison, but by this time the fish near the village had already diminished drastically.\(^{10}\) In order to catch fish, people have now to paddle further away from the houses and fishing is physically harder. The photograph above therefore records a special event in the children’s world, as it is extremely rare for anyone, child or adult, to catch such a big fish in the waters close to the village.

Ingold argues that ‘the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of—and testimony to—the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves’ (1993: 152). The same applies to rivers, and past generations of Matses have left the traces of their work on the riverine environment. Fish scarcity can be read as a tangible sign of Matses past life and as a trace of ‘the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation’ (Ingold \textit{ibid}: 152-153). For children, moving and acting on the river means engaging with an environment whose present bears witness to a particular past. Poisoning and the intensive exploitation of the river fauna have led to substantial fish depletion, which is making subsistence increasingly complicated. Children are growing up in an environment where fish are scarce and game animals have almost entirely disappeared. So whereas Ingold’s often idealised view of dwelling and the landscape likens social life to an ‘orchestral performance’ in which ‘the gestures of the performers may be said to resonate with each other’ (\textit{ibid}: 160), the work of past generations holds critical consequences for the children I worked with, including the lack of food and the impoverishment of environmental resources.

\(^{10}\) In most Peruvian areas, as far as I am aware, poisoning is strictly forbidden because it damages the environment and leads to rapid fish depletion. But Peruvian authorities are unlikely to reach Matses communities to control their policies. Matses communities are very remote and nonindigenous people, including authorities, only sporadically visit them.
Prior to sedentarisation, the solution to such a condition of food scarcity would have been movement and settling elsewhere in the forest. However, Matses people are now much less able to move because over the years their villages have developed facilities that are not easy to transport. These include school buildings, village halls and rural medical clinics made of out concrete as well as small concrete paths that run through every Matses village. The villages have in a sense become ‘heavier’ and people are more attached to them. Sahlins famously said that that ‘wealth is a burden’ to movement (1972: 11) and material possessions are often see as incompatible with ‘nomadism’ since goods are hard to carry (Testard 1982: 525). Although this view has been contested for reducing mobility to practical constraints rather than life-choices (Rival 2002), the impossibility of transporting the school, medical post, and the concrete paths is the main reason that Matses people cite for being unwilling to settle elsewhere.

The immediate solution to fish and game scarcity is to travel temporarily up- or downriver where fish are more abundant. The most productive areas can be reached by journeying to the Yaquerana River (see map below). Fish are copious in the Yaquerana, which is much wider than the Chobayacu along which the village is built. Travelling to the Yaquerana takes a good few hours in a motorised canoe (at least four from the village where I worked) and people cannot often afford the journey since this requires a considerable amount of gasoline, which is always in short supply. Gasoline must be purchased in Colonia Angamos, the closest nonindigenous settlement to Matses villages. This is set much further down the Yaquerana River and is reachable in eight to ten hours from the village where I worked, depending on the level of water (the lower the water, the longer is the journey). Gasoline is expensive and people can only occasionally travel to Colonia Angamos, which makes it difficult to bring supplies of gasoline back to the villages in order to store it for future fishing trips to the Yaquerana River.
Young people in their teens or twenties, as well as a few children aged eleven or twelve, often told me that in the future they would consider moving permanently along the Yaquerana River, where other Matses have already established a permanent village (Nuevo Cashishpi, see map above). This would allow them to eat more fish and to be closer to Colonia Angamos, where the chotac, ‘nonindigenous people’ live. As mentioned, in recent years the Matses have even founded a community on the outskirts of Colonia Angamos, named Fray Pedro. Moving towards the Yaquerana River also implies moving closer to nonindigenous settlements. The river itself is the way of accessing nonindigenous places and the urban world. As such, money, fish scarcity, nonindigenous places, gasoline, and exchanges with the chotac are all intertwined in Matses people’s experiences of the present and their ways of looking towards the future.

Figure 16. Matses villages and riverine resources.
As the Matses themselves put it, money is becoming increasingly important and so are exchanges with the chotac. Over the past decades the Matses have become reliant on a plethora of manufactured goods that can only be purchased in nonindigenous settlements. They now rely on clothes, medicines, shotguns and cartridges, axes, machetes, knives, metal pottery, fishhooks, and also flashlights, soap, salt and cooking oil, and so forth. The need for money and relations with the chotac already necessitate more frequent journeying along the river towards Colonia Angamos, and children and young Matses see the nonindigenous world of money and cities as indispensable to life. As mentioned, they often express a desire to be closer to bigger rivers such as the Yaquerana and to nonindigenous settlements, which also means moving further away from the forest.

As such, Matses people’s changing relationships with the environment and in particular the movement from forest to riverine dwellings must be understood in relation to social and economic transformations that took place over the past decades. Environmental changes are often intertwined with ‘social and economic flows’ (Harris 2005: 203) but they are dealt with differently by different generations. Elderly Matses are not keen on big rivers and nonindigenous places. In response to protein scarcity, the elders often go fishing but they have also established small hunting settlements deeper in the forest, where game is still abundant. These are located a few hours trek from the village and consist of one big house in a small cleared area in the woods. Groups of Matses elders regularly trek to these hunting settlements, where they spend several days to then return to the village with plenty of meat. Young people occasionally accompany them but are rarely keen on it. Consequently, in the final section of the paper I will focus on these intergenerational differences and preferences for the environment, in order to argue that children are playing a major role in Matses changing ways of knowing and acting in the world.
Playing in the river and shifting horizons: the river as *childscape*

Figure 17. Playing and laughing. (Still from video by Rebeca, ten years old).

The image above is a still from a video taken by Rebeca, a ten-year-old girl (please play Track One on the accompanying DVD at the back of the thesis to watch the video). The video shows children playing in a small lagoon that the river forms around the trees near the village. The children swim, jump down in the water from a tree, and shout loudly. A little boy, holding a paddle as big as he is, pops up on a canoe, canoeing at full speed. The children laugh and scream, having a great time in this adult-free space. I will never be fully able to put into words the sound of laughter, that feeling of joy and adrenaline, the sensation of the freezing water on the skin in the Amazonian heat, the thrill of jumping down from a height straight into the muddy waters of the river. The children’s laughter that Rebeca captured in her video—and which can be heard all day long from all around the village and echoing across the river—can
much better render the sensorial and aesthetic pleasure of children’s engagement with water.\textsuperscript{11}

I have so far suggested that agility, strength and bodily dynamism are key to performing vital activities in Matses environments. For the children, this largely means fishing and canoeing, and for the elders it means hunting, tracking and trekking as well as performing riverine activities and cultivating their fields. I argue, however, that bodily dynamism is not just developed out of necessity for food and protein but that Matses children also engage in bodily movement and physically challenging activities purely for sensory and aesthetic pleasure. Matses children, especially when compared to children in Europe, always struck me as incredibly active and energetic, and are moving and sweating for a great part of the day. When playing, boys and girls enjoy running, jumping, climbing up trees, wrestling (mainly boys) and chasing each other. Much of these activities are performed in the river, where children spend a great amount of time playing every day.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{image18.png}
\caption{Boys playing in the river. (Photograph by Edgar, ten years old).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{11} The video can also be accessed online at: https://vimeo.com/75014800
The riverine landscape offers great opportunities to the children for engaging in dynamic actions and testing their bodily skills. These include swimming against the current; crossing from shore-to-shore; chasing each other under the water; racing canoes; and climbing up trees on the riverbank in order to dive down into the water below. The children scream and laugh loudly as they play: the words ‘playing’ and ‘laughing’ are translated in Matses with the same term, *mamènec*, and in children’s daily encounters with the river, playing and laughing are indeed part of the same sensorial experience. Since the riverbanks form a basin around the river, which is higher or lower depending on the water level, the children’s laughter echoes in the river and can be heard all day long from every part of the village.

Figure 19. Girls jumping into the river. (Photograph by Nelson, eleven years old).

Children’s ways of knowing the river, therefore, cannot be fully understood without an attention to the sensory and aesthetic modalities of play. Here I am not using ‘aesthetic’ in terms of culturally situated ‘ideas about the beautiful’ (Overing 1996: 210) or as the ‘human capacity to assign qualitative values to properties of the material world’ (Morphy *ibid*: 208). I follow instead the term’s etymological roots—
from the Greek *aistanomai*: ‘to feel’, ‘to perceive’—whereby ‘aesthetic’ implies a type of bodily experience that extends to ‘the whole region of human perception and sensation’ (Eagleton 1990: 13). Through experiences of movement and play that stimulate the senses and allow for moments of aesthetic intensity, the children become emotionally attached to the river in a way they do not experience with the forest. In their daily encounters with the river, Matses children develop affective relationships with the water and learn to appreciate the river as a favourite place of interaction, and they spend a great amount of time in it. In children’s ways of knowing and acting in the world, the river is a foundational presence.

The aesthetic qualities of children’s experience in the river need to be understood in relation to its specific material affordances, which allow for certain possibilities of moving, acting and dwelling. The river water is very cold and provides a pleasant respite from the Amazonian heat; the current is strong and the children enjoy swimming against it and crossing the river from shore to shore. The water is muddy and dark; so the children enjoy trying to catch each other underneath where it is hard to see (Harris reports the same game in Brazil, 2005: 200). The riverbanks are covered in mud and sand, especially in the dry season when the water level is low; children use the mud for modelling shapes and enjoy burying each other in sand. The river affords many opportunities of sensory contrast and intense aesthetic pleasure which stimulate the senses and gratify children’s bodies.

In his extension of Ingold’s notion of ‘taskscape’, Harris (2005) seeks to render the fluidity of the river environment in relation to people’s embodied actions. Since the landscape is itself impregnated with human activity, the ‘taskscape’ is not a static material setting but is dynamic and constantly changing ‘depending on the work that people do’ *(ibid*: 198). Matses rivers are thus not only in constant state of flow and fluidity due to material properties of water but because of the ever changing realms of human and children’s activities. The children learn to relate to and know the river in different ways: as a major site of movement through canoeing; as a source of life through fishing; and a sensory and aesthetic space of interaction through playing and laughing. In this latest instance the river landscape, immersed in laughter and transformed into a playground by children’s activities, turns into the *childscape*: a space that children make their own and learn to know as a site of knowing, dwelling and being.
The same cannot be said with regards to the forest, which graphically demonstrates how children are developing different ways-of-knowing the world compared to elderly Matses. Sedentarisation along major watercourses has involved a gradual process of moving away from the forest—both practically and emotionally—and Matses children do not experience, engage with or know the forest environment as their grandparents did when they were themselves young. Consequently, they are not developing the same kinds of skills or bodies as previous generations of Matses.

Other anthropologists have noticed the same trend in different Amerindian societies, where processes of sedentarisation and ‘modernisation’ have resulted in changing ways of knowing the world among young people; in particular following the introduction of schooling, which is seen as preventing children from developing traditional skills and knowledge (Rival 1992, 1997, 2002; Aikman 2002; Rockwell and Gomes 2009). In Rival’s ethnography on the Huaorani of Ecuador (who like the Matses, have only recently faced sedentarisation as well as the introduction of schooling, money and new subsistence activities) she argues that for Huaorani people ‘the most far-reaching impact [of formal schooling] has been the children's (...) deskillment with regard to forest knowledge’ (1997: 141). Children need to attend classes in the morning and, therefore, cannot participate fully in subsistence activities and learn about the forest. This results in a shifting role of children from active food-providers and skilled forest-trekkers prior to sedentarisation, to pupils that need to be provided for by adults (Rival 2002: 152-176).

Matses children are experiencing a similar process to those described above, since schooling is becoming a relevant task that takes time out of other activities. But their lack of forest skills cannot be reduced to the need to attend school. To do so, would be to deny the agency of the children; both in how they actively choose not to engage with the forest, and how they ascribe a high level of importance to the river as an alternative source for nourishment and movement. The children refuse to engage with the forest, which they address as chieshe, ‘boring’ and dacuëden, ‘frightening’ and although canoeing and fishing are also hard modes of work similarly to trekking and hunting, they are something that children actively decide to do.

By arguing that children are developing original ways of knowing and relating to the world, I am not claiming that children are better skilled or more knowledgeable than
elderly Matses with regards to the river environment. To the contrary, elderly men and women are adept at fishing, can canoe for hours and are knowledgeable about riverine life and fauna. However, a key difference between children’s and elders’ ways-of-knowing lies not in what the children know about the world but in how they know it. If knowing cannot be understood as storing up of information in ‘the cabinet of consciousness’ (Heidegger 1962: 89) then skills cannot be seen as ‘part of a toolbox’ (Harris 2007: 7) or as ‘competencies in a basket’ that are taken out when needed or discarded with time, as Bock (2002) and Zarger (2010: 345) would have it. Accordingly, the difference between children’s and elders’ ways-of-knowing lies not in their differently stocked cabinets of consciousness or baskets of skills, but pertains, in part, to the different sensory, emotional and aesthetic modalities of knowing, encountering and acting in the world.

Once knowing is understood as a fully bodily, sensorial activity that unfolds through and is accompanied by emotional involvement, then we must acknowledge that while elders may be skilled at and depend on riverine life, their mode of encountering the river is radically different from those of the children, and they still prefer the forest and understand it as being foundational to their lifeworld. For Matses elders, the forest remains central and moving through it makes life meaningful. This stands in stark contrast to the children, for whom the forest is not just ‘boring’ or frightening’, but is peripheral to their concerns and modes of knowing—unlike the river and its sensorial and aesthetic intensity.

The different modalities of knowing between generations emerge not so much in speech but in ways of acting and relating to the world, for example in the embodied enthusiasm that children display when in the river as opposed to the forest. Nevertheless, important differences also emerged in my day-to-day conversations with children and elderly people. When I asked Matses elders about different topics such as what they thought about the city or schooling, they would usually change the topic and talk about the forest, hunting, spirits, trees and animals. Whereas when I asked children about forest life, spirits and animals, they would talk about the world of the chotac: cities, television, packaged food, and Jean-Claude Van Damme. If such utterances can be taken as an index of concern and attention, then they highlight how children and elderly people are developing different modalities of knowing and attending to the world as well as becoming attached to different parts of it. Recent
environmental and economic changes play a major part in how different generations relate to the world but such changes are not deterministic. The children are not simply responding to environmental and economic constraints or relating to the world in the same way as their elders, but are attending to and learning about the world according to their interests and passions. In doing so they are actively contributing to the growing importance of the river environment in Matses life, thereby playing an active role in how Matses relationships with the environment are changing and will likely change in the future. For example, by refusing to engage with the forest, the children are seriously reducing the possibility and likelihood of a future economy based on hunting; whilst simultaneously opening up spaces in which a riverine economy and lifestyle might flourish. In other words, the children are actively contributing to social transformations rather than just being caught up in them.

Figure 20. Boys on the riverbank. (Photograph by Diego, twelve years old).
Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to address some of the modes of knowing through which Matses children and their elders establish relationships with the environment in a time of radical social, economic and technological change. I argue that children’s engagement with the river environment, set within an intergenerational analysis, shows how children develop original ways of knowing and relating to their environments that cannot be read as simple reproductions of established knowledge. While elderly Matses spend much time in the forest and prefer the woods to the river, children spend most time in the river and only occasionally trek through the forest.

In my analysis, I have tried to incorporate multiple perspectives, as seen from the children’s bodily being in the world, in order to approach the environment not as a static background on which people move, like actors on a fixed stage, but as alive and interacting with them. Viewed as such, the environment is regarded in terms of what it affords to creatures ‘with certain capabilities and projects of action’ (Ingold 1993: 156). This means that the river is not a singular thing, especially when compared between generations, but changes according to the situated purposes, urges, modalities and feelings with which people engage with it. This follows Harris’s (2005) account of the ribeirinhos of Amazonian Brazil for whom the river becomes a source of nourishment when hungry, a means of connection while travelling, and a playground for children (ibid: 200-204). Matses ways of knowing and relating to the environment resemble those of floodplain dwellers elsewhere in the Amazon but both elders and children recast it for their own purposes.

‘Resilience and flexibility’ are crucial features of riverine populations whose lives are predicated upon a capacity of adjusting to the river in terms of seasonal changes, economic demands, and political and historical processes (Harris 1998, 2000b, 2005, 2009). The riverine dwellers live in synchronic rhythm with the river and attune their actions to the flows of the riverine landscape, having the ability to ‘reinvent themselves in order to survive each new historical challenge’ and to respect and preserve the river fauna and diversification of species (Harris 2006: 222-223). The Matses, on the other hand, have only recently settled along major watercourses and as such did not know how to preserve the fish stock in the river, which has depleted dramatically due to their over-exploitation of riverine resources.
I have sought to emphasise that by actively refusing to engage with the forest—and instead developing strong attachments to the river—children are not only dynamically contributing to the social transformation of Matses society in the present, but also setting up certain possibilities for the future. By doing so I tried to offer a different perspective than those accounts which attribute the loss of traditional knowledge and skills amongst young Amazonians as a straightforward consequence of socio-political impediments such as schooling (Rival 2002, Aikman 1996). I also sought to provide a tangible example to support the argument that children can and do act as agents of social change.

This process of intergenerational change has serious implications. By choosing not to engage with the forest, the children are not just leaving forest knowledge and skills behind. They are also projecting their attention towards new future horizons and aligning themselves with the world of cities and nonindigenous people. The river, I suggest, is the very means of accessing the nonindigenous world and moving closer to bigger cities. Young Matses are much more concerned with such a world than the elders. Whereas elderly Matses are often very critical of the chotac and show little interest in urban environments, the children display considerable fascination, interest, desire and curiosity for it, which will be elaborated on in later chapters. In the next chapter I will focus on two case studies to consider the contrasting possibilities of being a child in relation to new forms of economic inequality, which have only recently emerged as part of the transformations discussed in this chapter. In doing so, I attempt to show how children make sense of social differentiations, and how they conceptualise and enact different social understandings of ‘what it means to be a child’.
Chapter Two. Microhistories and future horizons: exploring children’s roles and possibilities in the household

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

(William Blake, *Songs of Innocence: The Chimney Sweeper*)

‘When I was a child like him [pointing at Emanuel, a ten-year-old Matses boy] I went with my father. We attacked the chotac. We killed the chotac men with bows and arrows. Ten, ten, ten [mimicking the sound of arrows fired at nonindigenous men]. And when the men were dead, we took away young women, like you [pointing at me, laughing].’

(Julio, Matses elderly man)

This chapter considers how knowing and understanding are intertwined with the different possible ways of being a child in the family household. My aim is to explore how Matses children and their elders develop mutual understandings of ‘what it means to be a child’ by way of engaging with household activities. Such understandings are not always put into words but often unspoken and taken-for-granted; however, implicit understandings or what it is to be a child are made explicit.
through action and can be observed in the everyday interactions between children and adults. Consequently, this chapter considers non-linguistic and *kineceptive* understandings—i.e. those generated through dynamic action—as well as more explicit language based forms. Through close ethnographic attention to household relationships, I propose to bring out how Matses children and adults develop ways-of-knowing the roles and possibilities of children.

‘Children’ and ‘childhood’ have long been understood as problematic and contested concepts that are liable to change ‘depending on the historical and cultural setting’ (Montgomery 2009: 51). This is made graphically apparent in the contrast between Julio’s opening quote, where he describes his exploits of killing *chotac*, nonindigenous people as a ten-year-old, and William Blake’s more familiar notion of children as angelic creatures whose innocence is stolen through child labour. Since Blake’s time, the idea of children as innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection has become a dominant moral perspective across much of North America and much of Europe (Zelizer 1985, Lancy 2008). Rather than social expectations of labour or wage earning activity, children are expected to spend their days at school and playing, although this is subject to substantial class and gender differentiation (Montgomery 2009: 67, Evans 2006).

In many parts of the world, children continue to make a major contribution to the household economy through manual and other forms of labour from a young age (Lancy 1996, 2008: 234-271; Punch 2001; Gaskins and Paradise 2010). In Matses society, children are expected to carry out physical work from a young age and, until missionary contact in 1969, boys as young as ten would also participate in raiding expeditions and warfare, as Julio demonstrates. Elderly men do not often recount about such expeditions, but when they do, they smile about it rather than addressing the killing of others as a painful or traumatic experience.

Julio’s words reveal a very different mode of experiencing and understanding childhood to many western societies. Since warfare was abandoned following missionary contact and is no longer practiced, his words also reveal that Matses responsibilities of (and towards) children have significantly been changing over the past decades. However, contemporary Matses ways of addressing childhood are markedly different from western child rearing practices and understandings of
children as vulnerable or innocent (Lancy 2008: 2). Moreover, within Matses society itself, childhood is also a ‘polythetic category’ (Needham 1975), i.e. a widely differentiated one that encompasses diverse understandings and experiences among different families. The economic and political transformations that have taken place over the past four decades have generated substantial inequalities among families and have opened up new and different possibilities of being a child. Alongside the introduction of money, the growing importance of private property and the accumulation of individual wealth have opened up new possibilities and ways of living as a Matses person. In the village where I work there are very different roles, duties and possibilities ascribed to children from one family to the next. Matses understandings of children as active participants and contributors to the household economy within certain families contrast with others where children are seen as pupils and whose main duty is to obtain a formal education.

To represent the complexity and diversity of children’s social experiences within the village, this chapter combines ethnography and microhistory to compare growing up in two families in order to:

i. Establish the processes through which different understandings of childhood emerge within and between family contexts;

ii. Present an account of how these open up different possible life-trajectories for the future.

Microhistory is here defined as a method of inquiry that looks closely at individual life-trajectories so as to render the discontinuous and heterogeneous character of social forms, but then expands out so as to emphasise the sharedness and commonalities of social experiences. It is a method of analysis that utilises ‘a constant back-and-forth between micro- and macrohistory, between close-ups and extreme long shots’ so as to bridge the gaps between the general and the specific (Ginzburg 2012: 207). My aim is to show how understandings are developed through individual creativity in mediation with others and draws upon Toren’s work, where cognition is understood as a ‘biologically microhistorical process’ (1993: 461). For Toren, children:
‘come to maturity as particular, historically located, persons who will actively constitute a world that is at once the same as, and different from, the world their elders know’ (ibid: 463).

Moreover, ‘it is in respect of our different histories that we differ from one another as particular persons’, whereby ‘what one attends to is a function of one’s history and even novelty is historically constituted’ (ibid: 468). Toren’s approach, however, can also be criticised insofar as children’s lived experiences are too often reduced to broad social or generational frameworks, and it lacks any sustained or ethnographic consideration of actual case studies and life-trajectories. Consequently, my aim is to present an ethnographically and empirically grounded account of children’s life-trajectories that expands out from the specificity of the household to illustrate the multiple, heterogeneous ways of being a child in Matses society.

I use this to argue that it is necessary to situate children’s experiences not only in terms of history, but also in relation to the future horizons towards which they are projected. My aim is to address children’s future horizons in ethnographic terms, which means that I consider how children develop certain expectations and desires for their future selves and work towards them within the political-economic constraints of the present. I argue that the ways in which children come to know themselves and their place in the world is not only a function of individual and collective history, but is also informed by the different ways that they imagine, interpret and work towards the future. Accordingly, an ethnographic analysis of the future can allow us to better grasp: (i) how children understand themselves in the present in relation to their perceived possibilities—or impossibilities—for the future; and (ii) how by working towards the future (both in trying to attain their desires or in realising the infeasibility of these), the children move away from the ways of being and knowing of past generations and, therefore, actively contribute to the process of social transformation.

By situating children more fully in time, my aim is to present a detailed ethnography of their different roles in Matses households and show how these are predicated upon the imagined directions that life is moving towards. I focus specifically on boys and show how entangled with familial understandings of childhood are certain ways of knowing and addressing masculinity. By comparing boys and their fathers, I look at
how male roles and responsibilities are addressed and negotiated within the household. A close comparison of individual families will allow me to consider how distinct understandings of manhood change across different families and between generations, reinforcing the view that gender and masculinity can take multiple and often contrasting forms within society, ‘shaped by a myriad of social and historical forces, and negotiable in varying degrees’ (Simpson 2009: 6; see also Connell 2000: 10). I suggest that to some extent, boys embrace the values and understandings shared by older generations, but they also aspire to develop different possibilities for the future and become different types of men to their fathers and grandfathers. As such, I emphasise how understandings of what it means to be a child and specifically a boy are not socially given or reproduced through generations, but developed through personal life-courses and reinvented by young generations.

I develop my analysis by means of comparing two twelve-year-old boys, Diego and Cristiano, and their families. Diego’s parents were born before 1969, the year of missionary contact. His father is a skilled hunter and his mother is known as a hard-working woman. Cristiano’s parents were born after missionary contact and both earn a regular and generous salary as teachers in the village school. The ethnographic comparison of the boys’ two families incorporates the perspectives of the boys themselves. It uses these to illustrate how ways of knowing and understanding are in an ongoing state of transformation, how children play a key role in establishing and facilitating processes of social change, and how different possible futures are opened up and closed off.

**Diego: the son of a real man and a hardworking woman**

Diego is the twelve-year-old son of a hunter and a hard-working woman. Over time Diego became one of my main informants but at the beginning my interactions with him were limited, primarily due to language barriers. Most Matses cannot speak any Spanish and the few that can are often too shy to speak, partly because their Spanish is rudimentary and they do not feel confident but more so because speaking Spanish often results in mockery. If a young Matses starts speaking Spanish, their peers will insult and ridicule them and shout ‘you want to be a chotac!’
Diego picked up some Spanish while spending time in Colonia Angamos with his parents, but he and I did not properly speak until I learned Matses. Our interactions began, therefore, through the use of drawings and photographs. Before I could speak Matses properly, Diego and other children would often approach me and ask for pens and paper to draw or ask me to take photographs of them. In the image above Diego is posing as the Belgian film actor and action star Jean-Claude Van Damme, with a shirt on his head and mimicking a fighting pose. ‘Titeiquin!’ he is saying: ‘I’ll slit your throat’, which the children learned in action movies. Although they only rarely...
are able to watch films, Jean-Claude Van Damme was one of the very first and most enduring topics of conversation with Diego and other children.

Diego was continually fascinated by my presence and revealed an enchantment with the nonindigenous world that I represented. He often asked me questions about my homeland, about my friends and what we do together, whether I had ever seen or been inside a car and how much money my camera and laptop cost. Diego spends a couple of months in the small town of Colonia Angamos every year—which, as mentioned, is accessed in eight to ten hours on a motorised canoe from the village—but he has never travelled to the city, Iquitos, which is much further afield. His parents would not be able to afford to pay for his travel expenses and have rarely been there themselves.

Diego told me that when he grows up he hopes to travel outside of Matses territory, to Iquitos and other nonindigenous places. But he also adds that he will never be able to do so because *piucquid nidbëdec*, ‘I have no money’ and nor do his parents. Diego wears old stained clothes and shoes ruined by the weather or cheap flip-flops that break easily, and he does not own many goods of his own, such as flashlights and the small knives that children desire.

Diego is short but is well-built and muscular. His shoulders are pushed back and his posture straight. He usually walks around slowly, carries himself with self-assurance and looks people straight in the eye when he talks. He displays a swaggering confidence when interacting with other children, is full of attitude and at times can be extremely confrontational. Throughout the village he is known as a *cuididi*, ‘mischievous troublemaker’, a term of scorn, rather than affection when spoken by adults but which boys themselves praise as a form of bravery. Children say Diego is the most mischievous boy in the village and the boys especially admire him for it: they seek his company, laugh at his jokes, fear his mockeries and seem to enjoy spending time with him.

When I began to know Diego better he extended his mischievous behaviour to our interactions: he insulted me, mocked me for my habit of asking numerous and repetitive questions, and would speak to me more like a playing companion than an adult. At the same time, he was extremely curious about my research and always volunteered to help; whether that was drawing, taking photographs or chatting about
various topics, and I gained some of my most important insights into children’s ways-of-knowing through my interactions with him. Examining Diego’s role and place in his household opens up a window onto how Diego understands himself as a particular type of child and human being, with certain possibilities of acting and being in the world. Beginning with a brief history of his parents, who spent their own childhood living itinerantly in the forest before missionary contact, the chapter then considers how their current family life is entangled with environmental adjustments and socioeconomic processes.

**Diego’s father, a real man, and his mother, a hard-working woman**

Raúl is an elderly Matses man. He claims to be in his sixties, but he is not sure about his exact age as the notion of calendar time was not introduced until after missionary contact in 1969. Consequently, people born before this date are never sure of their exact age and often give different answers when asked on different occasions. The chapter’s opening quote is from Raúl’s older brother, Julio, and his description of raiding expeditions as a ten-year-old child where the Matses would attack the *chotac*, killing the men with bows and arrows and taking the young women captive. Raúl also remembers these excursions although he never participated in one himself. Instead Raúl’s world was and continues to be one of hunting tapirs, monkeys, armadillos and other prey animals; of being bewitched by forest-spirits that try to disorient him and take him away to the spirit world; and of encountering and defending himself against dangerous predators such as jaguars.

Matses microhistory is made manifest on Raúl’s body and bears witness to the centrality of the forest environment to his generation. His body reveals that he is *dadambo*, a ‘real man’ or ‘very much of a man’; that is, a man who is brave, strong, hard-working and skilled at hunting. Despite the signs of age on his face and his slightly stooped posture, he remains strong, agile and quick. He regularly treks for hours through the forest without slowing down, getting tired or losing orientation. The physical constitution of Raúl’s body is an outcome of his engagement with but also his knowledge of the environment. His bodily constitution is indicative of a lifetime spent moving, tracking and hunting in the forest.
Raúl’s face and chest are marked by the traditional Matses tattoos: two black lines that encircle the mouth and cross the cheeks up to the ears, alongside two lines that bisect the sternum. His feet, as for all other elders, have developed a thick hard layer on their soles, which the Matses say ‘is like a shoe’ and is the consequence of daily treks and excursions walking barefoot through the forest. Raúl continues to hunt and trek almost daily but due to shortage of cartridges and scarcity of game animals around the village, he complains that pete nidbëdec, ‘there is no food’. If he returns empty handed from daily hunts in the forest, he goes fishing in the evening, paddling for long distances downriver on his own. Raúl is skilled at paddling and fishing with hooks and he knows the river well, although he often admits that the river is good for fishing but it is boring if compared to the forest.

Raúl’s arms and chest are covered by a plethora of small round scars, which were left by the application of a poisonous secretion produced by the acate, a type of tree frog found in the forest. Matses elderly men and women commonly administer frog poison to each other and to younger people. The poison-giver first burns the arm of the poison-receiver with a lit stick, in order to open the skin, and then applies the poisonous secretion on the raw blistered skin. The poison provokes an intense and overwhelming physical reaction, the magnitude of which depends on the number of raw wounds burnt onto the arm. Depending on the circumstance, the number of wounds that are burnt usually varies between two and ten but can go up to twenty in the case of men. Men can also receive the poison on their chest, further intensifying its strength and causing extreme pain. Reaction to the poison is immediate and follows the same pattern: first an instant increase of heartbeat followed by a pounding headache, dizziness, nausea, possible sight alteration, and eventually vomiting and defecating. Receiving frog-poison is painful, disorientating and frightening, as I myself experienced even though I only was only ever subjected to two burn wounds at a time. The Matses apply frog-poison to remove laziness from the person and instil energy, appetite and motivation for hard work, which is a foundational moral value among the elders. The poison is also thought to improve marksmanship, hunting ability and courage. The plentiful scars on Raúl’s arms and chest left by frog poison not only attest to the life of an aging hunter, but to one that is deeply entangled with the forest and the resources it can provide.
The skills and abilities I described make Raúl *dadambo*, a ‘real man’ and thus gesture towards certain understandings of masculinity. For Raúl and other Matses elders, manhood is largely predicated upon hunting abilities, courage, strength, and physical resistance, which are only partially embraced by young generations. Raúl’s masculinity is also predicated upon having two wives, as most elderly men do. Matses men can have several wives but have a responsibility to provide for all of them equally. Therefore, Raúl’s hunting skills allowed him to marry two women insofar as he was able to provide plenty of meat for both of them. Now that game animals have become scarce, Raúl still has to distribute any meat or fish that he catches equally between his two wives, in addition to any gasoline and money that he has at his disposal; which, as I will show, is a more complicated matter.

Diego’s mother Elena, a Matses woman in her late forties, is Raúl’s second and youngest wife. She is small, skinny and agile but also very strong and robust. Her face is also tattooed (although unlike men, elderly women do not have a tattoo on their chest) and like her husband, she has grown a thick layer on the sole of her feet. Although she does not trek as often as Raúl, she knows the forest intimately and moves swiftly through it. Elena carries out most of domestic tasks, such as preparing and serving food but also washing clothes and plates, taking water from the river and cleaning the house. Elena is known as *dayac*, a ‘hard-working’ woman. This is a quality much praised by elderly men, insofar as a good Matses wife works hard cultivating the field, takes care of the house, carries home products, and cooks food for her husband and children. The elders, such as Raúl, very much disapprove of lazy women who do not want to cultivate the field or carry out domestic activities. Every day, Elena provides food for her family by harvesting cultivated products, mainly manioc and plantain that the Matses eat with meat or fish (if there is any). When she was young, fields were cultivated close to dwelling spaces and were easy to reach, but with the advent of sedentarisation, the nearby soil soon became unfertile and families now cultivate their fields further away from the houses. To reach her cultivated field Elena has to paddle downriver, then walk on a path through the woods, then carry back home heavy loads of products on her back. The journey is easier when Elena has gasoline at her disposal and can use the family’s motorised

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12 Here I only address women marginally, while next chapter will be entirely dedicated to Matses women and girls, but also marriage and changing female roles throughout generations.
canoe instead of paddling. But gasoline is expensive and usually unavailable, leaving Elena to complain *piucquid nidbëdec*, ‘there is no money’. As people freely admit, the preoccupation with money is increasing in Matses society and especially amongst the younger generation that Diego belongs to.

**Diego’s place in the household**

Diego lives with his mother Elena and his father Raúl, while Mateo, his older sixteen-year-old brother, lives in a house opposite the familial one. Boys generally build a house of their own at around sixteen years of age, but until they marry, they eat with their parents and continue to contribute to their household economy. As such, Mateo helps his parents with many work tasks, while his mother Elena cooks food for him and his father Raúl provides him with meat and fish. In a separate house next to theirs also lives Raúl’s other wife Clara and their children. Clara and Elena often share the meat and the products they harvest in their fields, which are also set near each other.

Diego is expected to contribute to household activities in substantial ways and his tasks include fishing, cultivating the field, chopping firewood and collecting water from the river. He is agile and his body is already muscular and toned from canoeing for long distances and working hard weeding, planting and cultivating the field. The work Diego is expected to do is to some extent related to the value of developing into *dadambo*, like his father.13 His parents urge Diego to develop physical dynamism, strength, courage and a will to work hard. Consequently, like most Matses children, Diego was repeatedly given burns and frog poison by his father from the age of four, so as to enable him to grow strong and willing to work hard. When he was younger, his parents also resorted to physical punishment and threats. The Matses do not judge smacking or slapping children who misbehave, which most parents do, as unethical and immoral; as long as the punishment is not too hard or performed in public. I have never witnessed a parent hitting a child apart from on one occasion, at night, when I heard a mother smacking her two eight- and ten-year-old boys from inside my

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13 Girls generally start contributing to household activities at an earlier age than boys, as is common in other Amerindian societies (see Maybury-Lewis 1974: 73). By the age of six, girls are already expected to prepare food and take care of younger siblings.
mosquito net, while I was staying at her house. The woman thought I was already asleep, so she felt free to hit her boys who were acting mischievously. It is instead extremely common to hear adults threatening children with the words *mibi cuesembi*, ‘I will beat you up’ by which children are seriously intimidated and respond by quickly doing what the adult has asked for. By the age of twelve, like Diego, a child is generally no longer punished or threatened, but parents can still yell at or address them in authoritarian manner.

If Raúl has gasoline, his parents take Diego to the Yaquerana River, the big watercourse located downriver from the village and towards the nonindigenous settlements, where they set up camp for a number of days. When they do so, Diego misses school, but neither he nor his parents are overly concerned about it. Schooling is recognised as important, but many parents do not expect or pressure their children to study hard. Instead, they insist on the value of labouring which includes physical activities and household chores. If Diego refuses to help with these, his parents will yell and reproach him for being lazy which is a reprehensible quality in children. Such activities resonate with Lancy’s notion of ‘chore curriculum’ (2008: 235), which comprises of the extensive range of work activities and tasks that children are encouraged to perform and which are understood as central to life. Diego’s actions suggest that he understands himself as a dynamic participant and an active provider, rather than a child to be provided for. Diego carries out household chores spontaneously and without being asked. When he feels hungry, he goes fishing; when water is needed, he collects it from the river; when there is no firewood, he accompanies his father to collect wood from the forest and then chops it up; and when his parents ask for help, Diego rarely refuses or complains.

The ‘chore curriculum’ can be a useful concept insofar as it highlights a contrast with parents in many nonindigenous societies—but also, as I will show, between certain Matses families—who address children’s ‘curriculum’ as something bound to school and playground contexts. However, any chore curriculum should not be understood as a fixed blueprint programme that instructs children on how to move in the world, but rather as continuously evolving in relation to social, seasonal and environmental changes. The ‘chore curriculum’ here can be read as a mixture of taken-for-granted understandings and expectations on the responsibilities of children in the household. In most Matses families children are not protected and safeguarded from the labour
and dangers of adult work, but are active participants in adult activities. These understandings and expectations are sometimes explicitly articulated, although more often they are commonly observed in the everyday interactions between children, tools and work.

Figure 22. Children with blades. (Photographs by the author).
The expectation of certain kinds of work means that Matses boys use—and play with—all sorts of tools that in other societies would be forbidden or actively kept away from children, such as knives, guns, machetes, axes, and bows and arrows. Even two and three-year-olds that can barely walk or talk, often play with sharp knives in plain view of their mothers, who do not show any worry or concern. In one of the previous photographs, Luz, a two-year-old girl, casually holds a big knife in a way that demonstrates a familiarity and knowledge, while in another she sits on her mother’s lap handling the blade while her mother does not attempt to take the knife off her or guide her hand. Sandy, three years old, carries around a big rucksack and a machete that is almost as big as she is; and Harry, eight years old, helps his parents by chopping up firewood with a big axe without shoes. In the last image, fourteen-year-old Sebastian holds a machete from which he got a serious cut on the hand that is bandaged in the image.

**Changing ways-of-knowing**

Diego is not simply adapting to the expectations of his parents or reproducing his father’s gendered ways of acting in the household. In contrast to his father, he is not interested in developing forest skills and knowledge and although, like all children, he is burnt with frog poison, his body is not as scarred as that of his father, who received far greater amounts when he was a child. Diego has not learnt how to hunt and he is not interested in developing marksmanship skills or learning about medical plants. Whereas Raúl would accompany his own father on excursions and knew how to hunt, trek, collect medical plants and was knowledgeable about animal life and forest spirits, neither Diego nor his older brother Mateo accompany their father on his hunting expeditions and do not understand themselves as meat providers. Nor do their parents expect them to contribute to the household by hunting. Only on two occasions in fourteen months of fieldwork did I see Diego and his brother Mateo take their father’s shotgun and enter the forest to hunt for animals. The boys did not walk very far, as they cannot move well through the forest and are scared of it, and they returned to the village empty handed after a very short time. This represents a very significant change in the span of one generation and Raúl is now the only meat provider in the house.
At the same time, Diego is developing knowledge of and a taste for certain leisure activities that the Matses learned from the chotac such as playing football. Every day, at dusk, young men gather on the pitch at the centre of the village and play one or two games of football, while young women play volleyball. Only men from about seventeen years of age up to thirty-five take part in the game, while older men show no interest in it and younger boys watch them or occasionally engage in side football games with old, broken balls. Diego’s father Raúl and the other elders are extremely critical and describe football as a useless activity performed ambembi, ‘just for the sake of it’ or ‘for fun’ and without any tangible outcome or purpose. As such, football stands in contrast to purposeful activities, such as hunting, trekking or collecting medical plants, which are productive and contribute to the household.

Raúl also disapproves of the children’s love of watching movies, which elderly people consider as a way of being lazy. Children can only sporadically watch movies, since there is no electricity in the village. They mainly do so on their occasional visits to Colonia Angamos, or in the houses of two or three young men in the village who bought small projectors and DVD-players in the city; but these break easily and are powered by gasoline, which is always in short supply. When I was in the field the children often asked me to show a movie on my laptop and I often accommodated their requests. The fieldnotes below illustrate that elders did not approve of this.

Fieldnotes. April, 2010. I am lying on a hammock, worn out by the afternoon heat. The children have come looking for me, again, asking to watch a movie. Diego leads the crowd and insists that I show a movie on my laptop. ‘Let’s watch a film!’ he says. I stand up from the hammock and turn on my laptop, at the cheers of Diego and other children, and we sit in the shade behind the house. A crowd of boys and girls sit as close as possible to the small screen, looking extremely concentrated and as still and quiet as they never normally are. But all of sudden the children, all together, jump up and take flight running. Some of them scream, choec, choec!, ‘he is coming!’ I turn around and see Raúl, who approached us with his silent hunter moves. I would not have noticed him was it not for the children’s breakaway. Raúl holds a burning stick in one hand and a stick with frog poison in the other. He frowns and as the children see him, he starts threatening them with the poison. If he...
managed to grab one, he would burn the child’s arm and put poison on it, even to his own son Diego. But the children have vanished away.

Raúl and other elders were unhappy with the children watching movies in full daylight rather than working, and they often scared away the children as in the episode recounted. The elders often complain that children are not as strong and hard-working as they were when young, and they criticise young people for becoming lazy and fearing things. Whenever Raúl or other elders saw the children watching a movie they would come running, holding sticks and frog poison and threaten to inject poison in their arms. The children, terrified at the idea of being injected with frog-poison, would panic and quickly disperse, screaming. When threatening them with poison, which is seen as transmitting energy and the will to work hard, Raúl would remind the children of the value of physical labour and condemn their laziness. Although the elders never complained to me directly, after a few of these raids I decided only to show movies at night-time, when children are not required to carry out housework activities. This placated the elders but caused many complaints from the children.

Money and the world of the chotac

Raúl’s aversion to films and football does not mean that he has a negative judgement on everything associated with the nonindigenous world. Like other Matses elders he holds an active interest in some aspects of it including money and manufactured goods. Over the past four decades Matses subsistence economy has become increasingly entangled with goods that are purchased from the chotac. For instance shotguns and cartridges for hunting; hooks, lines, lead and gasoline for fishing; machetes and axes to work in the cultivated fields, fell trees, chop wood and build houses; and metal pots and knives for cooking and so forth. These tools are now part of the *equipmental whole* of Matses everyday life and yet they are still perceived as tied to the nonindigenous world. Moreover, such goods can only be purchased with money, which is becoming increasingly necessary to Matses subsistence.

Making money is now an integral part of household economies and it is primarily understood as a male activity. This requires establishing relationships with the
Chotac and travelling to their communities, which is never easy for the Matses. Families can also make money when travelling to Colonia Angamos, where they sell horticultural products to local nonindigenous people, although only for little amounts. In the past twenty years, several Matses men have tried to get work in the nonindigenous world. Several got jobs in the logging industry in different areas of Peruvian Amazonia, but their limited knowledge of Spanish and inexperience with waged jobs allowed their nonindigenous employers to take advantage of them. The men were treated badly, made to work long hours and often ended up without being paid. As such, the only reliable way of obtaining money is by working as a schoolteacher in the village, although only a few Matses have ever been able to get such work.

Feeling the urge to make money, Raúl temporarily moved to Colonia Angamos where he worked as a builder. This experience tells a different side of Raúl’s life-trajectory and his attempt to develop skills and knowledge that would be useful in the nonindigenous world. In Colonia Angamos, Raúl learnt some rudimentary Spanish and nonindigenous manners, such as greeting and shaking hands upon meeting a new person, but he finds this awkward and has never been able to acclimatise to it. Like most Matses people, Raúl remains incredibly shy when dealing with the chotac, and when talking to a non-Matses person Raúl reveals a sense of uneasiness and bodily discomfort, standing slantwise and at a distance from the person he is facing while trying his best to avoid eye contact. He was very shy with me as well, although with time he became used to my presence like everyone else in the village. The Matses word dacuëdën translates both ‘being shy’ and ‘being scared’, and indeed the Matses betray a combination of shyness and fear by way of their awkward posture and trembling voice, when addressing the chotac.

When he worked, Raúl squandered his wages quickly without saving up any money in a way that is common among Matses men who have worked in the wage economy of the nonindigenous world. Saving and frugality stand in clear contrast with the attitude of the hunter and his family, who consume meat quickly and share it with others if the catch is abundant. Dealing with money requires different skills and ways of relating to other people and the resources of the world and Raúl was not successful at it. He and his wife Elena complain that piucqid nidbëdec, they ‘have no money’ and are only rarely able to buy cartridges, fishing tools or clothes for
themselves and their children. The family’s machetes are old, they rarely have gasoline and they only occasionally get hold of packaged foods produced in nonindigenous territory such as rice, noodles or sugar.

Raúl’s life experience tells its own story of how Matses ways-of-knowing have changed over the years, especially with regards to appropriate masculine roles. The ways of being a man, including how a man should act in the world and the characteristics that make a man ‘desirable’ have significantly transformed. When Raúl was young, being a good hunter was the quintessential feature of being a dadambo. A good hunter was a desirable husband and could provide meat for more than one wife. As gender can only be understood as intersected with political, economic and material circumstances (Moore 1994), environmental changes—such as the decreasing use of hunting, the growing importance of money, the movement from forest settings towards the river and the reliance upon the nonindigenous urban world—are central to the ongoing changes in how a Matses man should be, act and provide for his family.

This illustrates how the microhistories of Matses life are deeply entangled with broader dynamics beyond the village in which most people rarely venture, and reinforces the idea that discourses of gender are informed by wider economic and political processes that transcend the boundaries of local communities (Moore *ibid*: 63, Simpson 2009: 5). A Matses man now not only has to provide food but should also make money and provide manufactured gods for his wife and family. Raúl developed skills and became a great hunter but he was not successful at making money and his son Diego has to deal with his failure. This precludes certain possibilities of being in the present and in the future for Diego and his older brother. In the next section I present a microhistory of the second family, of a boy called Cristiano, whose father negotiated and became successful in the nonindigenous world. Cristiano thus represents a radically different possibility of being a Matses boy and man from that which Diego confronts.
Cristiano, twelve years old, is the oldest son of the village chief and a chotac woman, and he has a baby brother named Jesús. One of my first topics of conversations with Cristiano was Michael Jackson, or as he liked calling him, el Rey del Pop, ‘the king of pop’. My interactions with him were initially much easier than with other children because Cristiano has a nonindigenous mother and as such is fluent in Spanish. In addition he has also spent time in Iquitos and so is used to the chotac and was not as shy with me as other children were at the beginning. Cristiano had certain kinds of...
knowledge that facilitated our conversations, and he would ask me endless questions about music, the Beatles, my home country Italy and the Pope, Manchester, Manchester United and Real Madrid, Hollywood and Madonna. Other children have no knowledge about professional football teams, and they have never heard of Manchester, Italy or the Beatles (at least until I started playing them, which they loved).

In the photograph above Cristiano is posing as a rockstar and is playing his guitar while wearing brand new clothes, sunglasses and expensive earphones. His parents can afford these goods because they both work as teachers in the village and earn a generous salary from the Peruvian government. No other children in the village own good quality clothes, even less a guitar or earphones. Cristiano’s peculiar ways of being and distinct ways of knowing the world often cause him to feel different from some of his peers. He cannot share his knowledge about the nonindigenous world with many other children, who although fascinated by it do not have the same access to it as he does.

Half way through my fieldwork, for example, I spent a few days in Colonia Angamos, where I met up with Cristiano and his parents who were spending time there. At the time the football World Cup was being held and the games were shown in a couple of public spaces. Cristiano and I had previously talked about the World Cup in the village and he knew I was quite passionate about it. He had watched all the games while I was still in the village and as he saw me arriving in Colonia Angamos, without even saying ‘hello’, he shouted at me, laughing: ‘Italy got knocked out!’ He watched the final game with me instead of his parents and told me that nobody was really interested in the games and he had not been able to chat about the results, the players and the teams involved. I asked him if any other Matses children who were also in Colonia Angamos had watched the games with him and he replied that they have no clue about the games. Cristiano is often an outsider amongst his peers.

Cristiano’s family is different to many others and this has allowed Cristiano to develop specific ways of being and knowing that go far beyond football. Here, by analysing household interactions, I explore how Cristiano develops an understanding of himself as a certain type of child, who embodies a set of specific possibilities for
the future. As in the previous section, I do so by linking Cristiano’s own experiences to the microhistories of his parents, in order to demonstrate a number of critical differences and past and future life-trajectories from those of Diego and his parents.

Cristiano’s father, the village chief

Cristiano’s father, Carlos, is one of my closest Matses friends and was my first Matses contact. We got into communication via email, since he has an email address that he checks when visiting Iquitos. He also knows how to use a telephone and owns a mobile phone that he can use to make calls on when he is in the city. Thus while there is no electricity or Internet connection in the village, Carlos has the resources to travel frequently to nonindigenous settlements and communicate with the outside world.14

Carlos was born in 1969, the year of Matses contact with SIL missionaries. His life started in a sedentary village and unlike Diego’s father, Raúl, he never experienced Matses itinerant lifestyle in the forest. Carlos has not developed the same skills and ways-of-knowing of Raúl or other elderly Matses but also of most men from his generation, including his own brothers, who can trek and work hard every day. Carlos does not hunt nor fish, only sporadically works in the field, is afraid of the forest and never goes trekking, and has no knowledge of animal and vegetal life or the use of medical plants. I have never seen him canoeing either. Although younger, his body is nowhere near as agile, strong and fast as Raúl’s, for bodily dynamism is not required to provide food for his family. The physical activity that he is best at is playing football with younger men, which Raúl and other elders, but also many of Carlos’s peers, consider useless.

Carlos has developed different types of skills and ways-of-knowing the world, particularly in terms of the nonindigenous world. He has spent extended periods in Colonia Angamos and Iquitos, where he studied to be a teacher and learned to speak Spanish fluently. Carlos knows well how to engage with and relate to the chotac and

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14 Every Matses village has a chief, who is elected by the whole community amongst three male candidates once every two years. The chief has a certain say in the community affairs, for instance he can choose whether to let visitors in the community or not, but he is also expected to reciprocate to his community, for instance to help the villages to find work.
is not shy with them. He does not show the uneasiness and bodily discomfort that most Matses do when addressing a *chotac* but looks them in the eye, faces them confidently with a secure tone, and knows how to give a good handshake or two kisses on the cheeks. Whereas Raúl never fully understood the meaning of nonindigenous manners or their ways of engaging with each other, Carlos can act and behave like a *chotac*, as people in the village say behind his back.

Carlos is not *dadambo* like Raúl. People accuse him of being lazy behind his back, as he has neither the skills nor inclination to carry out manual work. But unlike Raúl, Carlos was quick to understand the possibilities opened up by the nonindigenous world, especially making money. People say that ‘he has plenty of money’, which is another reason why they often compare him to a *chotac*. For his own part, Carlos considers himself to be lucky and is proud not to have to carry out manual work like other Matses people or his brothers. He often points out that his success allows him to own manufactured goods that other people cannot afford. Whereas Raúl’s feet grew tough, shoe-like soles, Carlos owns real shoes and sandals bought in the city. Carlos cannot paddle but he owns a big canoe with a huge motor. Some other men own motorised canoes, but Carlos’s has the biggest and noisiest engine, and when he approaches the village people can recognise him from the sound of his motor. Carlos has no knowledge whatsoever about medical plants, but he brings back plenty of pharmaceuticals whenever he returns from the city.

**Money and changing ways-of-knowing**

Carlos works in the village as a schoolteacher, a possibility only opened up after the introduction of the first State-run schools in 1983 (prior to this date schools were run by the missionaries who acted as teachers, as I will discuss later). He studied to become a teacher in Iquitos, while his peers were uninterested and preferred hunting and manual work. Working as a teacher, Carlos receives a generous salary from the Ministry of Education of approximately 1,500 Peruvian Nuevo Soles per month, about 340 British Pounds, which is an inordinate amount of money for a Matses person. His wife also works as a teacher, so as to double the family income.
With the money earned through teaching, Carlos set up a small store in his house where he sells a variety of products such as clothes, fishing hooks and line, flip-flops, flashlights, candies, school material, and so forth. He buys these goods in Iquitos on his regular trips and sells them in the village at a much higher price to make a profit. Most villagers have open tabs at his shops and are always in his debt. This type of business is perceived as quintessentially nonindigenous: the notion of making a profit, storing up goods and accumulating wealth stand in marked opposition to the sharing-and-giving values of Matses hunting economy.

Carlos learned about selling for profit when he left to study in the city but his application of this knowledge in the Matses village often leads to tensions. Matses people are critical of those who own more than others and if someone owns goods of various sorts—meat, manufactured goods, money or anything else—people usually feel free to ask them to share. There is no moral restriction in asking and no obligation to share, however those who refuse to share with others are called cudas, ‘greedy’ or ‘stingy’ and this is a serious accusation that usually forces people to share their goods. Everyone in the village complains that Carlos is cudas, because rather than sharing what he owns, he sells it for profit and, furthermore, at high prices. Carlos, as he told me, does not care and keeps making his profit.

In addition, Carlos runs a business with a North American artist who twice a year purchases genipap juice from him that is taken from the genipap tree (Genipapa Americana), which grows wild in the forest. Carlos commissions a crew of men in the village to collect and process the juice. He then leaves for Iquitos and despatches the juice to the United States where the artist uses it to perform temporary body-tattoos in Los Angeles. The artist sends money back to Carlos, who collects it in Iquitos and then returns to the village to pay off the people who have worked for him. People are paid at a fixed rate and Carlos takes a fixed percentage for his managerial work. Since most of the villagers have open tabs at his shop, however, Carlos will count how much money he owes the workers and how much they owe him from previous purchases at his shop, and he will close the tab and pay them the difference, if there is one. In most cases, people are left disappointed.

Carlos’s success in the nonindigenous world extends to the woman he married—Cristiano’s mother, Consuelo—who was born and grew up in Iquitos. The two met in
Iquitos when Carlos was studying to become a teacher. At the time Carlos was married to a Matses woman and had children with her, but left her for Consuelo and thus became one of the first Matses men to leave a single mother in order to marry a *chotac* woman. For a Matses man, marrying a *chotac* woman and taking her back to their village is something to be proud of and inspires a great deal of admiration from others. But marrying a *chotac* woman is not straightforward and requires particular skills and resources. Carlos could woo Consuelo only because he spoke Spanish fluently, knew how to deal with the *chotac* and how to approach women by making conversation and flirting. For example, if other Matses men want sex they might crawl into a cross-cousin’s mosquito net at night and start touching her (although if she resists, they will desist). Since the majority of Matses men have no money, do not speak Spanish, cannot travel to nonindigenous places or deal with and seduce *chotac* women, very few of them manage to find a nonindigenous partner.

Cristiano’s mother has now lived in the village for more than ten years but has never got used to life with the Matses. She never learnt Matses properly and has not developed the skills and knowledge that Matses people perceive as fundamental to live in their environment. She cannot fish, does not work in the field, cannot paddle or swim, and never treks in the forest to collect wild fruit. She employs young women to carry out housework chores for her, such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning and collecting water for her. In exchange she gives them money or manufactured goods, mainly clothes. Hiring girls to work is common for an adult woman living in Iquitos, where Cristiano’s mother grew up, but is an isolated case in the village, where women are highly regarded for their physical labour and hard work.

Cristiano’s mother is not *dayac*, a ‘hardworking woman’, and her body reveals this, for unlike most Matses women Consuelo is fat, as people point out. As other women often told me this is because Consuelo does not carry out manual work and eats packaged food bought in the city, such as rice and noodles. Cristiano’s mother can afford not to work and in this sense embodies an alternative possibility of being a woman.
A different type of household

Cristiano’s parents are one of the few couples in the village that can afford to eat and feed their children—Cristiano and his baby brother—without carrying out any manual work. They do not fish, hunt and never collect forest food, and do not even have a cultivated field. Cristiano’s family possesses an abundance of manufactured goods, such as clothes, shoes, flashlights, batteries, gasoline, knives, soap and kitchen tools, and also food purchased in the city such as oil, rice, sugar and noodles. Their house is the only one in the village to have big solid doors and locks. Carlos told me that a few young men have stolen goods from his house in the past, so that he felt the need to lock his house properly, but nobody else in the village does the same.

The presence of money plays a crucial role in Cristiano’s household, as opposed to the absence of it in most Matses families. Cristiano’s parents receive horticultural products, such as manioc and plantain, as well as meat and fish from Carlos’s brothers and sisters, which they reciprocate with manufactured goods, clothes and packaged food bought in the city. They also purchase food through direct monetary exchange, buying game meat, fish or horticultural products from other families. Few other families buy food with money, with the exception of chickens that people occasionally purchase from each other for about ten Peruvian Nuevo Soles each (equivalent to two British Pounds approximately).

Cristiano is neither expected nor encouraged to be a food provider or carry out manual work, and unlike Diego is not pushed to develop physical strength and dynamism as these skills are not crucial to feeding his family. Nonetheless, Cristiano is presented with different demands and expectations based around formal education. According to his parents, education will allow Cristiano better possibilities, including making money and travelling outside Matses territory. This is illustrated in the fieldnotes below that describe how Matses men clear their cultivated fields in the dry season and ask other men for help. Carlos helps his brothers, even though he does not own a field himself.

Fieldnotes. June, 2010. It is 8.30 in the morning. I visit Carlos’s house to collect some goods that I left with him. His house has big locks on the doors, so I store things there. I find Carlos ready to go and help a man
clearing his field and he seems grumpy for having to go. He greets me kindly as usual, but then walks around looking for his shoes and grumbling to himself and frowning. Cristiano is lying in his bed. He should go to school at this time, but his teacher, who lives in a different village and comes every morning on a motorised canoe, has not showed up. Carlos assumes that there will be no class and he asks Cristiano to go with him and help in the field. Cristiano stays in bed, moaning that he is very ill and has a terrible headache. His father shouts and insists for him to go, but Cristiano claims to be so aching that he cannot stand up. His father leaves on his own. His mother Consuelo has witnessed the whole scene and let Cristiano stay in bed. When his father leaves, she turns to me and giggles sarcastically: ‘Yes, sure: Cristiano is ill!’ Shortly after, Cristiano's teacher unexpectedly shows up. They hear the canoe approaching from the river and someone shouts that the teacher is arriving and classes will start shortly. All of a sudden Consuelo turns serious and yells at her son: ‘Cristiano, your teacher has come. Stop pretending to be ill and go to school, quickly!’ Two minutes later Cristiano is standing up all energetic, dressed and ready for school.

In his family Cristiano is a pupil to be maintained by parents rather than an active contributor to the household. The responsibilities for subsistence lie entirely on his parents, who understand studying in school as children’s first and foremost duty. Cristiano’s parents, who both work as schoolteachers, are indeed very critical of other families in the village, such as Diego’s, who take children on fishing trips that often cause them to miss schooldays.

These understandings are often unarticulated but made manifest at certain moments and in Cristiano’s own ways of acting in the household. Unlike Diego, Cristiano is very lazy. His mother occasionally asks him to chop up firewood or collect water from the river, but Cristiano mostly refuses or runs away to hide. His parents do not blame him or chastise him for being lazy, and unlike other Matses parents they openly disapprove of physical punishment and admit they never hit Cristiano. Unlike Diego, Cristiano is unable to provide food for himself. When he is hungry Cristiano does not go fishing, but instead visits his aunties looking for food or asks his mother to cook rice that they bought in the city.
Carlos makes his understandings explicit by frequently praising the value of schooling. He recounted to me that when he was a child, the SIL missionaries started teaching the Matses how to read and write and saw him as an extraordinarily talented student. They expressed desire to send him to a boarding school in the United States (where they were from) but Carlos’s father adamantly refused. Carlos’s father was a renowned hunter and fierce warrior and he regarded schooling as a waste of time. ‘My father did not understand the importance of schooling’, says Carlos. ‘He took us to walk through the forest and work in the field. My siblings liked it, but I didn’t. I preferred studying in school’. Carlos’s father told him off and called him lazy, but Carlos kept studying and became a schoolteacher.

When he started earning money through teaching, his father changed his mind. ‘Now I buy things for my father. Axes, knives, clothes, soap. He is proud of me. Now he thinks that schooling is good’, says Carlos with a smile. Carlos’s brothers and sisters, instead, helped with the housework and skipped classes—like most of today’s children still do. ‘Now they have no money!’, Carlos told me, grinning. ‘What good has cultivating the field done them?’. Carlos, therefore, encourages his son Cristiano to study rather than helping with housework. One day, Carlos says, Cristiano will make money and buy things for him—just like Carlos does now for his father.

Cristiano meets his parents’ expectations by being the best student in the village. He is the only twelve-year-old boy who has already been promoted to secondary school and he always does his homework and attends classes. His peers are not as diligent and are all still attending primary school, including Diego. Carlos always impresses upon Cristiano the importance of speaking Spanish and learning the ways of the chotac, so that in the future he will be able to earn money. Cristiano’s mother is equally committed to the importance of studying. She grew up in the urban environment of Iquitos, where most people rely on a monetary system of exchange—purchasing, rather than hunting for food—with money earned through waged work. In this environment, children are fully maintained by parents and schooling is the first and foremost duty of a child. Cristiano is thus developing very different ways-of-knowing himself and the world, which in turn inform his perceived possibilities for the future.
Ways-of-knowing and future horizons

I have so far suggested that Matses children and parents are developing new and different understandings of childhood that at times are explicitly articulated and at other times unfold through action and interactions in the household. These understandings include some underlying assumptions about the values and meanings associated with manhood, as well as perceived possibilities for the future that are redeveloped within particular microhistories.

Raúl understands children as active participants in the household and holds that boys have to develop strength, courage, ability to carry out manual labour and to provide meat or fish for their family in order to become dadambo. These values are predicated upon a life spent in close contact with the forest environment, where physically challenging activities are key to survival and make life meaningful. Carlos, instead, made money through formal education and understands children as pupils whose main duty is studying in order to open up a future where money can be made. For him, a man’s worth lies largely in his monetary wealth, having a chotac wife, providing manufactured goods for his children and developing urban skills.

Children to some extent embrace their parents’ understandings of how a child should act and contribute to the household as well as the qualities that a boy should develop in order to become a man. But rather than simply reproducing such understandings, they actively negotiate them and develop new ways of knowing the world. Diego, for instance, is developing dynamism, strength and a will to work hard in ways that recall his father’s values, but he is also actively refusing to engage with the forest and gives his attention to the world in different ways. Diego is developing a passion for the nonindigenous world and demonstrates a strategic concern in engaging with the monetary economy in ways that his father did not. For example, Diego and his brother Mateo set up a small replica of Carlos’s store. Their aunt travelled to Iquitos and they gave her some money that Mateo had saved up through processing genipap juice for Carlos. She bought some shirts, skirts, flashlights and cookies, which the boys displayed in Mateo’s house and sold to the villagers. The boys did not manage to make much in terms of profit and their shop soon ran out of goods and was shut down, as they do not have the regular supply lines that Carlos has. Their attempt
nonetheless illustrates a new kind of engagement with the monetary economy compared to their father, who is not interested in selling for profit.

Diego told me that when he grows up he wants to travel outside of Matses territory to Iquitos, where he has never been. He also told me—while blushing and acting with uncharacteristic shyness—that he would like to marry a chotac woman when he grows up. I later found out that Diego told other boys that I was pretty and when he grows up he wants to marry a woman like me. Diego is developing different understandings of how a person and specifically a man should be that differ from those of his father: wealthy, skilled, at ease in the world of the chotac and married to a chotac woman. However, Diego already expresses doubts on whether he will accomplish such aims when he grows up and told me that he will likely not have any money to travel or spend time in the city. The failure of the shop that he opened with his brother probably contributed in presenting Diego with the difficulties of pursuing his desires.

Cristiano, instead, displays a whole different confidence when looking towards the future. He often told me that when he grows up he will work as a guía, a ‘tourist guide’, and bring tourists to Matses territory. He is encouraged and supported in this by his father, who believes that Cristiano will make a lot of money by working as a guide and asked me to teach English to Cristiano so that he will able to speak with tourists from the United States and Europe.

Other children are largely unaware of the concept or word guía, ‘tourist guide’, which has no translation in Matses. Whereas Diego wishes to explore the world of the chotac but thinks he will not have any money to do so, Cristiano already has a plan and strategy for entering into the monetary economy when he grows up. This is facilitated and supported by his parents and their emphasis on education and the learning of languages including Spanish and English. Cristiano is to some extent embracing his parents’ understandings by learning to perceive himself as a pupil and behaving as a good student; however, like Diego, he is not simply reproducing his parents’ expectations and has to negotiate his present and future life amidst considerable difficulties. This is most evident in the interactions between Cristiano and his peers and in the way that Cristiano’s current and future possibilities often lead to tension and conflict.
Matses critical way of addressing people who own more than others and do not share, such as Cristiano’s family, is wrapped up in the accusation of being *cudas*, ‘greedy’ or ‘stingy’. The word *cudas* retains a considerable and tangible power that generates a deep discomfort in those who are labelled such, and more often than not makes them share their goods. Children frequently draw on the power of *cudas* and use it to obtain things from each other. If a child is eating something and others notice it, they will ask the child to share; if the child refuses they will shout *mibi cudasec*, ‘you are greedy’, after which they quickly begin to give their food away for fear of being ostracised.

I often experienced the power of being called *cudas* in that the children continuously asked me for cookies, balloons, pens, clothes and other goods that I stored up and tried to distribute evenly and sparingly. If I refused to give out the goods, the children pointed their fingers at me and called me *cudas*, causing considerable discomfort which usually compelled me to give in. Adults were constantly asking me to share money and buy medicines, clothes, food, gasoline, and so forth, and I had to negotiate people’s requests and learn to say no. To some extent I needed to fit in with local values and feared being openly accused or being the subject of gossip about being greedy, but I also had to set boundaries in terms of buying goods for people. The social pressure was one of the hardest and most tiring aspects of fieldwork and a difficult balance to achieve in terms of when to accede and when to refuse. Like others, I desired acceptance and feared social exclusion, but this was mediated through a constant awareness of being different from everyone else.

This provided an insight into the ongoing struggles and dilemmas of Cristiano’s day-to-day life. He owns and has access to many goods that other children could never own: shoes, clothes, books and his guitar. In addition, whenever his parents travel to the city they bring back plenty of packaged foods such as cookies, noodles, rice and sugar that the other children are eager to have. Children repeatedly ask Cristiano to share and he is persistently required to negotiate their requests and often ends up being called *cudas*. His parents, meanwhile, scold him if he gives his own possessions away. The following fieldnotes give a sense of Cristiano’s strategies to negotiate between his parents’ moral world and the moral world of his peers, specifically in relation to Diego.
Fieldnotes. August, 2010. I am lying on a hammock in Cristiano’s house. His mother, Consuelo, has invited me over to eat chicken soup. Consuelo goes out and comes back yelling at Cristiano. ‘I have just seen Diego outside wearing your sandals, she yells. ‘He says you gave them to him as a gift!’ Consuelo tells me that she has just bought the sandals for Cristiano in the city, and he has already given them away to a friend. ‘Why did you give your new sandals to Diego?!?’ she asks her son.

Cristiano looks uncomfortable. ‘He stole them from me, mami’, he says. Cristiano speaks Spanish with his mother and calls her mami, ‘mummy’. His mother goes out again looking for Diego, claiming the sandals back. Cristiano starts walking back and forth, agitated, pulling a nervous smile. ‘He says he didn’t steal them, Cristiano!’ shouts his mother as she walks back into the house, ‘He says you gave them to him as a gift!’ ‘Diego is a liar’, says Cristiano. And he quickly sneaks out of the house and runs away.

I stand up with an excuse and walk outside the house. Diego is yelling something at Cristiano. I walk back in and chat with Cristiano’s mother. ‘Who will be lying? Cristiano or Diego?’ she asks, with a giggle. ‘Oh well, it doesn’t matter’ she adds ‘those sandals were too big for him anyway’.

I eat my soup and afterwards I approach Diego and ask him whether he stole the sandals or not. ‘No’, he replies, resentful, ‘I’m not a thief. Cristiano gave the shoes to me because they were too big’. This makes sense to me. Diego would not walk with stolen sandals right in front of Cristiano’s house. Later on I ask Cristiano whether he lied to his mother. All I get from him is a nervous giggle, and he walks away without answering my question.

Sandals are precious goods. Matses children mainly wear cheap flip-flops sold by Carlos, which get damaged and break easily, or old broken shoes. Cristiano, instead, owns good sandals that his mother buys in the city. This makes him look like a chotac and his friends scold him, mock him and call him cudas if he does not share them. Cristiano’s everyday life is situated on the boundary of two moral worlds: the
dominant obligation to share his goods and be accepted by his peers, and the individualistic, possession based ethic of his parents.

Cristiano has to make sense of his privilege on a daily basis and often struggles to reconcile the differences between him and other children and become accepted by his peers. His efforts in mediating such tensions often result in conflict: his mother tells him off for giving his sandals away and Diego shouts at him for calling him a liar. Cristiano is often excluded by other boys and does not participate in many of their activities. He is not as tough or cuididi, ‘mischievous’ as other boys are. When he engages in confrontations with them, he cannot handle their attacks and is often defeated. Other boys in the village often mock Cristiano just for the sake of it, which causes him great discomfort and leads to isolation. I often saw Cristiano on the verge of tears in his interactions with other boys, while his parents are often unaware of the extent of the constant social pressure and negotiations he faces.

At the same time, Cristiano’s presence and goods remind Diego and other boys of the desirable possibilities generated by the nonindigenous, urban world but which are closed to them. Diego is admired and looked up to by other boys and is becoming dadambo. However, a dadambo cannot buy clothes and sandals and Diego has to find his own strategies to make sense of the possibilities and constraints of his life. In a later chapter I will discuss how boys negotiate such tensions in the peer group through mutual confrontations.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter I have tried to show how different understandings of childhood are emerging amongst Matses people. I chose the specific cases of Diego and Cristiano, who strongly differ from one another, in order to show that contrasting understandings of childhood are emerging in relation to individual microhistories that develop within changing material, economic and environmental conditions.

Cristiano and Diego’s everyday interactions show the lived experience of childhood amidst the socioeconomic transformations that are shaping and changing Matses life. Here I considered children’s experiences in relation to changing understandings of
masculinity within the family. In the next two chapters I will expand my analysis by focusing on: (i) young women and girls; and (ii) peer-group relationships and how children solve tensions and conflict between them. My aim is to consider how boys and girls have to come to terms with their own struggles and limits of action through mutual interactions. Here, knowing is understood as a developing awareness of one’s human condition not as an abstract or ideal notion, but as embodied in a certain set of possibilities and constraints that are enacted in relation to others.

I have partly shown here that Diego and Cristiano have to come to terms with their own potentials for acting and being in relation to others. Diego realises that his aspirations for the future might not be fulfilled because of a lack of money, whereby Cristiano learns to perceive himself as a privileged child and for this reason is often excluded or mocked by his peers. In the following chapters I will focus on this more closely by considering self-knowing and self-understanding, whereby I explore the process of existential questioning through which children come to acknowledge their own being in relation to others. As such, knowing will be presented not just in terms of possibilities of skilled action such as fishing, canoeing and so forth, or of language, schooling and money, but also as a mode of taking awareness of the limits and constraints posed to one’s ways of acting and being in the world. This type of knowing is often accompanied by modalities of struggle, sufferance and existential pain, which my analysis seeks to grasp.
First Visual Interlude
Figure 24. Boys on a canoe. (Photograph by Nelson, eleven years old).
Figure 25. Children playing in the village. (Photographs by Paco, ten years old; Lily, nine; and Edgar, ten).
Figure 26. Children and the river. (Photograph by John, ten years old).
Figure 27. Girl collects worms for fishing. (Photograph by Diego, twelve years old).
Figure 28. Boys in the village. (Photographs by Diego, twelve years old).
Figure 29. Boys posing for a photograph, boy playing with his father’s shotgun. (Photographs by Nelson, eleven years old).
Figure 30. Boy on the school wall, children drawing in the house. (Photograph by Raisa, twelve years old).
Figure 31. Children playing in the river. (Photographs by Harry, eight years old; and Emanuel, ten).
Figure 32. Boys climb a tree. (Photograph by Romina, nine years old).
Figure 33. Boys and girls play. (Photographs by Edgar, ten years old).
Figure 34. In and around the village. (Photographs by Lily, nine years old; Nelson, eleven; and Emanuel, ten).
Part II: Knowing as Existential
Questioning and Self-Interpreting
Introduction to Part II

In the previous chapters I mainly addressed knowing in terms of skills and competencies that open up certain possibilities of acting and being; of engaging with the world for certain purposes; and of moving through different types of environments. I now argue that in order to fully understand how human beings develop ways-of-knowing the world, it is necessary to explore the process of existential questioning through which people develop ways-of-knowing themselves.

Building on Moran’s reading of Heidegger’s hermeneutic philosophy (2000: 222-38), I propose a theory of human existence as a continuous interpretative act. In this view, every intentional act we perform entails ‘an interpretive component’ so that ‘all our experience is interpreting and encountering what has already been interpreted by ourselves and by others’ (ibid: 235). Toren suggested something similar in anthropology by arguing that ‘intersubjectivity entails that we make meaning out of meanings that others have made and are making’ (2007: 292), which suggests that knowledge always develops in dialectic mediation between individual agency and social constraints. Any such conception of human existence as an interpretive act, however, must also consider the process of existential questioning through which we interpret ourselves as specific types of human beings. This individual process is of course informed by the social, historical and class environments that we inhabit; as Moran points out: ‘a lot of the way my life presents itself to me is given by the culture I have grown up in, or is simply carried along by a kind of unquestioned horizon of acceptance’ (Moran 2000:239).

Anthropological studies of ‘personhood’ have widely addressed what it means to be a person in these culturally situated terms: for instance, what it means to be an Amerindian person (Conklin and Morgan 1996, Overing and Passes 2000, McCallum 2001, Villaça 2005); what it means to be Fijian (Toren 1990, 1993); what it means to Melanesian (Strathern 1988: 13); or what it means to be a British working-class person as opposed to being middle class (Willis 1977, Evans 2006).

Such theories of personhood, however, cannot fully account for the complex and manifold ways in which individual human beings question and interpret themselves. Less attention has been paid to ‘what it means to be me’ and how this question is
always asked (and answered) in relation to a questioning and understanding of ‘what it is to be you’. Although existential questioning is always situated in a shared environment, self-understandings cannot be reduced to external, social constraints: ‘as Heidegger … indicates, I can choose certain possibilities for myself’, a view further taken by Sartre, who asserts that ‘humans can make themselves who they are by seizing their possibilities’ (cf. Moran 2000:239). This view has been pursued by few anthropologists; for example, Rapport asserts that ‘the course of social life and relations cannot be comprehended without an appreciation of the individual world-views that animate them’ (2004: 863); Jackson proposed to render the ‘open-endedness and ambiguity of human experience’ (Jackson 2002: 125); and Irving argues for the need to explore ‘the interior dialogues and imaginative lifeworlds that constitute people’s experiences’ (2011: 22). To my knowledge, no anthropologist has applied this approach to children.

My aim here is to address knowing as a process of ‘knowing one’s own being’ that unfolds through self-questioning and self-interpreting, as well as through situated, emotional, bodily and relational modalities. My point of departure is the individual, which I emphasise in its interconnectedness to others and the environment, but without reducing it entirely to these factors. The process of self-knowing and questioning, however, ‘is not necessarily carried out verbally; rather it is carried out in the way we relate to things’ (Moran 2000:235). This means that we do not often question and interpret our existence in explicit words, but rather in an implicit and unspoken manner. In Heidegger’s words, ‘interpretation is carried out primordially not in a theoretical statement but (…) “without wasting words”’. From the fact that words are absent, it may not be concluded that interpretation is absent’ (quoted in Moran 2000: 235).

This poses a dilemma to the researcher: if existential questioning and interpreting is carried out primordially and without words, how can we access another’s person self-knowing or self-interpretations? This issue has been raised in phenomenological anthropology, in terms of how we could ever be able to access the world as another person does (Crpanzano 2004: 18; Irving 2011, 2013; Jackson 1989, 2002). But as Moran suggests, the process of interpreting is carried out ‘in the way we relate to things’. This means that our ways of comporting ourselves towards the world and other human beings already reveal some self-understandings prior to words.
In the two following chapters I apply this approach to Matses young women and boys. Exploring Matses process of questioning poses further dilemmas, for various reasons. Firstly, because the Matses do not even have a word for ‘existence’ let alone ‘existential questioning’. These concepts, however, can be useful to explore how the Matses come to understand themselves as particular types of human beings; I nonetheless recognise that these are merely theoretical tools and that ‘lived experience is never identical with the concepts we use to grasp and represent it’ (Jackson 1989: 2). A second hurdle emerges when applying this approach to children, especially Matses children, whose extreme dynamism and liveliness often resulted in a lack of patience and a refusal to participate in long conversations, answer elaborate questions or clarify their answers if I did not understand them. But following Moran, I argue that even if children do not ask themselves and each other ‘who am I’ or ‘what are my possibilities in the world’, this process is carried out in the ways a Matses child relates to other children. I argue, accordingly, that by looking at children’s action and even their being-in-movement, it is possible to grasp, even if only partially, how they question and understand themselves in specific situations.

The chapters are divided in terms of gender: Chapter Three concerns mainly young women and Chapter Four deals specifically with pre-teenage boys. My aim, however, is not to offer a contribution to the study of gender, which I use instead as a bridge concept to explore the process of self-questioning and knowing. Accordingly, my primary focus is not upon Matses understandings of gender, but I will touch on these indirectly by recognising that masculinity and femininity are an essential part of how one recognises being a certain type of person.
Chapter Three. *Mibi bunquioebi*, ‘I am hungry for you’: exploring the transforming bodies and desires of Matses women/girls

*Remedios:* You’re so pretty. All white women are.

*Camilla:* You think so? Why???

*Remedios:* Because you’re white. And you have doll-faces.

*Camilla:* What about you?

*Remedios:* No. I’m black. Very black.

(Dialogue with Remedios, seventeen-year-old single mother, dumped by the father of her baby for a nonindigenous woman)

This chapter explores the manifold ways-of-knowing oneself and engaging with the world as a *chido*, ‘woman’, or *chidompi*, literally a ‘little woman’ or ‘girl’. My aim is to discuss how Matses women/girls understand themselves and their possibilities for acting and being in the world; including how they understand their current roles and future lives as women.

Theories of gender urge us to consider that ‘gender is a cultural construct’ (Moore 1994: 71, Lewin 2006: 19-20) and even to doubt ‘that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women’ (Butler 1990: 1). I therefore try to understand how Matses womanhood is constituted through actions over time, while also addressing that ‘discourses on gender, wherever they occur, … are implicated in larger processes of economic and political change well beyond the control of local communities’ (Moore 1994: 63). Accordingly, my analysis attempts to investigate how Matses understandings and experiences of being a woman are intertwined with socioeconomic, political but also environmental changes, and how Matses womanhood is undergoing substantial transformations across generations.
Subsequent to Matses society opening up to the nonindigenous world, Matses girls and women are becoming aware of new and different ways of being and acting as a woman that not only inform their perception of themselves, but also their aspirations for the future.

While studies of gender in Amazonia have been growing recently (e.g. Knauf 1997, Gregor and Tuzin 2001, McCallum 2001, High 2010), studies of Amerindian women’s lived experiences and own understandings remain limited. The first accounts of womanhood in Amazonia were related to kinship and social structure (Siskind 1975, Turner 1979). In line with feminist theories that started emerging in the 1970s and postulated the universality of female oppression and male domination (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974: 1, Ortner 1974, Chodorow 1974), such works often emphasised sex antagonism and the hierarchical control of women by men in indigenous Amazonia (Bamberger 1974, Murphy and Murphy 2004, Gregor 1985). Later works in Amazonian literature called for closer attention to ‘the actual content of women’s life experiences’ (Seymure-Smith 1991:629; Muratorio 1998: 409) at a time when feminist studies had started challenging the universality of the female condition and arguing for gender as culturally relative (Rubin 1975; Etienne and Leacock 1980; Moore 1988, 1994). Consequently, Chernela (1988, 1997) examined ‘the production of social relations through linguistic practices’ in Northwest Amazonia, and the dramatization of women’s position in society through female weeping songs (2003: 796); similarly, Briggs (1992, 1993) considered the temporary inversions of power relations between Warao men and women, in Venezuela, through women’s appropriation of speech during mourning rituals. These analyses, however, are still somehow confined to social reproduction and symbolic representations of gender.

Little attention has been given to women’s own perceptions of womanhood and how these are constituted through action and are changing between generations. An exception is Muratorio’s (1998) work on changing femininities and ‘intergenerational conflict’ for the Napo Quichua of Ecuador (ibid: 409). Muratorio shows how emerging nonindigenous practices and urban attractions—such as make-up, discotheques and televisions—offer new and often dangerous opportunities for Napo Quichua girls—for instance, sleeping with nonindigenous men—which elderly women are very critical of. In this chapter I also discuss how possibilities and desires
opened up by the nonindigenous world are feeding into new experiences and understandings of womanhood. But whereas Muratorio takes the perspective of elderly women and their discontent with changing femininities, I put forward young women’s own experiences of womanhood and social change by bringing out their processes of existential questioning and self-interpreting. In other words, I try to grasp how young women question what it is to be a Matses woman but also what it is for each of them to be a particular woman—e.g. what it means to be Remedios, Damita or Dolores—as opposed to other women; which, I argue, is an unexplored approach in Amazonian anthropology.

I consider in particular how women are at once reproducing established forms of womanhood shared by older generations while also developing new gendered ways of acting and knowing themselves and the world. In order to problematise the tension between reproduction and innovation, I look at theories of gender external to Amazonia, starting with Butler’s (1990) concept of gender as performative. According to Butler, gender does not exist if not in its enactment through time, whereby ‘the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established’ (ibid: 178). In her view,

‘Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts’ (ibid: 179, italics in original).

Arguing that gender is constituted through performative, repetitive acts is not to deny individual agency: ‘construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency’ (ibid: 187). For Butler, it is indeed repetition that poses the basis for innovation and change:

‘The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such [repetitive] acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity… that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.’ (ibid: 214).
While Butler’s theory of gender as performative has been widely praised for ‘opening up new critical and theoretical terrains for feminism’ (Salih 2002: 140), it was also criticised for its ‘deeply antihumanist’ language (Fraser 1995: 67) that distances it from people’s lived experiences and because it ‘lacks a description of how the performative aspects of gender are lived by individuals in relation to a web of social practices’ (McNay 1999: 178). As such, her approach has been accused of lacking ‘social and historical specificity’ (ibid) while also overlooking the ‘cultural context’ wherein subversive acts that transform gender take place (Bordo 1993: 292). But once placed within an ethnographic analysis, Butler’s theory will prove useful to frame the intergenerational tensions between continuity and innovation, and especially to understand how Matses women are mediating between contrasting possibilities of being-women that are informed by political, socioeconomic and environmental forces.

More specifically, I intend to consider women’s ways-of-knowing and changing perceptions of womanhood through my shared experiences and gendered interactions with them as a *chido ushu*, a nonindigenous ‘white woman’. This chapter is inherently reflexive, insofar as I use my own way of being-a-woman as a means of comparison and because my gendered identity continually stimulated and elicited discussions with girls and women in which they constructed comparative understandings of themselves. Here the reflexive stance aims not at underlining ‘the privileged status of the woman ethnographer [as opposed to her male colleagues] with regard to the women she studies’ (Moore 1988: 10), which has been criticised as ‘the it-takes-one-to-know-one position’ in feminist studies (Shapiro 1981: 460). It instead sets up the basis for an ethnographically grounded inquiry that moves from what Moore termed ‘embodied intersubjectivity’: an experience that involves ‘situations where bodies marked through the social, that is, by difference (race, gender, ethnicity and so on) are presented as part of identities’ (1994: 3, brackets in original). The difference, in this case, involves my own being a certain type of woman (nonindigenous, white, wealthy) as opposed to how my female respondents understand themselves (black, poor, unschooled, and so forth). In this comparative, reflexive analysis the body plays a crucial role as a tangible site of difference: ‘the uses of the body, … and the readings made by others are all involved in the taking up
of a position or positions that form the basis for the enunciation of experience’ (*ibid*). As Moore furthermore argues,

> The intersubjectivity of experience is not confined, of course, to physical appearances, to actual dialogue and to the concrete nature of the sociological circumstance. Intersubjectivity is also about identifications and recognitions. It is about desire and the projections and introjection of images of self and others. (1994: 3)

Accordingly, I consider how Matses women and girls referred to our different types of bodies and thereby made sense of our different ways of being—women through expressions of desire, fascination, but also disapproval and other modalities.

By so doing I move away from Amazonian theories that mainly address the body in terms of how indigenous Amazonians conceive it at the level of thought or ‘ontological’ conceptualisations (Viveiros De Castro 1998, Turner 1995, Taylor 1996, Villaça 2005; see McCallum 2001, specifically on gender and the body). Here I am instead addressing the ‘lived body’ (Leder 1992) and how deeper, often implicit understandings of what it is to be a woman are wrapped up with and made manifest by certain types of female bodies. The body is revealed not as a naturally given structure on which gender is inscribed, but rather as ‘a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated’ (Butler 1990: 177). In Butler’s view, not just gender and womanhood but also the body itself and sex are culturally constituted: ‘bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender’ (Butler 1990: 13, 1993). Although accused of denying the ‘concrete, historical body’ (Moi 1995: 49; Epstein 1995: 101) or that ‘the creatures we call women do share some material ground’ (Hull 1997: 33), what Butler asserted is that ‘there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body’ (1933: 10). As such, bodies only exist in-the-world and within a frame of reference that is influenced by political factors and constituted through ‘embodied subjectivity’ (Moore 1994: 3). So, for instance, Matses women addressed their black skin as an index of their indigenousness, understood in opposition to my white skin, as an index of urban-ness, wealth and also beauty.

I nonetheless propose to expand on Moore’s concept of ‘intersubjectivity’ by proposing a view of existence as a continuous interpretive act, in an attempt to
explore how Matses women and girls both question and interpret their own gendered being in relation to others and do so in an often implicit manner. Exploring women’s ways of interpreting their own being in such a way poses an epistemological and methodological dilemma, especially as these are not easily rendered into speech or explicit verbal analysis. In trying to move the inquiry beyond public utterances and into the realm of ‘what goes without saying’ (Bloch 2012: 143-185), it is necessary to recognise that it is of course impossible to ever gain full access to another person’s own lived experience, and therefore we also need to observe other forms of expression and action in which women’s understandings unfold and are made manifest. In terms of method, this chapter pays special attention to:

(i) The recurrent questions that girls and women would frequently ask me and how these opened up dialogues on various topics that in turn disclosed a number of implicit understandings about the world; and

(ii) The everyday movements, skills and actions of girls’ and women’s bodies as they engage in social life and which reveal embodied and often unspoken ways-of-knowing.

The ethnographic description in this chapter offers a series of portraits of individual women, ranging from three years old to over sixty. In order to observe how Matses women’s ways of knowing and attending to the world have changed significantly over the past decades, I will introduce the women in reverse chronological order, starting with an older woman and ending with a young girl. I will introduce each woman by means of reporting short dialogues extracted from my fieldnotes, in order to represent how women present themselves to the world through expression and actions. This includes my own self-understandings in relation to my Matses respondents. As I interacted with Matses women, I was continually pushed to question myself and found new answers to old questions, including: what does it mean to be a woman? What do women do? And what does it mean to be me as opposed to Remedios, Damita, Dolores and other Matses women/girls?
Lorena *macho*: being a girl before contact

![Figure 35. Lorena. (Photograph by Raisa, twelve years old).](image)

_Camilla_: How old were you when you received a facial tattoo, Lorena?

*Lorena*: I was a little girl. Like this [she puts her hand out, with her palm facing the ground, as to indicate a small child’s height].

_Camilla_: Oh, I see. Why did you do it?

*Lorena*: My father told me to. ‘Daughter’, my father said. ‘If the *chotac* attack us and take you away, you will be scared. I will travel to their land and look for you. But if you are not tattooed, I will look amongst the *chotac* and not recognise your face. Where is my daughter?*, I will say’ [she points her finger towards an imaginary crowd of *chotac*, mimicking her father looking for her amongst them and unable to find her]. This is what my father said. I got scared. And I got tattooed.

_Camilla_: Was it painful?
Lorena: Yes! Dreadfully painful! Young people now don’t want to be tattooed.

Camilla: Why is that?

Lorena: Because they want to look like the chotac!

Camilla: Why do they?

Lorena: So they can marry a chotac! If they have the tattoo, the chotac won’t marry them. Leandro wanted to marry a chotac woman [Leandro is her husband, who already has two wives including Lorena]. He met the woman in Colonia Angamos. He was working there. But the woman didn’t want him. She said ‘No, you have a tattoo, you are a mayu!’ [here mayu derogatorily means ‘indigenous person’, ‘Indian’].

Camilla: Oh, I see.

Lorena: How many wives does your father have?

Camilla: Just one: my mother. [Women often ask me the same question].

Lorena: Oh, I see. When Leandro decided to take Alina [his second wife], I got mad at him. I said ‘No, don’t take her’! [Yelling, as if she was talking to him]. But he took her anyway. I got mad.

Camilla: What did you do in the end?

Lorena: In the end, I got used to it. So your father doesn’t have another woman? Only your mother?

Camilla: Yes, only my mother.

Lorena: What about his lovers? [shanu, literally, ‘female cross-cousins’].

Camilla: He doesn’t have any. Not that I know of. [Giggling].

Lorena: Oh. I see. [She looks suspicious. I think she does not believe me].
The conversation above took place in Lorena’s house, while Lorena and I were lying in hammocks. Lorena is a *macho*, ‘old woman’. She was born before 1969 and does not know her exact age, like all elders. She nonetheless thinks she is in her early fifties given that she spent her entire childhood in the forest before contact. Lorena is short and petite, and yet strong, fast and agile. When I trekked with her through the woods or accompanied her to the cultivated field, I was in awe of the sheer weight of plantains and other heavy loads she would carry on her head.

Like all men and women born prior to contact, Lorena was tattooed as a child and, like them, still winces at the thought of the dreadful pain. Children were easily persuaded to receive the tattoo by their parents, who warned them against the danger of looking like the *chotac*. Her tattooed body therefore reveals the particular type of woman that Lorena was encouraged but also decided to be as a young girl and her aspirations for the future: she wanted to be a Matses woman and for this to be visible through her own skin. The tattoo was thus a traditional means of transforming the person by inscribing Matsesness onto the body, reinforcing the view that for native Amazonians ‘persons are made’ (McCallum 2001: 5) and this process of making requires bodily transformation (Viveiros De Castro: 1998, McCallum 2001, Uzendoski 2005). When Lorena was a child, this process of bodily transformation openly expressed the will to be different from the *chotac*.

The tattoo, however, was not only functional in terms of being recognised as a Matses person but was also addressed in terms of desire and beauty: when Lorena was a girl the tattooed body was *bëdapatsë*, a ‘beautiful’ body. This is further emphasised by the fact that when Lorena was a child, the Matses would kidnap and take *chotac* women captive from different groups of Amerindians and nonindigenous Peruvian citizens (Romanoff 1984: 39-42). The Matses would raid the *chotac* such as rubber tappers or loggers camping in the forest and would kill the men, steal their tools and machetes, and capture young women, whom they took back to their villages, and who were unlikely to ever see their original families again. Taking a woman captive and marrying her was a sign of warfare ability, therefore of prestige. But as soon as a captive woman was taken back to the village she was forced to receive a facial tattoo and was assigned the kin name of the man who would marry her, so as to be incorporated into the kinship system. By being tattooed the women
were made fully Matses and their plain, non-tattooed faces were transformed into more desirable ones.

To become Matses, the captives also had to learn the ways of labour of Matses women, including cultivating the fields, skinning animals, cooking with fire, and learning many other skills. This was necessary not just to become Matses, but also to become desirable. When Lorena was young, Matses men considered women who were *dayac*, ‘hard-working’ as sexually appealing and desirable, and disapproved of lazy women who did not carry out manual work; and the same is true today, although to a much lesser extent, since young men’s attitudes are beginning to shift. Lorena is indeed *dayac* and she started developing physical dynamism and a will to work hard as a young girl, which made her a desirable woman to marry.

Lorena has nevertheless lived through times of great social transformation. After contact, as she was growing up, the Matses had already started developing different ways of knowing the world and their relationships with non-Matses people started changing. For instance after missionary contact in 1969, they abandoned warfare and raiding, so that marriage became almost exclusively endogamous. Since abandoning warfare the Matses lost almost all contact with other Amerindian groups, and are now limited to sporadic encounters in Iquitos where Shipibo and other Amerindians sell handcraft products. Relations with the *chotac* became increasingly important as the Matses started travelling to the nonindigenous settlement Colonia Angamos and the city, Iquitos. This not only had an impact on the society as a whole but on women’s self-perception, particularly in relation to a new, emerging image of womanhood: that of the *chotac* woman who Matses men met in the city but could no longer kidnap, only try to seduce in different ways. For example, Lorena described how, after her husband Leandro came back from working as a builder for the *chotac* in Colonia Angamos, he became intent on marrying a *chotac* woman but was unsuccessful in his quest.

Other men had similar experiences: local women in Iquitos or Colonia Angamos often snub and make fun of Matses men and their *mayu*, ‘Indian’ comportment and do not want to be associated with them. They regard Matses men as embarrassing peasants, laugh at their clumsy manners and avoid them; especially those, like the elders, who have marked their indigenousness on their body though a facial tattoo.
This is one reason why Leandro and Lorena decided not to give their children tattoos, especially as this will also give them a better chance of marrying a chotac. Young Matses themselves resist being tattooed insofar as tattoos hold little positive meaning for them and hamper their chances of looking and acting chotac. Since Lorena’s childhood, therefore, the way young Matses perceive themselves and develop aspirations for the future have been significantly changing, including in relation to marriage and bodily perceptions.

Although I use the term ‘marry’ there is no literal translation in Matses. The closest approximation is bedec, ‘to take’. A man takes a woman as his wife (occasionally people can say ‘a woman takes a husband’, but this is uncommon). Taking a woman means that a man chooses a wife, sometimes against the woman’s will, settles down with her, builds a house and soon after they start having children. The Matses do not perform any specific marriage ritual. ‘Woman’ and ‘wife’ are addressed with the same term, chido, whereas bènè can be translated as ‘husband’. Lorena herself was taken by Leandro against her will and when she was very young, most likely around twelve years of age. Leandro turned out to be a good husband due to his hunting skills. He kept Lorena well fed with meat and gave her status and recognition insofar as she was often able to share his catch with other families. When Leandro and Lorena were young, hunting was the main subsistence activity and good hunters were regarded as the best and most sought after husbands, and back then many other women wished that Leandro was their husband.

Because he was such a skilled and prolific hunter, Leandro could afford to take a second wife. As mentioned, the Matses practice polygyny and a man can have several wives as long as he works and provides equally for all of them (i.e. splits the meat and fish he catches, builds their houses, provides firewood and works on their lands). When Lorena was a child, a man might have seven or more wives, but the number of wives has decreased throughout generations. Leandro has two wives, which is common for a man of his generation, but this does not mean that Lorena was not jealous or accepted her co-wife passively. She admits she ‘went mad’ and yelled at Leandro to try to dissuade him. Eventually she ‘got used to it’ and Leandro was able to provide great quantities of meat for both his wives until game started depleting around the village. Now he struggles like all other men and Lorena often complains that Leandro provides more meat for his second wife.
By asking me how many wives my father has, Lorena’s question exposes a common cultural presupposition in which polygyny is thought of as a standard practice. When I replied that my father is only married to my mother Lorena looked puzzled, but not overly so, given that in recent years polygyny has been decreasing and men in their thirties or younger tend to have only one wife, as chotac men do. Lorena then asked me how many shanu my father has. Although shanu means ‘female cross-cousin’, in everyday speech it more broadly means a woman that a man has sexual intercourse with. If a Matses man has sexual intercourse with a chotac woman, he can thereafter call her his shanu, his cross-cousin. The equivalent for women is mëntado, which translates as ‘male cross-cousin’, but also as ‘lover’ or ‘boyfriend’.

Within Matses population, Matses people primarily have sexual intercourse and get married with their cross-cousins, otherwise it is considered incest. Sexual intercourse between cross-cousins is free and very common, including as extramarital affairs. When I told her that my father has no lovers, Lorena simply did not believe me. A few women put it in blunt terms: they openly told me that they did not believe my father does not have affairs. When I replied, giggling, that perhaps my father does have affairs which I am not aware of, they still found it implausible: people’s extramarital affairs are renown and gossiped about throughout the village, so that everyone is aware of them including one’s own spouse.

By briefly introducing Lorena and her microhistory, I intended to offer some initial background into Matses womanhood and particularly how understandings of the body and men-women relationships were ėnden, ‘in the past’, but have been transforming over the past decades. As such, Lorena’s story posed the basis for a further discussion on social change and transforming experiences of womanhood. In the next sections I will focus on young women and look more closely at how their self-perceptions, aspirations for the future and possibilities of acting and being are significantly different to those of Lorena when she was a girl.
Damita and a house filled with laughter

Figure 36. Damita. (Photograph by Harry, eight years old).

_Damita._ How old are you, Camilla?

_Camilla._ Twenty-four.

_Damita._ Twenty-four???

_Camilla._ I look younger, don’t I?

_Damita._ Yes! [she smiles].

_Damita._ When will you get married? [literally, ‘when will you take a husband’].

_Camilla._ I don’t know. Maybe when I’m thirty? [Damita giggles.] When did Fabián take you, Damita?

_Damita._ I was thirteen.
Camilla. Thirteen???

Damita. [She looks serious now] Yes. Fabián took me when I was thirteen. My brother gave me to him in exchange for his sister. I was just a child, Camilla. I was exchanged. I had no clue [tantienquio icombi, literally ‘I could not think’].

Camilla. Did you want Fabián when he took you?

Damita. No, I didn't! [she laughs] I used to bite his hands when he tried to touch me. [we both laugh].

Camilla. But now you do want him.

Damita. Yes, now I do. [she smiles, blushes and looks down].

Camilla. Will Paula be exchanged? [I point at her three-year-old daughter, who is sitting in the room with us].

Damita. No, I want Paula’s husband to be whomever she wants. I wouldn’t like her to be exchanged. I was a child. I had no clue. Paula should be married to a man she wants. [Then she smiles, comes closer to me and whispers, as if someone could hear us although we are alone]. I’d like her husband to be a chotac.

Camilla. You’d like Paula to be with a chotac?!

Damita. [Still whispering] Yes, if she wants.

Camilla. Why?

Damita. For the clothes! And the money, too. [Damita is implying that a nonindigenous man would have plenty of money and buy clothes for Paula].

The photograph above, taken by her eight-year-old son Harry, shows Damita returning to the village from her cultivated field. Damita is Lorena’s daughter-in-law (she is married to Lorena’s son, Fabián) but also is Lorena’s niece (her father is Lorena’s brother). In other words, Damita and her husband, Fabián, are cross-cousins and as such are allowed to have sexual intercourse and get married. Fabián took Damita against her will when she was thirteen. She told me, ‘I was just a child’, and ‘I didn’t have a clue’. It is quite common for Matses women to get married at twelve
or thirteen, as long as they have entered puberty. At this point they are not considered a child anymore, which reinforces the view that the social category of childhood is constructed and negotiated differently across various cultural contexts (Lancy 2008, Montgomery 2009: 50). However, as elsewhere across the world (Lancy 1996: 39) and in Amazonia (Maybury-Lewis 1974: 73), girls are thought to mature earlier than boys which means that they are considered ready for marriage at least two or three years earlier than them. Whereas a thirteen-year-old boy is considered as still a boy or a grown-up child, Damita was ready to be taken by Fabián and to start having babies.

Damita expresses her absolute disbelief on hearing that I am twenty-four years old. She is twenty-three and has been married for ten years already. She also has four children, the oldest one being ten years old. Like her mother Lorena, Damita’s questions reveal various presuppositions that inform her ways of knowing, understanding and relating to the world. Here, following Heidegger, I define the act of questioning as a mode of disclosure, whereby ‘every inquiry is a seeking’ and ‘every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought’ (Heidegger 1962: 24). By definition, ‘a question seeks for certain information by addressing itself to something about something for some purpose’; but nevertheless ‘in order even to be able to pose a question we must have some presupposition or pre-judgments of what we are asking about, of how things will be’ (Moran 2000: 236). Gadamer understood these kinds of implicit pre-understandings as ‘prejudices’, not in the widely used sense of a negative moral closure to the world but as ‘the platform from which we launch our very attempt at understanding’ (cf. Moran 2000: 278). In Gadamer’s words, prejudices represent the set of ‘biases for our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something’ (quoted in Moran, ibid).

This implies that whenever we question and approach something in order to understand it, we do so with certain expectations and presuppositions. Accordingly, paying close attention to the content and character of people’s questions provides a useful methodological opening and tool that gives insight into people’s implicit understandings and ways of relating to the world. By asking me something she does not know (i.e. how old I am and at what age I will get married) and by responding in a particular manner (e.g. surprised or puzzled) Damita also reveals what she does know about the world. Her questions and responses around the subject of having
children or being ‘taken’ can be read as revealing defining aspects of what it means to be a woman of her age. Other Matses girls and women would often comment on how strange it was for a woman of my age to be single and without children.

This emphasises that there are multiple and various ways in which ‘in each culture the category ‘women’ is linked to … motherhood’ (Moore 1988: 25), as it appears when Damita and I come to confront our different ways of being-women. For Damita, motherhood and womanhood are intertwined in the experiences of a twenty-three-year-old. For me, having and raising children is subordinate to completing my studies, travelling, finding a job and accomplishing other aims and activities for myself. Damita herself frequently put this contrast into words by suggesting that I am lucky to have money and being able to travel around, but being unmarried and childless must be very unpleasant. She described how she could not imagine her life without her children or without Fabián, adding that she wants more babies with Fabián.

This is not to say that Damita is completely accepting of how marriage works amongst the Matses, indeed, at times she can be extremely critical about it. When her husband took her at thirteen years old, she had to move away from her family and follow Fabián to his own village as the Matses are virilocal. Damita recalls her pain and unhappiness at the time, about how she missed her mother and did not want to leave. At the time Fabián was nineteen years old and he neither asked for nor considered Damita’s opinion, but simply made a deal with Damita’s brother. Damita was cambiauaic, ‘exchanged’ (the Matses word is an adaptation from the Spanish cambiar, ‘to ex/change’). Matses people often get married through an exchange of sisters performed by two young men. In this case Damita’s brother met Fabián’s sister, and they decided to settle down and have children. But in order to take Fabián’s sister as his wife, Damita’s brother had to give his own sister, Damita, in exchange to Fabián.

As commonly happens in sister-exchange, one couple agree to the union but with regard to matching the other couple, only the man agrees to the exchange that secures him a wife. The woman may not agree but is not consulted about the matter and Damita described how she was not mature enough to understand what was going on or to even consider rebelling against her brother’s decision. Initially Damita
would resist or bite Fabián’s hands whenever he tried to touch her but eventually she got used to him and now bunec, ‘wants’ him. The verb bunec literally means ‘to be hungry’ and particular ‘to be hungry for meat’; but it also signifies ‘to want’, ‘to desire’ and, when referred to relationships can mean, ‘to desire someone sexually’ or very approximately ‘to love’. While this reinforces the close association in indigenous Amazonia between hunger for meat and sexual desire (Holmberg 1969: 126; Siskind 1973: 235, Kensinger 1984, Gow 1989), the Matses have no direct translation for ‘to love’ or ‘to fall in love’.

Damita disapproves of sister-exchange and she would want her daughter Paula to marry a man that she really wants, desires or literally bunec, ‘is hungry for’ rather than getting used to the man who takes her against her will as Damita herself did. Like other young women, Damita has started questioning the rules and conventions of marriage and exchange, while elderly people are generally in support of the traditional ways. And although I am not aware of any case where a mother prohibited her daughter from being exchanged, younger women’s changing attitudes are opening up for possible changes in the future. Desire, or in Matses terms bunec, ‘being hungry for’, becomes itself a form of ‘subversive act’ (Butler 1990: 101) which reveals that taken-for-granted and unquestioned social rules are arbitrary and can be destabilised. Young women’s desire or hunger for transformation is setting the ground for possible changes in the future and opening up new horizons for women’s experiences and understandings of gender.

Moreover, Damita hopes that Paula will decide to marry a chotac. Back when her mother-in-law Lorena was young, only men could marry nonindigenous partners by taking women captive through raiding. In recent years, the possibility of marrying chotac men has opened up for women as well. A small but increasing number of women have started travelling to Colonia Angamos and working as housekeepers for nonindigenous families, performing tasks such as washing clothes and cooking. A few women have met chotac men and have engaged in sexual relationships with them, even though most Matses women ended up being mistreated and dumped by their nonindigenous partners, who were often violent men who drank heavily. There

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15 Whereas men travel much more often to the city and spend time there, only a few women are brave enough to do so. I only know of one young woman who did so in the village where I worked, but not at the time of my fieldwork.
is, however, the exceptional case of a Matses woman who moved to Colonia Angamos and married the wealthy and respected son of a shop-owner and they now have children, a nice house, plenty of manufactured goods and, most of all, a big television that they watch every night. Other young Matses women think she is extremely lucky and also want to find a chotac husband. Damita hopes that her daughter Paula will marry a wealthy chotac who will buy her clothes and manufactured items, highlighting a major transformation from her own relatively recent exchange or the time of her mother-in-law Lorena’s youth, when good hunters were the most desirable husbands.

Accordingly, desire must be understood as something that is entangled with certain economic and political possibilities, and as emerging in relation to wider social transformations. The introduction and increasing importance of money and manufactured goods is feeding into new forms of desire and aspiration for the future, including different kinds of marital relationship such as marrying a chotac man. Women’s changing desires are also influenced, I argue, by recent environmental transformations and subsistence activities. When the elders were young, and the Matses lived in the forest, protein was provided exclusively by men. Women accompanied men on hunts to carry home their prey, but their main contribution in terms of food was providing horticultural products, which are not sufficient to constitute a meal without protein. But since meat became scarce and fishing became a foundational subsistence activity, women have started providing fish and are now active protein providers. Damita, for example, is perfectly able to provide for herself and her four children by both fishing and cultivating the field.

Damita, unlike her mother-in-law, does not express the need for a man who can catch a lot of meat. Game animals are scarce anyway and can be replaced by fish that Damita can catch herself. Young women instead desire men that can make money and can buy clothes for them and their children. Young men, such as Damita’s husband Fabián, are under growing pressure to make money for their families. Fabián even once asked me what contraceptive method I use not to have children and asked me if I could give Damita some of my contraceptive pills (although she never asked me herself). The Matses know what contraceptive pills are and can get them for free when they travel to Colonia Angamos, but women do not like taking them. Fabián went on to explain how having a wife and children requires ‘a lot of money’.
In order to buy them clothes, Fabián worked for Carlos, the village chief, in his genipap juice business; and following Carlos’s example he also started purchasing manufactured goods in the city, such as flashlights, soap and fishing tools, and selling them for a profit in the village. But money, as he told me, is always short.

Men’s need for providing money and women’s changing aspirations are also resulting in another major transformation, namely a decline in the practice of polygyny across generations. Whereas Lorena and other elderly women may have complained and ‘got mad’ when their husbands took a second wife, but ultimately had to accept it and get used to it, now young women have instead started refusing a co-wife. Damita told me that her husband Fabián has a baby with an older woman in the village, whose husband died a few years back, and that Fabián was considering taking this woman as his second wife, but Damita strongly opposed it. On the other hand Fabián was also easily dissuaded because, as he made clear, having a wife and children requires money, and if money is always short with just one wife, the money he earned would never be enough for two.

Despite the transformations that I have mentioned, there is some degree of continuity between different generations of women. These can be analysed by looking at their bodies, which carry differences and similarities and can be read as indexes of certain gendered understandings and ways-of-knowing the world. Damita, like Lorena, is short and chëshë, ‘black’ but unlike older women, Damita’s face is not tattooed and emphasises the different attitude towards the chotac as well as young people’s desire to be different from their elders. Both Damita and Lorena are dayac, with slim, toned and agile bodies. Every day Damita wakes up before sunrise and walks down to the river, where she washes the dishes used the night before for dinner and collects water. She walks back home and starts cooking plantain and fish or meat. After breakfast, when the children go to school or outside to play, Damita works in the field, weeding, planting and harvesting which requires her to canoe some distance and then walk through the woods to reach it. After working she puts together a big bunch of plantains, manioc or other products, ties it to a strap made of bark that she slings over her head, and walks and canoes back. During the day Damita also goes fishing, washes clothes, cleans the house and cooks when the children are hungry.
These daily chores can be read as ‘repetitive’ acts through which Damita reproduces certain implicit understandings of gender, specifically what it means to be a woman. As Butler states, ‘gender is not a fact’ and it is ‘the various acts of gender [which] create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all’ (1990: 178). Further, she goes on to argue that not just gender but “the body” is itself a construction, as are the myriad “bodies” that constitute the domain of gendered subjects” (ibid: 13). Damita’s toned, muscular and agile body, developed through physically challenging actions and hard work, reveals that a fundamental part of her being-a-woman is being dayac, like her mother-in-law Lorena and most Matses women. As a twenty-three-year-old woman and mother Damita is expected to provide for her children and carry out physically challenging activities, whereby these understandings of womanhood are enacted through her daily hard work and embodied in her nimble and toned physique.

The continuity of Matses women’s strong and agile bodies suggests certain commonalities within their dwelling environments and daily activities, for although these have been changing over the past decades, physical dynamism is still required for survival. In this sense, female Matses bodies present some general characteristics that run between different generations and as a result Matses female bodies are very different from the bodies that are becoming increasingly popular among Matses men, of which I am myself an example.

Damita and I often discussed our different bodies and skills. Compared to her—for instance when paddling a canoe, trekking through the forest or cultivating the field—I always appeared big, clumsy and physically unskilled. Matses people called me chido dapa, ‘fat woman’ and emphasised my lack of agility and skills compared to them. When I worked in the field with Damita or other Matses women I got tired quickly and could not carry even half of the loads they carry with great ease, and I could only walk slowly through the woods. Matses elders, especially, mocked me for being ungainly and unskilled, pointing out that the chotac are lazy and cannot work hard.

Despite being older, I also look much younger than Damita, as she herself noted, and we agreed that compared to the grown-up woman that she is, I look like just a girl. Damita’s body carries the signs of her daily working life, and also of her life as a
mother that started so early. Damita’s breasts are petite but already sagging and her abdomen is covered in stretch marks left by her four pregnancies. Her skin is covered with scars from machete cuts, her hands are blistered, and she has lost several teeth through dental infections or knocking her mouth while working.

Our different bodies are visible forms of expression through which our contrasting life-trajectories or microhistories are made manifest. Damita’s body reveals that being dayac and being-a-mother are intertwined and constitutive of being a twenty-three-year-old woman. My own body reveals a rather sedentary life in urban environments. It is not weather-beaten and my skin is soft and my teeth are intact. But mine is also an unproductive body that has not given life back to the community that gave life to me. Compared to Damita, who is one year younger and has already produced four children, I have the body of a girl, one that has not yet expressed its fertility.

Remedios, a single mother: Matses women and new understandings of beauty

Figure 37. A Matses girl’s dolls. (Photograph by Lily, nine years old).
Remedios: You are so pretty, Camilla. When you come back next time, can you bring some of your vitamins for me?

Camilla: Vitamins? What vitamins?

Remedios: Your vitamins, to get fatter.

Camilla: Vitamins to get fatter?! What do you mean???

Remedios: How can you be so big here [placing both hands on her hips] if you don't take vitamins?

Camilla: I don’t! There are no such vitamins, to get fatter. [I can’t help giggling].

Remedios: Is that the way you are?

Camilla: Yes, it is!

Remedios: It looks really good. Your arms are skinny, your bottom is fat.

Camilla: I wish I was slim like you, instead.

Remedios: Really? [she smiles and blushes].

Remedios is seventeen years old and considered one of the best-looking young women in the village. She has thick dark hair that runs the length of her back, black eyes and a beautiful face. People in the village say she is pretty, and her ways of acting suggest her unspoken awareness of it. Remedios is not as shy as other women and enjoys flirting with men, which is why people also call her chishpida, which means ‘vain’, ‘flirtatious’ or ‘promiscuous woman’. Remedios is not married but has had affairs with married men that provoked the rage of their wives.

When I arrived in the field Remedios had just given birth to her first child, Tamara. She told me that the father of her baby is Santiago, the twenty-year-old son of Carlos, the village chief, and his former Matses wife. Remedios had an affair with him and, when she became pregnant, hoped he would take her as his wife. But Santiago denied being the father of the baby. He told everyone that Remedios was chishpida,
‘promiscuous’, and that she slept around and became pregnant with somebody else. Remedios denied Santiago’s accusations and maintained that the baby is his. Shortly after she became pregnant, Santiago travelled to the city, and after she gave birth was still hoping that he would come back and take her as his wife. After a few weeks, bad news came from the city: Santiago had met a chotac woman, and he was going to marry her and take her back to the village. The news reached the village via radio. Every Matses village has a radio, powered through solar panels, which is used to communicate between villages but also with Colonia Angamos and Iquitos. Radios are used at fixed hours in the early morning and evening, so that all radio stations are turned on at the same time. And when a radio communication is performed, all the other radio stations can hear it: hence news disclosed via radio quickly spreads throughout all Matses villages, making the radio a major source of gossip. Santiago’s nonindigenous girlfriend became a major topic of gossip and speculation: what will she look like? What is her name?

Amidst people’s everyday conversations, Santiago became a hero or superstar. The only other man in the village to have a nonindigenous partner is his father Carlos, and now Santiago had managed to achieve the same success. I heard several young men openly wishing to find a chotac woman ‘like Santiago did’. I once asked one of them, who told me he had a short affair in the city, why chotac women are so good. Besides the usual answer, ‘because they are pretty’, the young man replied: ‘because they kiss’. Matses people do not kiss each other, and while elderly people find kissing somehow repulsive, young Matses are fascinated by it. I asked the young man, ‘what was it like, kissing?’ ‘Batambo’, he replied: ‘it tasted so sweet’; which refers to the type of taste of sugar, candies, papayas or wild berries.

Everyone assumed that Santiago’s girlfriend was beautiful even before seeing her; including Remedios, who told me that his girlfriend surely was really pretty and that Santiago was able to attract her because he has money. Chotac women, she said, want a wealthy husband. I also pictured Santiago’s girlfriend as a beautiful young woman: Remedios looks stunning to me, and I imagined that only someone extremely attractive could compete with her. Remedios is shorter than me and defines herself chëšhë, ‘black’. She is slim but not skinny, with a slender and toned physique and great control of her body in movement. She has muscular arms and thighs, a toned abdomen, straight hips and small breasts. To me Remedios looks like
a real Amazon, with her strong and supple figure that transmits a sense of dynamism and strength.

I imagined Santiago’s girlfriend equally slim and good-looking. But when Santiago finally returned and took his girlfriend to the village, I realised that my expectations were far from right. Jenny, the girlfriend, was not the young attractive woman I expected. A thirteen-year-old, Jenny looked terribly young to me and to my eyes was just a little girl, a child. She was very short and chubby, with a round face and small eyes. Her arms and legs were big and plump, and her hips and waist were very wide. She was not toned and moved slowly, showing none of the dynamism of Remedios and other Matses women.

People in the village, however, disagreed with me and thought of Jenny as extremely beautiful and attractive. Matses people regard girls in their early teens not only as ready for sexual relationships, but also at the peak of their beauty. Thus while Jenny looked like a child to me, to the Matses she appeared in full bloom. Remedios is seventeen years old and with a child, which makes her look old compared to Jenny. Her body is marked by pregnancy, with her abdomen covered in stretch marks, like that of Damita. Remedios also lacks many of the attractive, nonindigenous physical features that Jenny has. For instance she is not fat and does not have bright skin, which Matses people regard as attractive qualities. Remedios is considered one of the prettiest women in the village, but she has to confront herself with a new image of what is desirable in a beautiful body: that of chotac women, which Jenny represents, but also which I myself am an example of. For young Matses I represented an even more privileged type of woman since I was not just a chotac but more specifically a chido ushu, ‘white woman’, something that Matses people, especially the young ones, associate with extreme prestige, fascination and economic wealth.

Remedios put this comparison into words herself, by often addressing the differences between her body and mine and by suggesting that our contrasting bodily qualities reveal two unequal possibilities of being-a-woman. Remedios addressed me as pretty because I am ‘white’, ushu, whereas she is ‘black’, chëshë. She told me I have a ‘doll face’ (using the Spanish word muñeca, doll), which according to her all white women have, and she pointed out that I have feminine breasts and big lips. But most of all, Remedios and other people praised me because I am fat. They say I have wide hips and a big bottom, for which I gained the nickname Camilla tsitsupa, ‘Camilla
big bum’. Most Matses women are generally slender, like Remedios and Damita, while only a few look overweight; but as Remedios pointed out, none of them have a curvaceous body, or my ‘Mediterranean physique’ that consists of the wide hips, a large bottom, relatively thin waist and slim arms and legs, and which is rather common in my homeland, Italy.

Both Remedios and I understand the specific and different types of bodies we have as intertwined with being particular types of women, whereby bodily differences become constitutive of certain gendered identities within a context of shared interactions. This means that our different bodily features only emerge and are invested with certain meanings in the ground of ‘embodied intersubjectivity’ (Moore 1994: 3) wherein Remedios and I encounter and face each other. Remedios’s black, muscular and slim body and more importantly her recognition of it only emerge in opposition to my different physical qualities, and as such her body becomes charged with certain moral understandings. This point can be expanded in terms of the theory of knowing that I propose in this thesis. Knowing is always in-the-world (Harris 2007: 1), which implies that knowledge always unfolds within certain circumstances and through sensorial, emotional and relational modalities of some sorts. This includes questioning and knowing oneself as a certain type of person or woman, which can only emerge in situated circumstances and in relation to others. Or as Moore points out, ‘the experience of being a woman…can never be a singular one, and will always be dependent on a multiplicity of locations and positions that are constructed socially, that is, intersubjectively’ (ibid). Accordingly, Remedios’s blackness and her ways-of-knowing herself as a black woman (with all the moral values implicated with it) are not objective and naturally given, but only emerge in front of my whiteness. And her straight, slim body acquires a certain meaning when compared to my fat, curvaceous figure.

More specifically, our bodies become the tangible expressions of certain economic and political factors that allow for and become constitutive of different possibilities of being a woman. My white, fat body is associated with being a wealthy chido ushu, a ‘white woman’ who can afford fattening pills but leads a different lifestyle from Matses women. People often pointed out that my job is working at a laptop while theirs is cultivating the field, fishing, hunting and performing other physically hard activities. I do not need to do this, they pointed out, because unlike them I have
money: this means that I do not need physical dynamism and bodily strength to survive and can also afford to buy expensive fattening pills. The same is for Jenny, who is a student in the city and is provided for by her parents; therefore, as Remedios put it, she most likely carries out no housework and this is why she is so plump. Remedios herself started actively contributing to the household economy early and by six years of age was carrying out numerous chores in and around the house and helping her mother out in the cultivated field. In doing so, she started developing a skilled, dynamic and toned body from a young age, as most Matses children do.

Here I am not claiming that bodily specificities can be reduced to the daily activities one performs, without considering the importance of genetic configurations and individual idiosyncrasies. However, the Matses themselves take different female bodies as indicators of social statuses, work and material wealth. For example, Jenny is understood as coming from a world in which parents are expected to provide economically for their children, where food is abundant to the point that girls can be very plump, and where girls do not have to perform physically challenging activities to survive. Remedios has to confront this different type of woman and deal with the fact that Matses men find it attractive and they often prefer chotac women to Matses ones. Santiago demonstrated this by leaving Remedios for Jenny and as a result Remedios is now a single mother, raising her baby in the house of her elderly parents with her two younger sisters. The elders told me that such a thing would not happen in the past, when men had several wives and non-Matses women were taken captives through raiding. But the number of single mothers is now rising, since more young men have started leaving their partners as they became pregnant, hoping to find a chotac woman.

The Matses, therefore, explicitly put into words a contrast between the nonindigenous body—fat, less dynamic and with brighter skin—and the Matses body—dark, slim and not curvaceous. This contrast, I argue, is charged with existential understandings and it is informing and transforming how young Matses women understand their particular possibilities of being and acting in the world. My body comes to signify the affordances of urban life and the possibility of being a woman who has money, can afford not to carry out manual work and uses contraception to have sexual intercourse without the risk of ending up as a single mother. Remedios’s body comes to represent the negation of such affordances.
Accordingly, young women are learning to perceive themselves as poor, as having to work hard to survive and as not being as pretty as the chotac.

The female nonindigenous body is thus invested with forms of desire, expectations and aspirations for the future. At the same time, this body is seen as unreachable, impossible or even ‘unnatural’. Remedios assumed that I took vitamin pills to fatten up, and aspiring to grow wide hips, she asked me to buy some of these fattening pills for her. Other women thought likewise: on one occasion Leonora, a twelve-year-old girl, saw me taking rehydration tablets and, thinking I was out of ear-shot, whispered to her younger sister: ‘she’s taking her vitamins’. When I asked for explanation, Leonora blushed and mumbled, ‘yes, your vitamins that make you get fatter’. I explained to Leonora and other women that there is no such thing as ‘fattening vitamins’, but they all looked unconvinced and thought I was lying, and often kept asking me to buy fattening pills for them.

While investing it with desire, young Matses women have to accept that the nonindigenous body is one they will never be able to have. They will never be able to have white skin; indeed, one of the stories they preferred about my homeland—initiated by Cristiano, the son of the village chief—was that of popstar Michael Jackson and how he underwent heavy medical interventions to brighten his skin. As well as not having white skin, Remedios also claims not to have the ‘doll-face’ that according to her all white women have, and which she sees as beautiful. The Matses do not produce dolls themselves, but in recent years they started seeing and very rarely buying dolls in city stores; the image at the beginning of the section, taken by nine-year-old Lily, shows some dolls that her father bought in the city. I told Remedios that in my view it is not that I was lucky enough to be born with a doll-face, but rather that dolls are fabricated with the somatic traits of nonindigenous people; but Remedios still claimed that dolls are pretty. If dolls can be read as the manufactured products of a capitalistic and consumerist mass economy, by encountering dolls young Matses are also coming across a wider economic and political system that has an impact on their daily lives and understandings, reinforcing how local experiences are informed by wider processes of economic practice and globalisation (Moore 1994: 64). These wider economic and political forces are influencing women’s self-perceptions and understandings of gender, for
example, in that Remedios understands nonindigenous-looking dolls as an expression of beauty.

I have thus demonstrated that self-perceptions and the ways we question and interpret our own gendered ways of being are mediated by social, political and economic factors. This included my own self-perceptions in the field, which changed significantly while I stayed with the Matses but then shifted again when I returned to Europe. In my homeland, I have developed and usually live with an underlying feeling of being overweight, which has led me to share with most western women low self-esteem and the experience of eating disorders (Bordo 1993:49-50). Such feelings were likely inspired by the media presenting me with images of impossible and unnaturally-looking female bodies but also by Barbie dolls (ibid: 29) that in my childhood taught me that the beautiful body is excessively slim, blue-eyed and with blonde hair, similar to how dolls taught Remedios that beautiful women have white skin and a certain type of face. However, living with the Matses, the perceptions of my own body started changing and being regularly complimented for my fatness, I even enjoyed feeling fat and tsitsupa, having a ‘big bum’. During fieldwork I gained about seven kilos and returned home feeling big and happy with it. But after a few months and despite having lost all the weight gained during fieldwork, the implicit feeling of being overweight returned, demonstrating how self-perceptions or forms of embodied habitus are mediated by the social and economic context.

In the following section I will tell the story of a six-year-old girl to suggest how Matses children understand themselves and make sense of radically different possibilities of being a woman, specifically a chotac woman.

**Dolores: new possibilities of being a girl**

It is evening in the village. Adults are playing volleyball and football, and children are playing around the pitch. I am sitting outside a house with a group of girls, all between six and ten years of age, who seem happy with me being around. The girls are playing and chatting together until Rebeca, ten years old, starts attacking six-year-old Dolores for fun.

*Rebeca: Dolores was going ah-ah-ah-ah [she mimics a moan].*
The other girls laugh, apart from Dolores.

*Dolores:* You’re a liar! I wasn’t!

*Rebeca:* I’m telling the truth! You were going *ah-ah-ah.*

*Dolores:* No, I wasn’t!

Dolores frowns and looks uncomfortable. She holds the stick of a lollipop, which she keeps biting and playing with.

*Rebeca:* Yes, you were! You were masturbating with a piece of firewood.

The girls laugh more. Dolores frowns and her eyes look shiny. Rebeca throws her arm at her, trying to grab her lollipop stick, but Dolores manages to move backwards and keep hold of it.

*Dolores:* No, I wasn’t! You are a liar!

*Rebeca:* Yes, I know you were. Nelson saw you and told me.

*Dolores:* Liar!!!

Rebeca grins and the girls laugh. Dolores starts sulking.

*Romina:* Look! Look! Now she’ll cry!

Romina also tries to steal the lollipop stick from Dolores, but she holds back. Rebeca also tries again. Dolores looks as if she is about to cry and I decide to step in.

*Camilla:* Don’t cry, Dolores, it’s okay.

*Inés:* Leave her alone, Camilla, she’s a crybaby. You know, her father left her mother and took a *chotac* woman.

Dolores hears it all. She frowns even more. It is not the first time that I hear other girls harassing Dolores or reminding her that her father left her mother for a *chotac* woman.

*Rebeca:* [laughing] Look, she’s going to cry!
Rebeca tries again to steal her lollipop stick. This time she manages to grab Dolores’s arm and takes the stick from her hand. Dolores stands up and leaves the group, walking towards her house. The girls keep playing and laughing, undisturbed.

![Dolores washing plates](image)

Figure 38. Dolores washing plates. (Photograph by Elsie, eight years old).

Dolores is already developing a similar type of working body as Remedios, Damita, and Lorena and which runs through different generations of women. She is agile, nimble and enjoys dynamic activities. Although she is just six years old and tiny, Dolores already contributes to household activities by looking after her baby brother, cleaning the house, collecting water from the river, and helping her mother with cooking and other house chores. The photograph above, taken by eight-year-old Elsie, shows Dolores washing up pots and pans, as she does daily. Dolores can also fish and she works in the field with her mother, weeding and helping her carry home products.
Through her daily, dynamic acts (Butler 1990: 178) Dolores is to some extent reproducing the gendered, *dayac* ways of older Matses women and developing a similarly muscular, toned and skilled body. However, Dolores is already becoming aware of the possibility of being a very different type of woman not only from her mother, but also different from the woman she is herself on the way to becoming. This awareness, I argue, is informed by new imageries of urban, nonindigenous womanhood which, at such an early age, is already an element of concern in Dolores’s life; particularly because shortly after Dolores was born, Dolores’s father left her mother for a *chotac* woman and this often causes pain for Dolores and tensions with other children.

Dolores’s father, Bartolo, now lives in a different village where he works as a schoolteacher. Dolores’s mother, Dalila, met Bartolo when she was in her mid-teens. They were both unmarried and started having an affair, and she became pregnant with Dolores. Bartolo was already working in school and earning good money, hence Dalila thought he would be a good husband. Whereas good hunters were once the most desirable men to marry, schoolteachers have now replaced them and are the wealthiest Matses men. Matses women, however, are not just after financial stability: schoolteachers are also familiar with urban life, speak Spanish and have high social status. But they are also less likely to marry a Matses woman and mostly aspire to marry a *chotac* woman. Bartolo is no exception. Although he often told Dolores’s mother, Dalila, that he wanted to be with her and have a family together, shortly after Dolores was born he travelled to Iquitos and left her for a *chotac* woman, Violeta. Dolores’s mother was left with her baby to raise and no husband to help her out. Furthermore, before moving to the city Bartolo had affairs with two other unmarried Matses women from different villages, who also thought he would marry them, but when the women became pregnant he also dumped them, leaving two more single mothers. Dolores’s mother eventually married another Matses man who Dolores calls *pa*, ‘daddy’, but she still recalls being left by Bartolo as painful.

Dolores knows the whole story about her father; everybody in the village does and children often mock her for it. Verbal confrontations, such as insults and mocking, are crucial modes of interactions in children’s peer groups among both boys and girls. Children often hassle younger ones *ambembali*, ‘just for the sake of it’ and are likely to use any social observation they have at their disposal in order to hurt the child they
target, including any issue or weakness that the targeted child is known for. If a child who is being mocked starts crying, other children will take great pleasure in this and mock the child more loudly. Children undergo peer pressure on a daily basis and soon realise the need to learn how to deal with attacks without showing signs of defeat, most of all crying.

The vignette at the beginning of the section illustrates an example of this in relation to girls. Dolores is younger than the other girls she plays with, and also shy and less aggressive compared to them; in Matses words, she is not as chishpida, ‘mischievous’ as they are. This means that she is not as good at handling verbal attacks, and older girls enjoy hassling and mocking Dolores for fun. And when she tries to resist, the girls have a weapon they can use against Dolores to be sure she will hurt, namely that her father left her mother for a chotac woman. This makes Dolores uneasy; when girls remind her about her father, she looks visibly hurt and often leaves on the verge of tears.

In a sense, the presence of chotac women and men’s desire for them have already started affecting Dolores’s short microhistory. Violeta, the chotac woman that her father got together with, is known as beautiful and other men envy him for it. Dolores and other girls are aware of this and already learning to perceive themselves in opposition to chotac women. They address chotac women as more desirable and prettier than themselves, and as associated with the world of cities, money and manufactured goods that young Matses women and girls are fascinated with, desire and yearn for. Matses girls also know that chotac women behave, move and act in ways that Matses men find desirable. The image below is a still from a video that I filmed (please play Track 2 on the accompanying DVD at the back of the thesis to watch the video). It shows Matilda, ten years old, mimicking the walk of a chotac woman. Matilda sways her hips dramatically, placing one foot in front of the other, and other girls in the background can be heard laughing.

16 The video can also be accessed online at: https://vimeo.com/75014801
Thus while Dolores and her peers reiterate some of the same gendered practices of older women and may also end up entering into marriage by being exchanged by their brothers, they are also developing new hopes and aspirations for the future. The tension inherent in Dolores’s generation was made clear when Dolores and I chatted about her future and when I asked what she thought her life will be like when she is an older woman. Dolores told me that she will work in the field every day, like her mother, and go fishing. She will not trek through the forest, she said, because she is scared of it. She will have many children and she hopes that she will also have
clothes and nice shoes. I asked her whether she wants to marry a Matses man or a *chotac* instead. Dolores at first hesitated to answer, blushing and giggling, but she finally told me that she would like to marry a *chotac* man. When I asked her why, she simply replied: ‘clothes’, meaning that a *chotac* man would buy clothes for her.

Several other girls gave me similar answers when talking about the future. On one side they imagine themselves living their mothers’ lives, cultivating the field and having many children. On the other, they aspire to have what their mothers do not have: money, clothes, shoes and, as many girls told me, a wealthy husband, possibly a *chotac* man.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter I have discussed women’s ways of knowing the world and perceiving themselves in relation to others. By discussing women from different generations, I have tried to offer an insight into how the possibilities available to Matses women in the world have been changing over the past decades.

By describing how certain understandings of gender and what it means to be a woman are being re-iterated and re-enacted, I have attempted to show the continuity that persists between generations. However, girls and women are not just passively reproducing a model of womanhood that is passed down through generations. They are instead actively questioning Matses social norms and assumptions and in doing so are contributing to a process of social transformation. Young women are, for instance, refusing to be tattooed, rejecting polygyny, questioning sister-exchange, and desiring different men from those their mother wanted.

The world of the *chotac*, and particularly the emerging image of the desirable nonindigenous female body, is informing Matses women’s ways of perceiving themselves as well as their aspirations for the future. Matses young women and girls, like Dolores, attend to the world of cities, clothes, television, money and nonindigenous people through modalities of fascination and desire; which was the same world that Lorena and other elderly women wanted to stay away from when they were children. This world is a living and vibrant element of concern in the
imagined future of Matses girls, and as such it informs the girls’ ways of acting and perceiving themselves in the present.

Women’s desires, however, hold serious consequences and certain risks. By wanting to marry a wealthy man, several women end up sleeping with Matses men who work as schoolteachers or with *chotac* men they encounter in Colonia Agamos while working as housekeepers. In both cases, their relationships rarely have a happy ending. Matses teachers will often sleep with several of their cross-cousins and may proclaim that they want a family, but will then leave them as they become pregnant, choosing instead to continue their pursuit of a nonindigenous partner. The *chotac* men that women slept with while working as housekeepers were in many cases violent and treated them badly and the women were thrown out if they became pregnant. The young women were then forced to return to their village as single mothers, with no money or new clothes, weighing heavily on their parents for survival.

There is an increasing number of single mothers amongst the Matses who are now living with their parents, who in turn have to work harder to provide for everyone, and lament their daughters not having a husband. The phenomenon of single mothers has only recently emerged and is seen as a shameful condition, and neither Matses society nor the young women themselves have yet come to terms with it. Mothers impart no teaching or warning about how to protect themselves against men who might be only interested in sex and who might leave them as soon as they become pregnant. I often discussed contraception with young women, which is new to Matses society as a means of avoiding ending up as a single mother, while women of Lorena’s age did not have to deal with such problems in their youth because even though free intercourse with cross-cousins was common, there were also established social structures in place in the event of pregnancy. While today’s girls desire and yearn for money and clothes, wealthy husbands and *chotac* men, they are often unprepared for the nonindigenous world.

In the next chapter I will focus more specifically on boys aged between six and twelve and their interactions in the peer group, discussing how boys question and interpret their own being in relation to others.
Chapter Four. Words in the body and the different possibilities of being a boy

When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’

(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

Cristiano: *bat’s ears!*

Manuelito: *spider’s anus!*

Cristiano: *forest spirit’s wife!*

Manuelito: *river dolphin’s husband!*

Cristiano: *river dolphin’s nose!*

Manuelito: *tapir’s nose!*

[I walk towards the boys and they see me]

Cristiano: *Camilla’s son!*

Manuelito: *Camilla’s husband!*

Cristiano: *white woman’s son!*

Manuelito: *white woman’s husband!*

(Manuelito, four years old, and his cousin Cristiano, twelve, performing a word-fight: a type of verbal confrontation based on formalised insults, the aim of which is leaving one’s opponent speechless.)

In this chapter I extend my inquiry on knowing as a mode of existential questioning and self-interpretation in order to see it at work within children’s peer groups and
everyday interactions. My intention is to consider how children, specifically boys, develop ways-of-knowing and understanding themselves, through recognising their possibilities of being in relation to and in interaction with others.

My analysis enters in conversation with studies of ‘children’s identities’ (James 1993, 1998; Thorne 1993; James and Prout 1997; Corsaro 2003; Goodwin 1990, 2006), which address children as active agents and consider how they negotiate and affirm roles, hierarchies and power relations in the peer group. James (1993, 1998) pioneered this field by exploring ‘the social space…of childhood…within which children ‘identify’ one another and themselves’ (1993: 3). Having worked with young children in a British nursery school, she focussed on play interactions and argued that play ‘is a serious medium through which children conduct their social affairs’ and negotiate ‘significant markers of social identities’ (James 1998: 106, my italics). Identities—such as winners or losers, popular players or excluded outsiders—are negotiated through action and they may be ‘temporarily conferred or more permanently acquired’ (ibid: 108) but also challenged and rejected. Goodwin, focussing specifically on play and speech practices among girls in a North American school, similarly argued that ‘in the peer setting the identities of participants are negotiated within and through talk’, and hierarchies among children are created (2006: 3). She suggested that peer-groups’ identities are not given but must be continuously reaffirmed, demonstrating how affirming oneself as a certain type of child—e.g. as a popular child, as opposed to an unsuccessful one—requires continuous effort and negotiation with others (ibid).

As Matses children spend most of their time playing together outside the houses and away from adult control, the peer group is a crucial learning environment. In this chapter I focus specifically on boys aged between six and twelve and consider how they negotiate power relations through interactions and confrontations in the peer group. So whereas I previously addressed masculinity in terms of an intergenerational comparison between boys and their fathers, here I will focus specifically on how forms and understandings of boyhood are enacted and negotiated amongst boys as a group in themselves. My analysis of boyhood is based on the assumption that ‘masculinities do not exist prior to social interaction, but come into existence as people act … using the resources available in a given milieu’ (Connell 2000: 218) Alongside this, I also recognise that such ‘identities are only provisional’
(Weeks quoted in Simpson 2009: 9) and that notions such as masculinity must be continuously reaffirmed. Accordingly, I will show how boys have to continuously restate their gendered being through action and in opposition to others. Butler’s (1990) theory of gender as performative will again help me to discuss (as it did in the previous chapter about girls) how assumptions of gender are constituted through repetitive, bodily actions over time, but this time I shall address this issue specifically in relation to notions of boyhood.

Anthropological studies of boyhood have been growing recently, but remain limited in Amazonian literature (cf. High 2010: 753). As for children in general, references to boys are scattered throughout Amazonian ethnographies concerned with different topics. For example, Maybury-Lewis (1974: 72-74) briefly mentioned Shavante boys’ and girls’ separation in playing and boys’ initiation to male activities in Brazilian Amazonia; Hugh-Jones (1979) offered a thorough description and symbolic analysis of boys’ initiation rites amongst the Barasana of Colombia; and Gregor (1985) proposed a Freudian approach to boys’ preparation for sexual life (ibid: 29-31) and experiences of the Oedipus complex amongst the Mehinaku of Brazil (ibid: 131-151). These works do not address boys as direct research respondents nor as agents who actively develop understandings of masculinities rather than simply reiterating the views of previous generations. A recent exception is offered by High’s (2010) gendered-focused analysis of changing masculinities amongst young Waorani men, which takes seriously the men’s perspectives and experiences while also allowing for processes of change. His attention is nonetheless directed towards young men and not children, therefore this chapter provides a comparative account in relation to young boys.

This chapter also enters into conversation with a number of child-centred studies which all consider how gender identities are developed and negotiated specifically amongst pre-adolescent boys. The most relevant contributions to this research are offered by school-based ethnographies (cf. Janssen 2009: 89), which consider how boys develop masculine identities through engaging in gendered interactions in school (Thorne 1993, Renold 2000, Epstein et al. 2001, Swain 2003, Evans 2006).

Gutmann (1997), Connell (2000) and Weaver-Hightower (2003) have offered reviews of the research on masculinity and boyhood in anthropology and different social fields. Here I will mainly refer to child-centered studies concerning pre-adolescent boys and their activities away from adult supervision.
They include, for instance, Thorne’s (1993) pioneering analysis of how children construct gendered identities through play in an elementary school in California; Evans’s (2006) analysis of how British working-class boys develop violent and ‘disruptive’ behaviours in the classroom and the street, which they address as appropriate forms of manhood; and the work of human geographers Epstein et al. (2001) on how boys appropriate public school spaces by performing male-exclusive activities, such as playing football and fighting. These ethnographic works do address pre-adolescent boys in their own right and treat them as direct research respondents, but like other theories of childhood identities mentioned at the beginning of the chapter (e.g. James 1993, 1998; Goodwin 2006), they remain primarily confined to school settings within industrialised European or North American societies. This chapter offers a counterpoint to these existing works, by focusing on indigenous Matses boys and following them through their interactions in the peer group, away from adult control.

Despite the strengths of some of the approaches listed above, I intend to also take this line of thinking in a slightly different direction, whereby I recognise the limitations of their focus on ‘social identities’ and ‘roles’, which imply an overly static view of being, and instead turn my attention towards ways-of-knowing, in order to better explore the social dynamism of childhood play and other interactions. This means that I focus not just on how children achieve and negotiate pre-established identities, as if these were costumes that children wear to enact their roles in a play, but instead focus upon the dynamic processes through which children question and interpret their own situated ways of being in relation to others. My aim is to try and grasp the implicit, often unspoken process of existential questioning through which children ask themselves ‘who am I’, which changes depending on the situation. Or in other words, I explore how children come to know themselves and others through the situated instances in which their own particular microhistories and life-trajectories converge with those of others. This means that in the space of existence in which they encounter one another, children learn to question and recognise themselves in certain ways and as particular types of children, but these ways change according to different situations and by being with different people. Paraphrasing Moore (1994: 3), I would argue that the experience of being a child and the project of understanding oneself in general is, like that of being a woman, never
one but always entangled with situated, mutual exchanges with others. As such, the situated interpretation of who-you-are becomes constitutive of the question and interpretation of who-I-am.

The process of questioning and interpreting one’s own being is not always carried out verbally, and as previously outlined, children do not often articulate through explicit words the question ‘who am I’ or ‘what are my possibilities in the world’. Nevertheless, I argue that a specific mode of existential questioning and understanding is enacted in the ways a child ‘relates’ to the world and other children (Moran 2000: 235). Consequently, close ethnographic attention towards children’s interactions in their peer group will allow me to grasp, even if only partially, how children understand themselves in specific situations. I focus specifically on certain types of aggressive speech interactions such as verbal confrontations, insults, and mockeries. The wordfight reported at the beginning of the chapter offered an example of this. Verbal confrontations, I argue, are an essential means through which boys negotiate power relations in the peer group while also questioning and interpreting their own being in relation to others. I therefore suggest that wrapped up with the situated, relational understandings of ‘who-I-am’ are some implicit assumptions about masculinity and boyhood that the boys make manifest through speech, bodily movements and mutual exchanges.

**Word-fighting and the power of speech**

I opened the chapter with a ‘wordfight’ so as to give a sense of the openly confrontational and verbally aggressive character of children’s interactions, particularly those of boys. The wordfight is a kind of verbal confrontation that is regularly performed by children but for which there is no term in Matses. It involves two opponents who have a disagreement and get angry at each other. In the instance reported above, the opponents are four-year-old Manuelito and his twelve-year-old cousin Cristiano. Although girls can also perform wordfights, it is less usual to witness girls word-fighting than boys. The children start exchanging a series of insults, which are standardised offensive epithets that liken the opponent child to
something hideous; for instance ‘bat ears’, ‘dolphin nose’, or ‘spider legs’, but also ‘white woman’s husband’, ‘white woman’s son’, and so forth.

Figure 40. Boys wrestling and playing. (Photograph by Francisco, ten years old).

Anything can be used as an insult in a wordfight, the point of which is to defeat one’s opponent by leaving her/him speechless. The key to winning a wordfight is thus to find continuous inspiration and think of new insults to shout at the opposing child. Although there are no Matses words to define winning and losing, children have started using the terms perdeuaic, ‘to lose’, and ganauic, ‘to win’—adapted from Spanish by adults who play football—so as to describe the winners and losers in a wordfight. Wordfights sometimes take place in front of an audience of other children, who laugh at the loser and praise the winner. The audience can also give suggestions to the fighters when insults run short, so as to ensure the wordfight goes on. The children describe losing a wordfight as a dreadful and humiliating experience. The loser is publicly mocked, ridiculed and reduced to being natiec: literally, ‘paralysed with embarrassment’ and ‘unable to do a thing’. The child who loses feels humiliated, blushes and usually leaves the group to be alone. The worst possible reaction is crying, because in this event the child will be mocked even more.
Cristiano and Manuelito were word-fighting alone in the house. As soon as they saw me they found new inspiration, calling each other *Camilla’s husband* and *Camilla’s son*. Being called ‘my husband’ or ‘son’ would not be offensive in a different context of speech, but in the performativity of the wordfight any formulaic nickname assumes an offensive connotation. In the wordfight, words mean whatever children want them to mean (paraphrasing Carroll’s opening quote) and the power of insults lies not in the meaning of words as much as in the performativity of the duel. A child must be capable of finding new insults as well as of standing and facing one’s opponent, looking them confidently in the eye and showing no sign of weakness or defeat. Central to wordfights is the creative use of words, which is a crucial skill in peer-group life.\(^\text{18}\)

The meaning of wordfights can be better understood through Austin’s notions of ‘performative utterances’ and ‘illocutionary force’ (1962), which Bloch (1974) adapted to the study of symbols in ritual. For Austin, the ‘performative’ character of an utterance ‘indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something’ (1962: 6-7). In this view, the ‘illocutionary force’ is the quality of certain performative utterances that aim ‘not to report facts but to influence people’ (Austin quoted in Bloch 1974: 67). Examples of illocutionary utterances are ‘I urge you to...’, ‘I argue that....’, ‘I advise you to...’, and so forth (Austin 1962: 101-102). As such, illocutionary speech acts differ from *propositional* speech acts in which ‘meaning is primarily transmitted by the way lexical units can be combined in utterance’ (Bloch 1974: 56) and which rather have a descriptive character. This difference can be addressed as ‘performance of an act in saying something [illocutionary] as opposed to performance of an act of saying something [propositional]’ (Austin 1962: 99).

\(^{18}\)To my knowledge, this type of verbal interaction has not been documented for any other Amerindian peoples. Wordfights should not be mistaken as the banter typical of ‘joking relationships’, which Radcliffe-Brown defined as ‘a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence’ (1940: 195). Neither should they be taken for mockeries, jokes and cheerful interactions documented amongst Amerindian peoples (e.g. Gow 1989, Overing 2000, Lagrou 2006, Rosengren 2010: 106-109). Matses children experience wordfights not as play or cheerful banter, but rather as verbal duels that involve being truly *nëisha*, ‘angry’, and their feelings should therefore be taken seriously.
Bloch (1974) readapted this concept so as to explain the effects of rituals. He points out that language in rituals, for instance in the form of singing, presupposes highly standardised utterances in which the propositional force—i.e., the capacity of expressing meaning through creative combination of lexical units—is largely fixed and pre-established. Therefore, the creative power of speech in ritual is widely reduced by the rigidity of prescriptive language: ‘you cannot argue with a song’ (1974: 71). But as the propositional force decreases, illocutionary force increases. This means that the effective meaning and emotional impact of ritual is not so much to be found in what ritual language says, but rather in what it does: ‘as the propositional force of language diminishes “what it does” comes to the fore (illocutionary force)’ (1974: 77, brackets in original). Accordingly Bloch views illocutionary force as ‘some kind of energy’ (Boyer 1990: 86) contained in language that aims at influencing people in certain ways.

This interpretation could also be applied to children’s wordfights, the effects of which lie not in the propositional meaning of the insults but in the performative character and context of word-fighting. A child is put down not so much by being called a ‘bat’s ear’. Insults are formulaic, standardised and always the same, and they do not make much sense in themselves; however, ‘it is precisely the imprecisions of such words which gives them their social and emotional force’ (Bloch 1974: 74). The power of the wordfight, therefore, lies not in the literal meanings of insults but in the performativity of word-fighting, which implies continuously throwing insults at each other, displaying confidence and coming up with new insults without remaining speechless. The word-fighting performance is a bodily-based and emotional phenomenon, wherein children have to display both confidence and a fearless attitude, whilst yelling insults in an aggressive manner. As such, the meaning of wordfights is entangled and inseparable from the performative context, actions and bodily behaviour of the children involved in it.

The wordfight is only one type of interaction but it emphasises the importance of aggressive speech, as well as the creative use of spoken words as being a crucial skill within peer-group dynamics. In the following sections I will focus on other, more flexible forms of language and aggressive speech through which children learn to affirm their roles and power in relation to others. Through such verbal attacks and confrontations, I argue that a process of self-interpretation is also carried out and the
use of spoken words is an important means through which children come to know themselves as certain kinds of persons in relation to others. I show how boys resourcefully use spoken words to confront each other, deal with tensions and negotiate power relations within the peer group, and in doing so use words as crucial weapons to establish power relationships and to display their toughness.

Nelson and Paco: the importance of being cuididi

‘Where’s your mother, Paco?’ asks Nelson, 11 years old. He drops his gun and looks at Paco, steadily. Paco shuts up, speechless, with his gun in his hands. He lowers his head down and frowns. All the other boys around them quieten down and stop crafting their guns. They look at Paco’s face. He looks about to burst into tears.
Nelson says nothing else. He takes his gun and keeps working at it. Until a minute ago, Paco was making fun of Nelson’s gun for being badly crafted and ugly, while the other boys sat down quietly and crafted their own guns. Nelson kept silent, struggling to craft his gun, until he got fed up with Paco’s mockeries. He looked at Paco, calmly, and asked: *Where’s your mother, Paco?*

We all know where Paco’s mother is. She lives in a different village, with her new husband. When Paco’s father left her, she abandoned Paco and ran away with another man. Paco’s mother *niana*, ‘abandoned him’ like children say.

Nelson’s question creates palpable tension in the group and brings silence, causing Paco to be *natiec*, ‘unable to do anything’ with embarrassment and discomfort. His eyes are shiny and his forehead wrinkled. Paco’s gun is good, but he has no resources against Nelson. In a verbal confrontation, the boy who stays speechless is defeated. Paco has lost.

I have witnessed the whole scene, watching the boys crafting guns with tree bark and small knives. They know me well now and let me hang out with them, unlike any other adult. I wonder if I should intervene and tell Nelson off. But his words disarmed me too: I feel sorry for Paco, abandoned by his mother, and I am shocked at the ease with which his peer mocks him for it. Meanwhile, Nelson sits in front of us, looking unmoved and somehow intimidating.

When the guns are crafted, the war starts. The boys split up into two opponent teams or ‘armies’. All the boys scream ‘Nelson! I want to be with Nelson!’ Nelson chooses his teammates. A couple of boys who are left in the rival team, with Paco, complain and protest in disappointment. ‘We are the Estados Unidos’, the United States, says Nelson. He then calls the other team *Japon*, Japan, which is already tagged as a less powerful team.
Nelson is eleven years old and the oldest in the group of boys crafting toy-guns with bark and machetes. Nelson is not very tall, but already muscular, fast and strong. He is also a real cuididi, a ‘naughty troublemaker’. Matses adults use the term cuididi to repreach boys and girls that misbehave, for instance by disobeying adults’ commands, mistreating a younger sibling or cluttering up the house. It is very common to hear an adult yelling to a child ‘cuididiquenda!’ which means ‘stop acting naughtily’. The children themselves however, especially boys, praise mischievousness as a form of bravery. Cuididi boys are fearless of adults’ scolding and skilled at handling verbal confrontations within the peer group. A mischievous boy knows how to verbally attack, mock and insult others, but also is adept at counterattacking with verbal aggression without showing signs of weakness. Nelson, as demonstrated above in his interaction with Paco, is a master at this.

Paco is ten years old and taller than Nelson but is not as cuididi. He is generally more soft-spoken and shy than Nelson and not as loud and aggressive. He is also less skilled at verbal attacks and quarrels. He is not particularly good at insulting other children and can be easily defeated. This is mainly because Paco has an Achilles’ heel of which all the other children are well aware: his mother. Paco lives with his aunt and as such is the only child in the entire village that has been abandoned by his own mother.

Children know that in a verbal quarrel the word mother causes Paco to be natiec, which is the opponent’s primary aim. Nelson, therefore, knows how to defeat Paco; and it is not the first time that he or other children have used the word mother against him. Children often told me directly in his presence that ‘Paco’s mother doesn’t want him’. They said so pointing their fingers at him. Paco nearly always looked hurt by such comments; his eyes would become wet and he would lower his head down in silence. The word mother is not only a weapon against him but is a means whereby children learn to affirm power positions, negotiate their positions and roles in the peer group and make sense of themselves and others through verbal interaction.

Nelson’s rhetorical question could be defined in terms of Bloch’s (1974: 67) interpretation of illocutionary force, i.e. as an utterance aimed at influencing others. However, Pascal Boyer (1990: 85-86) points out that whereas illocutionary force refers to the intentions of the speaker in influencing others, the actual, tangible
effects of the utterance ‘pertain to the *perlocutionary* aspects of the utterance’ (*ibid*; 86; Austin 1962: 101-102). For Austin, the perlocutionary force of an utterance refers to the fact that:

‘Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience, of the speaker or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them’ (Austin 1962: 101).

So whereas illocutionary force refers to the intentions of the speaker, which can be seen as indirect and concealed beneath the literal meaning of words, perlocutionary refers to the actual consequences of the utterances; for instance the tangible reactions of Paco, the other boys and me. In the example above, Nelson’s question is not really aimed at locating Paco’s mother, but rather at making an indirect statement that Paco is an abandoned child so as to provoke a reaction in him. As such, Nelson’s question could be also defined as a form of ‘indirect speech act’: an utterance in which ‘the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on *their mutually shared background* of information’ (Searle 1979: 31-32, my italics).

Having a shared background of information, or shared microhistories, Nelson knows that the word *mother* will shut Paco up and uses it accordingly to affect his behaviour.

This shows how children use language to organise their social interactions and define power relations. Goodwin (1990: 19, 2006) provides an example of this in relation to girls’ playing in school and using language to negotiate ‘social identities’, such as when defining who is allowed to participate in a game and who is excluded. She also posits a relationship between language and embodied action and argues that ‘both language and the body provide important resources for achieving (…) social order’ (Goodwin 2006: 6). In peer-group relations, body language is thereby revealed as an important form of expression used to negotiate inclusion and exclusion. For instance, Goodwin shows that while playing girls assume certain types of affective ‘alignments or stance’, i.e. bodily positions that accompany particular words and can be seen as ‘embodied displays of how one affectively positions herself with respect to ongoing interactions’ (*ibid*: 40).

Here I take Goodwin’s point further by trying to overcome an analytical separation between the body and speech. I argue that bodily positions not just accompany
speech but are inherently intertwined with spoken words, and the children themselves perceive them as such. Children recognise the perlocutionary force of speech and, therefore, intentionally use spoken words to affect their peers’ emotional and bodily behaviour. For example Nelson’s question, ‘where is your mother’ has a tangible impact on Paco’s body, which Nelson knows all too well. The word reduces Paco to be natiec, which was described to me as a whole bodily feeling that comprises of a mixture of embarrassment, hurt, fear and shyness in front of others. This feeling is accompanied by blushing, a sense of hotness in the chest and neck and the perceived inability to move or react in any way. ‘You feel ashamed and you feel like crying’, the children say of being natiec, but a child must hold back from tears or they will be mocked and ridiculed for being a crybaby.

The effect of spoken words (or their perlocutionary force) onto the body is particularly important in that while verbal confrontations between boys are regular and aggressive, physical violence is entirely absent. In fourteen months I never witnessed a Matses child or adult engaging in a physical fight. Boys wrestle for fun, or push and punch each other on the arms in a confrontational manner, but they do not hit, kick, bite or slap others to intentionally cause harm. So whereas the confrontational attitude between Matses boys seems to support the view that men often resort to ‘violence in order to prove their masculinity ... or to challenge others’ (Connell 2000:218), the very concept of violence here is problematic. Public displays of physical violence are looked down upon by the Matses, and when a child feels nēisha, ‘angry’, their rage is taken out through words. Verbal attacks and their impact on the body are, therefore, a common mode of restraining the physical actions of others through which children tacitly learn to understand the material effects of spoken words.

Mastery with words is a vital skill to develop in peer group life, and throughout childhood, children learn to understand themselves and others by using spoken words as weapons and to negotiate tensions and conflict. As Evans put it, ‘the objects which children attend to (as well as the physical competency that relating to objects requires) become the bridges over and through which they encounter and make sense of each other in particular ways’ (2006: 123, brackets in original). Here I showed how spoken words can be similarly addressed as tools that children learn to use so as to negotiate power relations and affect the bodily reactions of others. However, the
material effects of speech on the body cannot simply be understood in terms of the semantic meaning of the words used, insofar as words are also attached to particular individuals and their microhistories or life-trajectories. For example, the word *tita*, ‘mother’, is widely understood by children as having a certain semantic meaning but in relation to Paco, the word opens up a realm of feeling and emotion that are not shared by others.

*Mother* thus becomes a ‘lived word’ that is ‘freely communicated and understood at the social level’ but that people also inhabit ‘in the form of specific biographical associations, emotional attachments and bodily states that can be substantially, even radically, discrepant from those of another person’ (Irving 2011: 346). The Matses term *tita*, is used and experienced very differently in the sentences *tita ubi dayunta*, ‘mum, hug me’; *bunquioebi, tita!* ‘I’m hungry, mum!’; *adac tita tiednantan nidosh?* ‘Has your mother gone to the field?’, and *midambo tita icquec?*, ‘Where is your mother?’, that Nelson asks rhetorically to Paco, who was abandoned by his mother.

For Paco, I argue, the word *mother* is often accompanied by feelings of discomfort and abandonment. This is not always the case in that words are not fixed but situated, and Paco might experience and understand the word mother in relation to a broad spectrum of feelings that are not necessarily negative or painful and without becoming *natiec*. But his life experiences are such that he often inhabits the word ‘mother’ in a way that other children, who still live with both their parents, do not share. Paco does not put these feelings into words, but other children recognise them in his bodily comportment, silence and inability to move.

This also illustrates how ways-of-knowing are often accompanied by emotional struggle, pain and sufferance. Through the use of spoken words children question and understand themselves as certain types of children. Nelson displays his skills with words and his being *cuididi*; Paco, who is left speechless, shows instead his weakness and inability to deal with the confrontation. The boys are therefore pushed to understand themselves in certain ways and in opposition to one another. Paco is reminded that he is an abandoned boy, the only one in the village, and has to recognise himself as *perdeuaic*, ‘defeated’ by Nelson. This way of knowing himself is accompanied by feelings of pain and discomfort, made public by his blushing, tearful eyes and his head lowered down. Paco has to hold back from crying when
Nelson asks him ‘Where is your mother?’ Nelson instead, pronouncing the last words, looks confident and unmoved, appearing as the toughest and most mischievous boy in the quarrel: Nelson ganauaic, ‘won’.

The other boys and I, having witnessed the scene, are also moved by the events and pushed to ask ourselves about our possibilities of acting and being. In my case I ask myself: What is my place? What should I do? Am I an adult or a playing companion? Should I intervene or not say anything? What are my ethical responsibilities? The children, I argue, are presented with a different set of questions: in the different possibilities of being-a-boy they are presented with the questions of, what type of boy do I want to be? This questioning and the answer they give, is not carried out verbally, but it is made public when the game starts and the boys have to divide into two teams: all of them scream ‘I want to be with Nelson!’ while those left with Paco complain.

In the next section I present a vignette that recounts what happens in the war game after the boys divide into two teams. The vignette will show that self-understandings are not fixed and given, but rather, relational and situated.

**Diego cuididimbo, a ‘real troublemaker’**

‘No me mates, amigo!’ The children run around, pointing their weapons at each other and mimicking the noise of machine guns shooting. They shout phrases in Spanish, such as the above ‘don’t kill me, my friend!’ These are amongst the very few Spanish words they know, learned from Jean-Claude Van Damme action movies. The boys laugh, push each other, scream; the oldest kids grab the smaller ones by the arm and pull them away as captives; the young children try to escape and beg for forgiveness in Spanish, as they learned from Van Damme. I run around with the children, who proudly show me their captives and invite me to follow them into their secret war shelters: small havens in the greenery areas around and behind the houses, where adults never spend time but children occasionally play. Nelson is the winner: he holds the biggest number of captives and everyone runs away from him.
‘Diego is coming!’, screams one of the boys, all of a sudden. Nelson freezes. He stops shouting and running around. He giggles and hesitates, blushing and looking embarrassed. He watches Diego coming over, and hesitates over his next move. He tries to make jokes but he looks nervous and uncomfortable. The boys around him are still playing, running around and shouting. But Nelson lost his aggressive manner of a fierce warrior, and apparently his interest in the game.

I turn around and see him. Diego is coming towards us, walking firmly and holding his head high, with his shoulders pushed back and his eyes fixed on us. ‘Don’t you play this game, Diego?’ I ask. ‘No’, he replies, watching the scene with a confident and mock smile. ‘Why not?’ I ask again. ‘Because it’s a game for babies’. At the word ‘baby’ Nelson drops his gun and screams: ‘I’m off with Diego!’. The other boys look puzzled. Nelson puts his arm over Diego’s shoulder, laughing. The two boys walk away together, looking for another place to cause trouble.

Figure 42. Boys playing with guns. (Photograph by Nelson, eleven years old).
When Diego is around, the other boys always seem cautious of their actions. Children and adults describe Diego as the most mischievous boy in the village: *cuididimbo*, ‘really naughty’. He is tough, verbally aggressive and appears unafraid of receiving a scolding by the adults. His confidence shows in bodily posture and movements: Diego usually walks slowly, with his head high, shoulders pushed back and looking people straight in the eyes. Diego is twelve years old, which means that he is not old enough to spend time with adults but becoming too old to play ‘childish’ war games. He spends much time with his older brother Mateo, who is sixteen, but also with younger boys and especially Nelson.

Diego’s wordless arrival elicits a dramatic change in Nelson and impacts on his whole bodily behaviour. Nelson gets embarrassed in front of Diego, who is tougher than him. He starts giggling and moving in a clumsy way, and he blushes and looks away. And when Diego calls playing war a ‘game for babies’, Nelson makes a decision and drops the game he had thus far enjoyed. Diego’s utterance can be also read as an instance of an ‘indirect speech act’ (Searle 1979), in which the describing the game as being for babies implicitly suggests that Nelson too is a baby. This reinforces how the meaning of words changes depending on the situated context of utterance (Aitchison 1993): the word ‘baby’ used by an adult to address a two-year-old is different than ‘baby’ used by a twelve-year-old boy to mock a peer. It also shows how words become attached to particular people in different ways. The word baby, when spoken by Diego, the toughest boy in the village, transforms Nelson from a *cuididi* into a *bacuëmpi*, ‘baby’, and in doing so impacts on Nelson’s way-of-being and changes his role in the group.

The vignette illustrates how being *cuididi* and being *bacuëmpi* can be read as two possible ways of being a boy for Nelson. In James (1993) and Goodwin’s (2006) terms, these could also be termed as ‘social identities’, or following the classic theory of Nadel (1969), as ‘social roles’. According to Nadel, all social relationships are never fully arbitrary but instead defined by some more or less implicit rules, or a ‘brief’, that guide the ways in which people interact with one another (1969: 11). In social life, everyone enacts some sort of ‘social roles’ and these, Nadel argues, are always relational; which means that ‘roles materialise only in an interacting setting; consequently, … [they] will always include, besides the actor’s own mode of
behaviour, that of others towards him’ (ibid: 24). Examples of social roles are ‘father’, ‘priest’, ‘doctor’, or ‘rich-man’ (Nadel 1969:20); or in cases of children reported so far, different roles might be ‘mischievous troublemaker’, ‘baby’, ‘loser’, ‘winner’, and so forth.

Here I intend to extend the notion of social roles and identities by placing them back within the world of action and situated behaviours. I therefore replace ‘social roles’ with *ways-of-being*, so as to offer a more fluid model of human existence that emphasises how the ways people act and understand themselves in relation to others are highly dynamic and transformational. I nonetheless maintain, with Nadel, that these are situated and relational, whereby a boy’s way-of-being a troublemaker becomes constitutive of another boy’s way-of-being a baby in the act of verbal confrontation in which the weakest boy is defeated by the first one. A boy’s being-*cuididi*, or his toughness, does not exist if not in relation to the opposing boy who is defeated and is thus openly recognised as a baby or a loser. For example, Nelson acts and understands himself as a tough troublemaker in relation to Paco and the younger children that play with him. But with Diego, his role transforms and he suddenly has to reconsider his sense of self and confront himself as a ‘baby’ or at the very least, a much weaker boy. It is now Nelson’s turn to become *natiec*. At the same time, although Diego reconfirms his position as the toughest pre-adolescent boy in the village, he is not yet old enough to hang out with adults.

In order to position himself as *cuididi*, Nelson has to drop the game and leave with Diego. This outlines how boys have to continuously negotiate and affirm themselves as certain type of boys in relation to others; or as argued by Goodwin, the process by which identities in the peer group ‘are achieved rather than ascribed’ (2006: 3). This implies that social relationships and self-understandings do not just occur ‘in virtue of a brief’, as Nadel (1969: 11) put it, but also require various degrees of creativity and resistance so as to adapt to different situations and reinvent oneself; which is what Nelson does by leaving the game and following Diego.

But affirming oneself as a *cuididi* also means affirming oneself as a certain type of boy, where *cuididi*-ness is constitutive of Matses boyhood. In the boys group, affirming one’s position in relation to others often involves a level of confrontation and aggressiveness through which children continuously test and push the boundaries
of permissible action. Being a tough troublemaker is not a fixed quality but rather a relational skill, an ability that emerges through confrontations with others that must be periodically re-stated. The boys’ interactions gesture towards ‘the complex fragility of masculinity’ (Simpson 2009: 9) which must be continuously restated through action, and by proving one’s mischievousness not just with peers but also with the adults. One evening in the field, a few boys had come to look for me and stood outside my window, insulting and mocking me for fun. An elderly lady known as ‘Old Felipa’ yelled at them to leave me alone. The children are generally afraid of Old Felipa who always yells and threatens them with frog poison. The children gave her the Spanish nickname policía, ‘policeman’, which is yet another word learnt through movies. When Old Felipa yelled at the boys to leave me alone, they all shut up, frightened, except Diego, who yelled back: ‘leave us alone Old Felipa! Go sleep with your old husband!’ The boys exploded laughing. Old Felipa did not reply and probably did not even hear Diego, but for weeks the children kept recounting this episode and praising Diego for his fearless and mischievous gesture.

By confronting themselves with others, including adults—as Diego did with Old Felipa—but more commonly with other children, boys test the boundaries of accepted action and often try to push them further. ‘All of us are criminals born by instinct’ declared Edmund Leach insofar as ‘all creativity whether it is of the artist, of the scholar or even of the politician [or of children], contains within it a deep-rooted hostility to the system as it is’ (Leach 1977: 19). Testing boundaries is carried out in different ways and for different purposes. Among Matses boys, pushing boundaries and testing one’s possibilities of action is most notably related to the ability of using spoken words, which are the means through which children confront and negotiate their positions (or ‘roles’) towards each other. Paco, the larger of the two boys, is turned into a baby by Nelson’s question ‘where is your mother?’, which provokes great distress in him, while Nelson himself becomes aware of his childish behaviour when Diego calls him a ‘baby’, which leads him to change his way of acting.
Tim *lluvi-lluvi*, a ‘crybaby’

![Image of children playing outside a school building]

*Figure 43. Boys playing outside the school building. (Photograph by Paco, ten years old).*

The children and I have been modelling mud in school. When we have finished, the classroom is covered in mud and paint, and I ask the children to help me clean up. The children love cleaning and take it as an opportunity to get rowdy. They start throwing water on the desks and at each other, running around, shouting and laughing. The classroom is wild: water and paint all over, children jumping and running everywhere, the heat seems especially strong, and the room as loud as ever, echoing with the children’s laughs and screams. In the midst of chaos I notice two boys, Tim and Juan, arguing over a broom. I pay little attention to them, being overwhelmed by the confusion. But as I leave the classroom to throw dust outside and walk back in, I find Tim in tears. Juan holds the broom, smiling and bouncing around.
Tim is six years old and very small. He has just started school. Although extremely lively and cheerful when playing outside, he is shy and quiet in the classroom. Juan is nine years old and hard to deal with. He is only temporarily spending time in the village, where his grandfather lives and his parents came to visit him. Juan is a real cuididi: he is incredibly energetic, bullies younger children, rarely listens to adults’ commands, never sits still in school and always shows a mischievous smile on his face. The boys in the village seem to like him a lot: he quickly made his way into the peer group, and all the boys seek his company and want to play with him.

Seeing Tim crying I suddenly take control and yell at the children to quieten it down. I am touched seeing Tim, so young but also so small, bursting into tears. I kneel down and try to comfort him, asking what had happened, but Tim just keeps sobbing. I turn to Juan and ask him whether he has hit Tim to steal his broom, as I suspect. I tell him to give the broom back. Juan looks at me with his big naughty smile and replies he has done nothing. ‘I don’t believe you’, I say, and ask again Tim if he is fine.

Emanuel, ten years old, steps in and takes Juan’s side. He yells at me: ‘Camilla, it’s not Juan’s fault! He didn’t hit Tim, he got the broom first.’ As he says this, he punches Tim on the shoulder. A couple of other boys come over and tell me that Juan has done nothing wrong. I ask the boys why, then, is Tim crying so much, and they reply that he is lluvi-lluvi, a ‘crybaby’, who always cries just for the sake of it. All the boys, one by one, punch Tim’s shoulder or push him, telling him to stop crying and acting like a baby, and then walk away. I am shocked at their lack of compassion for Tim, who is crying his eyes out and is much smaller and more vulnerable than the other boys. But I also feel sorry for not trusting Juan. I apologise to him and tell him to go play with his friends. Juan looks at me with the same naughty grin and trots away.

Tim is six years old, physically small and known for being a crybaby. Older boys mock him and scold him for always whinging and crying ambembi, ‘with no reason’,
which is considered an inappropriate behaviour for a boy. The boys say that crying with no reason is for babies and girls; even though girls are also mocked if they cry easily. A boy should be strong and able to reply to others’ attacks and confrontations without bursting into tears. In the vignette above, boys reprimand Tim for crying; they punch him on the shoulder and push him as if to tell him to grow up and act appropriately.

These interactions reveal how Matses boys understand the social meanings of boyhood, how one should act and what is implied by being-a-boy. Boys should be ‘tough’, a word that finds no expression in Matses language but accurately describes the value they place on strength and aggressiveness. The closest expressions to ‘being tough’ are (i) cuididi, ‘mischievous’, which implies being brave and able to respond to peers’ attacks; and (ii) being dadambo, a ‘real man’. The word dadambo can only be used to refer to grown-up men and means being brave, strong and fearless, and although this word cannot be used to describe boys, who are not yet ‘men’, children like Nelson and Diego are already developing a dadambo attitude.

Figure 44. Jean-Claude Van Damme move. (Photograph by Harry, eight years old).
Boys should display toughness without showing weakness. For example as did Francisco (the nine-year-old boy that I showed in Chapter One, holding a big catfish) when he smashed his head onto a log while playing in the river, received serious injury and blood was coming out. His father took him to the posta, a rudimentary health clinic that provides basic medical assistance and stores up medical supplies. A Matses man trained as a paramedic bandaged the injury, while a small crowd of people, including myself, gathered around him. Francisco grimaced with pain and his eyes were shiny, but he did not shed a tear. His father and other people praised him and ironically called him Dadambo: Francisco is not yet a man, but his courage and strength are to be praised.

On another occasion Emanuel, the ten-year-old boy who punched Tim’s shoulder, fell off his hammock as he was playing and his leg started bleeding badly. Emanuel asked me to bandage his wound, knowing I had a first-aid kit. I grabbed a sterile dressing and some alcohol, and warned Emanuel: ‘This is going to hurt: are you sure you want this?’ Emanuel looked worried at first, then suddenly shouted: ‘yes!’. The alcohol seemed to hurt him, while an amused crowd of boys and girls stood around us, but Emanuel handled the pain without complaining. ‘Well done’, I said. As soon as I was finished, all the other boys asked to be medicated, wanting to prove their toughness, and showed me signs of old wounds on their arms and legs. ‘Those are scars, there’s no blood!’, I replied. The boys were disappointed, and in the following days, whenever they had the smallest cut they came looking for me, asking to clean their wounds with alcohol to test, as well as to demonstrate how well they could handle the pain.

Moving from a theory of gender as constituted through repetitive, bodily actions over time (Butler 1990: 178-79), the boys’ displays of strength and mischievousness can be interpreted as gendered acts through which forms of boyhood are established and reinforced. Through confrontational interactions boys reinforce that trouble-making, strength and courage are constitutive of what it is to be a boy. Boys who are unable to counterattack or cry easily are mocked and called lluvi-lluvi, crybabies, or chidompi, ‘little girl’, reiterating that such behaviours are not appropriate to being-a-boy. Tim fails to show himself as a tough troublemaker and is ridiculed and mocked for crying and giving in to other boys’ attacks. For as Butler argues, ‘as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive
consequences’ and in the repeated enactments of what are considered appropriate
gendered behaviours ‘we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right’
(1990: 213, my italics). Tim is indeed regularly chastised for failing to act as a boy
and especially for crying easily, which is condemned as a sign of childishness. Older
boys target children who do so and to this purpose they play what I will term the
uaca game, of which I give an example with the vignette below.

A group of boys and girls are gathered together laughing and joking. One
of them is John, a mischievous ten-year-old. Tim approaches the group.
As they see him coming over, John and Nelson start shouting: ‘Tim is
coming! Say ua, Tim! Ua, ua, ua!’ Tim sulks and seems trying hard to
resist crying. The boys point their fingers at him and they keep going:
‘say ua, ua, ua’. Tim lowers his head down, hides his face, turns around
and walks back from where he came from, drying tears from his eyes
with his small hands. The children around me—both girls and boys—
burst out laughing. I shout, ‘come on Tim, come back!’, but he walks
away without looking back.

Uaca is an onomatopoeic made-up word that means ‘say ua’, where ua is the sound
of crying (ua, ua, ua). The children play this game with young ones who cry easily
for fun and try to make them natiec. Young adults told me that they also played and
were targeted in the uaca game when they were children and described it as a
dreadful experience that caused discomfort and isolation by peers if they cried. They
also recounted how boys like John, Diego and Nelson, who are now mischievous and
tough, also cried when older children played the uaca game on them. Both boys and
girls play and are targeted by the uaca treatment; however the stakes are higher for
boys, who play it more often and are more vocally criticised and mocked for crying.
Tim is still young, but he must learn to be strong if he wants to survive in the peer
group and not be scorned by older boys.

The emphasis on boys being strong, brave and verbally aggressive, partially explains
why new imageries of masculinity that come from the media are so popular among
Matses children. Jean-Claude Van Damme is loved by boys and girls alike and Van
Damme action movies inspire children’s conversations and play. Various scholars
have documented young men’s fascination for action movies amongst indigenous
peoples with established traditions of warfare and hunting, specifically in Papua New Guinea (Kulick and Willson 1994; Wood 2006) and also native Amazonia (High 2010). Figures such as Rambo and Bruce Lee are understood as embodying localised and traditional understandings of masculinity as well as promoting new forms of male power which are informed by globalised media influences. For young Kamula men in Papua New Guinea ‘Rambo came to stand for forms of masculine and sovereign power that he could transfer into the social body of Kamula men’, being a figure that young men ‘could identify with and thereby explore new understandings of masculinity’ (Wood 2006: 62). High, meanwhile, stresses that young Waorani men in Amazonian Ecuador praise their ancestors for their ability to hunt animals and kill enemies with spears (2010: 757), although physical violence and warfare are no longer acceptable. Here, ‘images of Bruce Lee and Rambo appear to embody a fantasy of masculine power and generational continuity that young men idealize, even if they fail to demonstrate it in everyday life’ (ibid: 762).

Jean-Claude Van Damme could also be said to be popular amongst Matses boys and girls as a figure that embodies traditional masculine traits: strength, braveness, physical dynamism and an ability to fight. But Jean-Claude Van Damme also carries within him a range of qualities that Matses boys place value on but are aware that they will never achieve. Matses children, especially boys, described Van Damme to me as: white, as opposed to the Matses who are black; big and tall, in a way that Matses children will never be as they grow up; but also as rich and having beautiful (and numerous) chotac girlfriends. Children place value on these features, which are recognised as entangled with each other. Being white, big, rich and having chotac girlfriends are all available to chotac men and are opening up for Matses boys new forms of desire and understandings of new possibilities of being a man—as opposed, for instance, to how their fathers and especially their grandfathers are. In this view, boys’ experiences and understandings of masculinity cannot be reduced to those of older generations, and increasingly, ‘global forces necessarily play an important role in the construction of masculine identities and the local can only be understood within larger global frames’ (Simpson 2009: 5).

However, most Matses boys recognise themselves as being black, poor and probably unable to marry a chotac woman. The figure of Jean-Claude Van Damme emphasises all the unreachable elements that originate from the world of cities,
money, concrete and nonindigenous people. Although most Matses children perceive themselves as largely excluded from such a world, Cristiano, the son of Carlos, the village chief, and a chotac woman, represents an exception. Whereas I previously discussed Cristiano’s case to show contrasting understandings and experiences of childhood within the household, here I will further discuss how Cristiano’s privileged condition often creates tensions with others children and how such tensions reveal emerging problems of masculinity amongst Matses boys.

**Cristiano, Jean-Claude Van Damme and emerging forms of masculinity**

It is evening time in the village. The air is not so hot anymore and young men play football while young women play volleyball. People have gathered up all around the football pitch, sitting outside the houses, watching the game and cheering. Only grown-up men are admitted to playing the games, while young boys are considered not skilled enough and have to play on their own.

I am sitting close to a group of boys, including Diego, Nelson, Emanuel and Sebastian, a fourteen-year-old who sometimes hangs out with younger boys. The boys have been playing football with a broken ball, and now they sit and rest on a bench attached to the front side of Carlos’s house. The house is built right in front of the pitch, where adults, including Carlos himself, are playing a football game. Hyped up with adrenaline after playing, the boys push and mock each other, laughing loudly. They look more confrontational than usual, but are still laughing and cheerful. A group of younger boys and girls sits all around them, standing up or sitting on the ground.

Cristiano arrives and notices the boys sitting outside his house. He walks over in his expensive sandals, his new-looking T-shirt and nice shorts. The boys are barefoot and wearing old clothes full of holes and stains. Cristiano is twelve years old, hence in the same age range as them; he
should be sitting with the boys, rather than standing up with the younger kids. But there is no space left on the bench.

Trying to gain a seat, Cristiano starts bickering with Sebastian. ‘Stand up’, he shouts at him. Sebastian tells him to leave him alone, grinning and immovable. He is a real cuididi, and Cristiano does not intimidate him. The two boys are laughing, but the confrontation seems to get bitter. Cristiano grabs Sebastian’s arm and tries to pull him away. ‘Stop it’, shouts Sebastian, grinning. He pulls back, keeping tight onto his seat, and pushes Cristiano powerfully. If someone had pushed me with that strength, I would be lying on the ground. Cristiano staggers, but he does not fall. He still tries to laugh and look nonchalant, but his smile gets bitter. He is clearly uncomfortable. ‘Stand up’, he eventually yells at Sebastian, ‘This is my house!’ Sebastian turns serious all of a sudden and growls back at him: ‘Go away, mayu’.

All the boys laugh at Sebastian’s words, and the quarrel is over. Cristiano is defeated. The word mayu literally means ‘non-Matses Amerindian’, but it can also be used derogatorily to signify ‘Indian’. The boys use the word mayu to attack Cristiano and remind him that he is the only child in the village born from a nonindigenous parent and, therefore, he is not really one of them. Cristiano stands speechless. He blushes and his eyes get shiny. He stands there for a while turning his back on the boys, and then walks away, alone. The boys have noticed his struggle—I see them looking towards him—but pay him no attention. They instead keep playing and laughing with each other.
Figure 45. Boys playing with an old football on the pitch before the adults arrive to play. (Photographs by Edgar, ten years old).
I have already introduced Cristiano as being different to most other children. His parents are wealthy schoolteachers, his mother is a chotac woman and Cristiano is fluent in Spanish, travels often to the city, wears nice clothes and shoes, and owns nice manufactured goods that other children could never afford, including a guitar that his father bought for him.

Other boys often resent and bully Cristiano ambembi, ‘just for fun’ or ‘for the sake of it’. Diego, Sebastian and other boys do not own the same goods as Cristiano, but they are more skilled in wordfights and more mischievous compared to him. They know that Cristiano is easily defeated if they call him mayu, which implies that Cristiano, the only child in the village born from a chotac woman, is not fully Matses but rather an outsider in his own home-village. Cristiano is crushed whenever this accusation is made and it causes him to be natiec and unable to react.

The word mayu, like ‘mother’ for Paco, bears particular relevance for Cristiano, as it recalls his individual background that distinguishes him from other children and confirms his outsider status in his own village. The words tita, ‘mother’, and mayu have become attached to Paco and Cristiano in particular ways and have come to define situated modalities through which children understand themselves in relation to others. Paco learns to recognise himself as an abandoned child, while Cristiano learns to understand himself as different and often excluded.

Boys think of Cristiano as a privileged child and they openly wish they could afford the goods and possibilities available to him, whilst simultaneously realising that such possibilities are precluded to them. This often creates difficulties for the boys who have to find new strategies to make sense of their impossibilities and take out their resentment. Cristiano often takes on the role of a ‘scapegoat’—a concept that Girard traces to the Greek apopompoiaos, ‘one who wards off illnesses’, and defines as a response to ‘the universal human tendency to transfer anxiety and conflict on to arbitrary victims’ (1987: 131). Although I would not attempt to make universal claims, Cristiano could be said to often fall victim to attacks because other boys take out on him the anxiety and tensions that accompany the awareness of their unsatisfied and unattainable desires. Cristiano—with his peculiar skills, precious goods, and nonindigenous mother—comes to personify the ongoing transformations in Matses society as well as children’s impossibility to fully access the opportunities
opened up by nonindigenous world. Bullying Cristiano, therefore, becomes a coping mechanism that responds to the feelings that arise in the boys as they take awareness of their more limited possibilities of being.

Cristiano is not becoming *dadambo*, a ‘real man’, but he already enjoys certain opportunities that the other boys cannot have now and are even unsure whether they will ever achieve as they grow up, not least money and marrying a *chotac* woman. Here, new forms of economy, media communication and urban imagery feed into emerging understandings and desires of masculinity, which begin to move away from those of past generations—just as I argued earlier in relation to shifting conceptions of womanhood. On one hand, Matses boys are placing values upon and enacting forms of behaviour that are recognised as quintessentially masculine across generations and especially praised by Matses elders, such as being *dadambo*, strong and brave. But on the other hand—as I showed for girls—boys are also developing new forms of desire when compared to older generations and consequently, are exploring new directions in relation to what constitutes a desirable way-of-being for a boy or a man.

The impact of nonindigenous practices upon boys’ enactments of masculinity is evident in the passage from boyhood to manhood and how this has been changing over recent years. Romanoff (1984: 244-246) and Romanoff et al (2004: 131) document that at least until 1975 Matses people practiced a ritual that Romanoff named ‘ceremony of the singing souls’ (1984: 244) and which marked the distinction between young boys and grown-up men. The ritual was performed in the evenings, in the traditional longhouses, where several families lived together. Adult men left the longhouse admittedly to visit an underground world of spirits, and they returned wearing capes of tree bark so as to personify the spirits themselves. They then sang traditional chants and exhorted women and children to sing along. Only adult men performed the singing ceremony, as reported by Romanoff:

‘Young boys stay in the house with their mothers when the men go to the underworld. The women tell them that someday the souls will come for them and do terrible things to them.’ (1984: 245).

When boys were regarded as old enough (usually in their mid-teens) they were initiated to the singing ceremony through a special rite of passage. Elder men took
the boys to-be-initiated away from their house, unexpectedly and amidst screams, and they all returned after several days. Upon their return, the boys were considered adult men and could perform the singing ceremony. The ritual was a frightening and challenging experience for the boys, reinforcing that in order to become men they had to learn how to master fear and display courage.

The singing ceremony is no longer practiced and I never heard any reference to an underground world of spirits that men can visit from elderly Matses, let alone from the children. The transition from boyhood to adulthood is not marked by singing or any other formal ritual. However, I argue, boys are officially regarded as adults when they are admitted to a different type of adult activity, namely playing football. Adult men address football as a most amusing activity and every day before dusk, when the heat is less strong, they gather to play in the large football pitch at the centre of the village. Only men aged between sixteen and thirty-five years old approximately are allowed to play: older men never learned to play football, which they address as a useless and unproductive activity; boys under sixteen would love to play and look forward to it, but they are considered neither old enough nor good enough to play with adults. Younger boys can only play to the side of the main pitch, using old, broken footballs which are discarded by adult men.

Playing football is another quintessential masculine type of skill and every boy has to learn how to play—and is also extremely willing to do so. At the age of approximately sixteen or seventeen, a boy starts playing with adults and this usually coincides with the time he also takes a wife, builds their own house and starts having children. The equivalent for women is playing volleyball, which they do with a net set up to the side of the football pitch. However, young women start playing volleyball earlier than young men, usually at thirteen or fourteen years of age, which is also when most women start getting married.

Both football and volleyball have become habitual practices in Matses life but they are nonetheless perceived as originating from and associated with the world of the chotac (the very objects used to play, footballs and volleyballs, can only be purchased from the chotac in the city). Accordingly, the passage from boyhood to adulthood is significantly marked by developing mastery over nonindigenous practices and skills, unlike it was when the elderly people were young. For Matses
boys, becoming a successful man implies developing a range of nonindigenous types of activities such as playing football and making money, which will differentiate them from elderly men and causes the latter to complain that young Matses want to be like the chotac.

Conclusions

In Part I of the thesis (Chapter One and Two), I discussed knowing in terms of skills and propositional knowledge that open up certain possibilities of acting and moving in the world. In the last two chapters I have explored a different type of knowing: knowing as questioning and understanding oneself as a certain type of human being in relation to others. This chapter focussed specifically on how boys question and interpret their own being through interactions in the peer group, namely speech and aggressive verbal confrontations. In recounting how ‘baby’ or ‘tough troublemaker’ are situated ways of being intertwined with speech, movement and the body, I have attempted to show how boys come to recognise themselves as a certain type of boy vis-à-vis others. This often means taking awareness of one’s own human condition and of the limitations inherent to this, and is a process that is often accompanied by feelings of pain and struggle, which I tried to grasp by looking at the boys’ interactions and reactions.

I have shown how Paco has to continuously question himself in relation to his peers and take awareness of his own being as an abandoned child; how Nelson has to struggle in order to affirm himself as a mischievous boy; and how Tim strives to learn how to act appropriately as a grown-up boy as opposed to a crybaby. I have shown Cristiano’s pain and discomfort in acknowledging himself as an outsider in his home-village who is somehow different to other boys and is not as strong as them. But I have also shown the struggle of Diego who, like most other boys, is developing new forms of desire and aspirations for the future while acknowledging himself as largely excluded from the opportunities he yearns for.

Consequently, while some forms of masculinity are continuous between generations, boys are also developing new understandings of what it means to be a boy and a man. Matses boys are attending the world in original ways when compared to previous
generations and are developing new aspirations and desires, such as making money and marrying *chotac* women. The ability to play football as constitutive of adult manhood reinforces the importance of nonindigenous types of skills and activities in the development of masculinity.

In the following chapters I will explore in greater depth children’s fascination for the urban world of the *chotac* and how this impacts on their expectations for the future. This means that I will introduce another way of knowing, one that is not informed by direct encounter with the landscape or with people in the environment, but instead developed at-a-distance and largely through the imagination. I will also explore in more depth how children’s desire for the world of the *chotac* is accompanied by growing self-perceptions of being poor, unprivileged and largely excluded from the possibilities that such a world offers to others.
Second Visual Interlude
Figure 46. Girls, boys. (Photographs by Edgar, ten years old; Romina, nine; and Raisa, twelve).
Figure 47. Girls walk to the river. (Photograph by Sebastian, fourteen years old).
Figure 48. Boys jumping in the river. (Photographs by Nelson, eleven years old).
Figure 49. Playing in the village. (Photographs by Elsie, eight years old; Lily, nine; and Francisco, ten).
Figure 50. Boys about to jump down in the water. (Photograph by Rebeca, ten years old).
Figure 51. Girls in the village. (Photographs by Lily, nine years old; Paco, ten; and Matilda, ten).
Figure 52. The river. (Photographs by Flora, twelve years old).
Figure 53. Water fights with water pistols. (Photographs by Nelson, eleven years old; and John, ten).
Figure 54. Boys fight like Jean-Claude Van Damme. (Photographs by Diego, twelve years old).
Figure 55. Girl with sunglasses. (Photograph by the author, who bought sunglasses in the city as a gift for the children).
Figure 56. Posing with sunglasses. (Photograph by the author).
Part III: Knowing as Imagining the Nonindigenous World and the Future
Introduction to Part III

I have so far discussed children’s ways-of-knowing with regards to people, practices, places or tools that are found within or in close proximity to their everyday environments: the river, paddling, peers, fishing, cross-cousins, the forest, elderly people, food, canoes, spoken words, and so forth. I discussed children’s knowledge and skills in relation to the riverine environment; their place and roles in the household; and their existential questioning and gendered self-understandings vis-à-vis others. In the following chapters I will focus instead on how children engage with realms of the world that are perceived as far-away and largely absent from their everyday dwellings.

My primary aim is to explore children’s relationships with the nonindigenous world that consists of cities, money, concrete, electric light, manufactured goods, airplanes, television, cars, packaged food, and so forth. These entities are only partially available in the children’s village and they are usually imagined and addressed by the children at a distance. More specifically, I will focus on the children’s imagination of nonindigenous settlements or cities (Chapter Five); their ways of knowing and perceiving money and monetary practices (Chapter Six); and their experiences of schooling (Chapter Seven). Although unlike cities and money the school is a material, daily presence in the village, here I address schooling in relation to Matses people’s perceptions of the future and the nonindigenous world, whereby schooling also poses a connection with a faraway and distant elsewhere.

While my aim is to consider how children develop ways-of-knowing the nonindigenous world at-a-distance, less attention is paid to the children’s first-hand, direct encounters with it. For example, whereas I discuss how children imagine the city from their village or money in the absence of it, I do not illustrate their actual visits to nonindigenous settlements and I only mention a few sporadic encounters with cash. This is partly because children’s direct encounters with the nonindigenous places and material are extremely sporadic, for instance they only rarely travel to cities; and partly because my aim is not to try and grasp that initial, original moment in which knowledge of the nonindigenous world is grasped for the first time. Moving from a Heideggerian view of knowledge as a way of being-there amidst what is known, I argue that knowing at-a-distance can also be interpreted as an active,
dynamic way of being-there with or amidst what is known. Or paraphrasing Heidegger (1962: 89), even by thinking about and imagining something I am there amidst what I know not any less than when I originally grasped it.

Accordingly, my aim is to look at the numerous, repeated occasions on which children express knowledge of the faraway nonindigenous world and in so doing bring it into being as a tangible, living presence. This, I argue, has tangible consequences for the children, who by attending to the nonindigenous world through modalities of fascination and desire also come to know themselves in certain ways and develop certain expectations for the future. The chapters will therefore seek to address in what ways and to what extent the children perceive money, cities or the possibilities opened up by formal education as parts of their future lives as adults, while becoming aware that certain affordances of the urban world will always be precluded to them.

In a sense, children’s imagination and interpretations of nonindigenous or urban practices could be framed within an analysis of modernity, if this is defined as ‘exploring how “local,” usually non-Western people, adapt objects, ideas, and symbols from global circuits of production, consumption, and knowledge, indigenizing, resignifying, appropriating, and hybridizing them in the process’ (Wade 2007: 51). In this view, children’s desire to make money, buy clothes and travel to the city when they grow up could be defined as ‘expectations of modernity’ (Ferguson 1999), whereby the urban world is understood as opening up possibilities for better livelihoods although these expectations are often failed. I nonetheless agree with Ferguson that the notion of modernity can be useful insofar as it constitutes a ‘folk category’ (2005: 167) that respects and helps rendering local viewpoints and discourses. Here I will avoid the term insofar as it does not really help bring out Matses own understandings of wider social processes, and in this case it also risks depicting a romanticised view of indigenous Amazonians as backwards compared to the advanced or modern urban world rather than recognising their ‘coevalness’ (Fabian 1983: 31). It seems therefore more appropriate to refer to ‘expectations of urbanness’ or ‘non-indigenousness’ rather than modernity and to avoid the term in favour of simply ‘nonindigenous world’, here defined as the whole of practices, places, materials and possibilities that are perceived as originating from and related to the lives and actions of the chotac.
Whereas in the previous part of the thesis I presented boys and girls acting in separate groups, here I will show children’s interactions in mixed groups so as to offer a sense of how Matses children until the age of twelve or so often spend time together regardless of sex and age distinctions.
Chapter Five. Do forest children dream of electric light? Exploring the relations between drawing, the imagination and movement

I think the reason that boredom is the principle affliction of school children in the United States … is that they are bored with the artificial world. The artificial world is boring.

(Margaret Mead, 1977: 22, italics in original)

Concrete is great. I love concrete.

(Paloma, six-year-old Matses girl)
Figure 57. Iquitos. (Drawing by Paloma, six years old).

The above drawing is of the city of Iquitos, the closest urban centre to Matses villages, and was drawn by six-year-old Paloma. Her drawing conveys a vivid sense of urban life. Huge cemento, ‘concrete’ or ‘tarmac’ streets zigzag across the city while black houses, also made from concrete, are connected by power-lines to the electricity grid. Massive lampposts tower over the houses and shed light across the city, while underneath bubble shaped cars carry passengers along Iquitos’s busy streets. The car in the very centre of the drawing contains two people. They are Paloma and her mother, who are driving around the city and observing all that urban life presents.

However, Paloma, like most Matses children, has never been to a city but only to Colonia Angamos, the closest rural town to Matses villages. She has never travelled in or even seen cars, although she has encountered lampposts and concrete paths in Colonia Angamos.

Iquitos is too remote for Paloma’s parents to reach, as it is for most of her peers. Instead, Paloma explores Iquitos by imagining it at a distance: there she is in the
midst of the city’s concrete streets in a bubble car, looking out at the buildings and people that surround her. In Paloma’s drawing, an inaccessible and un-witnessed city comes alive on a piece of paper and in doing so a distant ‘elsewhere’ is brought into being through the combination of Paloma’s imagination, coloured pencils and hand.

During fieldwork I frequently used drawing as a means of developing fieldwork relationships with children and to engage with their ways of imagining and understanding the world. In this chapter, I use drawing to consider Matses relationships with the chotac yacno, ‘nonindigenous places’ (i.e. settlements where the chotac live). The chapter considers how children develop imaginative constructions of elsewhere as part of their ongoing, practical, activity. Imagining is here understood as a fundamental activity of childhood and a means of accessing and creating social lives, worlds and experiences that lay beyond the tangible places where people dwell. Drawing is thus used as a mode of expressive activity that can be used to transcend children’s immediate surroundings, and which opens up a window into the ways that children engage with a distant elsewhere that otherwise remains unreachable. Drawing allows us to enter the fluid and many-faceted forms of life that exist beyond the horizon of people’s immediate surroundings and offers a glimpse into what Crapanzano describes as the ‘hinterland’, i.e. ‘a very concrete land, a place, an intimate one, (…) which lies elsewhere, ailleurs, beyond where one is and yet intimately related to it’ (2004: 15). By considering how children embark on imaginary journeys towards an elsewhere and come to (imaginatively) inhabit the nonindigenous world, I try to delineate how these realms are entangled with the here-and-now of their domestic, everyday environment.

Exploring children’s imagination

The Matses do not have a word for ‘imagining’, the closest expression being the verb tantia, ‘to hear’ or ‘to listen to’, but also ‘to know’, ‘to remember’ and ‘to think about’ or ‘to miss’ (someone). Nevertheless, I argue that imagining-at-a-distance is foundational to how the children develop ways of knowing and understanding the
world: in this case, the nonindigenous world, which remains geographically out of reach but is made available through the imagination. Whilst it is clearly necessary to recognise that ‘lived experience is never identical with the concepts we use to grasp and represent it’ (Jackson 1989:2), I argue that the imagination can be used as a valuable analytical concept that offers a means of exploring children’s lived experiences within a wider theoretical discourse.

Any ethnography of the imagination poses a series of thorny epistemological and methodological problems, not least the difficulty of defining what the imagination is and the impossibility of directly accessing another person’s imaginative activity. The imagination, as Crapanzano suggests, constitutes ‘an important dimension of human experience’ and thus requires ethnographic consideration but problematically resists and even ‘disappears with articulation’ (2004: 18), making it notoriously difficult to research and represent. Concomitant problems have been encountered whenever anthropologists have tried to overcome the ‘empiricist’s terror’ (ibid: 17) and venture beyond the limits of observable experience so as to grasp people’s imaginative and unspoken lifeworlds (Crapanzano 2004: 18; Irving 2011, 2013; Rapport 2013; Jackson 1989, 2002). Rather than follow traditional paradigms of what is possible and worthy of investigation within anthropology, a small number of anthropologists have advocated, in different ways, the need for new modes of inquiry and methods within the discipline which can render the ‘open-endedness and ambiguity of human experience’ (Jackson 2002: 125) while recognising that ‘experience is not reducible to objectivities’ (Rapport 2013: 13).

In order to grasp children’s imaginative lifeworlds as a kind of embodied and enplaced activity that takes place in the flow of their everyday thinking and being in the field, my aim is to bring together Collingwood’s inquiry into the human mind (1992) with Michael Polanyi’s study of human consciousness (1965). Collingwood proposes an approach that ‘does not ask what mind is; it asks only what mind does’ and as such ‘renounces all attempt to discover what mind always and everywhere does, and asks only what mind has done on certain definite occasions’ (1992: 61, italics in original). In this Collingwood is moving from definition to function, that is to say rather than making an ontological claim about what the mind is, he is offering a way of thinking about its material outcomes, of which art and drawing are paramount examples. In a related vein, Polanyi argued that it is never fully possible
to access another person’s consciousness and bodily states, although these can be to some extent grasped by dwelling in ‘the external workings’ of another person’s ‘mind from the outside’ (1965: 807, my italics); although here ‘mind’ can be replaced with a broader attention to bodily feelings, emotional states and embodied actions.

By considering the activity of the ‘imagination’ and imagining, I aim to engage with people’s practices of imagining through ‘an investigation into observable behaviour’ (Irving 2013: 133). My aim, following Collingwood, is not to attempt an exhaustive definition of what the imagination is—insofar as this would reduce the complexity and immediacy of that imagination as it emerges in action and render it in a too static or reified form—but rather to try and grasp what imagining does within the context of a practical fieldwork encounter. Here the gerundial form ‘imagining’ draws attention to the fluid, situated and unfinished activity of the imagination and how it is enacted and made manifest on specific occasions towards undetermined ends. Following Polanyi, I consider how children’s imaginings are made evident in tangible forms of expression (or ‘external workings’), through the act of drawing.

**Drawing as a dynamic activity, a ‘moving towards’**

Drawing is a useful ethnographic method, distinct from film or photography, which can be used to engage with people’s imaginations, understandings and creativity (Mitchell 2006), while simultaneously being a mode of representation. In the anthropology of childhood, drawing has only been explored in a limited fashion. The first serious attempt to employ children’s drawings as an analytical tool was offered by Mead (1932). Working with Manus children in Papua New Guinea, Mead used their drawings to verify the assumption that children are innately animistic and spontaneously tend to invest inanimate entities with human qualities. However, through observation and interviews Mead found ‘no evidence for spontaneous animistic thought in the uncontrolled sayings or games of these Manus children’ (ibid: 180), and her conclusions were reinforced by the children’s drawings:

‘The evidence of observation was confirmed by the evidence from the drawings. There were no animals acting like human beings, no composite
animal-human figures, no personified natural phenomena or humanized inanimate objects in the entire set of drawings. ... There was no humanization’ (ibid: 181, my italics).

In Mead’s approach, the drawings are evaluated as a visible form of expression of the child’s worldview onto the piece of paper and appreciated with regards to their contents, whereby the figures and shapes represented by the children provide evidence of their knowledge and cognitive functions.

More recently, Toren (1990, 1999, 2007) used drawings to grasp Fijian children’s understandings of hierarchy, for instance by asking the children to draw a scene of a ritual gathering, and analysing the contents (such as how the children had positioned men in relation to women, or regular chiefs compared to the high chief). Children of similar ages produced similar drawings, which led her to argue that children within the same age clusters conceive of hierarchy in similar ways. For example, she points out that:

‘The drawings of the oldest children revealed that they were more aware of the possibility of ambiguity regarding the position of the high chief when compared with other chiefs ... In other words, these oldest children had grasped ... the principle of hierarchy as manifest in a relative ranking on the above/below axis’ (1999: 92-93, my italics).

For Toren, drawings reveal what children are aware of and to what extent they have grasped social principles and understandings, and through an intergenerational comparison, the drawings ultimately disclose the process of embodied cognition as this evolves throughout childhood.

Here I also intend to look at the contents of children’s drawings insofar as these open up a window onto what aspects of the world stimulate children’s imagination more than others and what captures the children’s attention and interest. However, I also understand drawing as a situated, practical activity and form of making and moving through which the imagination is carried out and meanings are developed. My approach is influenced by Heidegger’s (1962: 88-89) understanding of knowing not as the passive internalisation of information but as a way for actively engaging with what is known. Knowing is thus a way of being-there with the world that is known,
and drawing thereby becomes one possible mode of action which has the capacity to bring knowledge to life. As such, it is a form of expressive knowledge that becomes a way for establishing dynamic relationships with the imagined and represented entities. For Heidegger,

‘If I ‘merely’ know about some ways in which the being of entities is interconnected, if I ‘only’ represent them, if I do no more than ‘think’ about them, I am no less alongside the entities outside in the world than when I originally grasp them’ (ibid: 89, italics in original).

If we can admit imagining as being a form of knowing that allows for accessing an elsewhere beyond the limits of the habitual and the ordinary, then drawing offers a tangible form of expression in a way that neither the camera nor text is quite able to do. The drawing of worlds that are known and unknown is a way of being there alongside them. Drawing becomes a form of situated making and expressive activity through which imaginaries come into being and are made publicly visible, and in which disparate elements and unreachable spaces are brought together into a single representative space. Or as Taussig recently put it, drawing should be addressed not just as a ‘means of witness’ (2011: xi) and neither, I argue, a public manifestation of already-existing understandings; drawing is also ‘a hauling, an unravelling, and being impelled towards something or somebody’ (ibid: xii, my italics) and, therefore, is itself a form of movement. Here I will examine children’s drawings of chotac yacno, ‘nonindigenous places’, and consider drawing as a dynamic activity that brings out the children’s fascination for the nonindigenous world and their being impelled towards it.

An approach to drawing as a situated activity must bring into attention ‘not only the content of an image, but also the circumstances of its production’ (Mitchell 2006: 63). In my research, the children’s drawings were produced in various situations: individually and collectively, in school and outside, under children’s spontaneous requests or following my elicitation. In most cases, however, the children themselves initiated drawing. During my very first week of fieldwork, I started distributing pieces of paper and coloured pencils to the children and drawing with them in a building that is used for community meetings or in the house where I was staying at the time (that of Carlos, the village chief, who was spending time with his family in
Iquitos at the time and let me stay in his house). Later on during fieldwork, the children and I would draw in a small wooden house that had been built for me and which the children themselves named *dibujon shubu*, the ‘drawing house’. From the very beginning of fieldwork the children started coming every day to look for me and asked me to draw. The children have limited access to drawing material and they only draw in school with their teachers; which is seen as a school task and not as something fun, as I will explain in a later chapter on schooling. Drawing therefore helped me to establish a relationship with the children even when I could not yet speak with them properly, and their drawings also helped me to learn some first Matses words. Accordingly, drawing is a situated activity that helps establish relationships between people (the children and me), with meaningful objects (paper and colour pencils, which I provided and are scarce in Matses villages) and with various entities (the world represented). In this view, representation is itself a way of developing knowledge rather than of simply illustrating the world that is known.

Drawing also helped me explore children’s fascination and the aspects of the world they place emphasis on, first and foremost the world of the *chotac*. When I arrived to the field, my initial objective was to investigate children’s relationship with the forest environment and especially their knowledge and imaginaries of spirits and other creatures that populate the forest. In my own imagination, before reaching the field, I assumed that children would find the forest to be extremely stimulating and fascinating, and that they would often refer to it in their play activities, speech and also, in their drawings. I therefore asked the children to draw *mayan*, ‘forest spirits’, a word that I learned from the adults. But to my surprise (and initial discomfort), the children showed little interest in talking about the forest and, unlike the elders, knew little about the *mayan*, which are defined as deadly creatures living on forest trees and looking for humans to take away with them (to eat or kill them). Even when I asked the children to draw spirits or the forest, they would include elements associated with the nonindigenous world within their pictures, as exemplified in the images below by three-year-old Bridget and eight-year-old Simón.
Figure 58. Forest spirit. (Drawing by Bridget, three years old).
Both drawings were produced within my first two weeks of fieldwork. The children portrayed a *mayan*, forest spirit. Bridget drew the image in her house, where I was spending time and asked Bridget to draw with the help of her thirty-year-old uncle, Leandro, who knows a little bit of Spanish (since at the time I could not yet speak Matses). As she finished drawing, Bridget explained that her spirit ‘comes forward floating, like people in the movies’, as her uncle translated for me. Simón drew in the house where I was staying at the time, where a group of girls and boys were drawing together and I was the only adult present. Simón’s drawing suggests that spirits are deadly creatures living on forest trees, as the elders describe them, but also adds creative details to it which are related to the nonindigenous world: the spirit has a skeleton body, which children see in movies or schoolbooks, and wears sunglasses, one of the most desired goods amongst Matses boys and girls.

Nonindigenous places and materials are among the most recurrent features in the drawings I collected. Although I occasionally elicited such drawings, most of the
time the children themselves produced images in addition to initiating conversations about the nonindigenous world. Drawing, therefore, allowed the children to express their fascination for the world of the chotac and encouraged me to address this as a central point in my research, ultimately causing me to leave aside my original plan to investigate the children’s relationship with the forest world.

It is obviously not fully possible to establish to what extent children’s fascination for the nonindigenous world was stimulated by my presence, being a chotac myself. Although this surely played a part in it, the children often initiated conversations and games about the nonindigenous world spontaneously and amongst themselves and in a manner that seemed unrelated to or at least not determined by my presence. As elderly people say out loud, young Matses ‘want to be like the chotac’ and talk about them all the time. As a matter of fact, children’s constant references to the nonindigenous world led me to address the latter as a major topic of inquiry and to leave aside my original research plans.

In the rest of the chapter I will look more closely at children’s drawings of chotac yacno, mainly Colonia Angamos, the closest rural town to Matses villages and reachable in approximately eight-hours from the village where I worked; and Iquitos, the capital city of the Peruvian department of Loreto which Matses territory is part of. Nonindigenous settlements were largely unknown to the Matses until recently and remain only partially explored: the Matses spend most of their time in their villages and although they are familiar with Colonia Angamos, which is easier to reach, only a few of them have regular access to Iquitos. Flying to Iquitos is expensive and as Matses people often lament piucquid nîdbëdec, ‘there is no money’. Children might be taken to Colonia Angamos by their parents two to three times a year, but most children have never been to Iquitos; accordingly, children’s direct experience of nonindigenous places is generally very limited. And yet, children talk incessantly about nonindigenous places and frequently bring them to life through speech, play and drawings. In doing so, they collectively develop communal understandings of nonindigenous environments through imagining and enacting the social, moral and material life of the nonindigenous world.
Concrete paths in the rainforest

The image above was drawn by nine-year-old Romina. It represents Colonia Angamos, the closest nonindigenous settlement, which is an eight-hour river journey by motorised canoe. Romina has been to Colonia Angamos and is relatively familiar with it. Even so, her drawing is far from a photographic description. Instead it brings out the nonindigenous world in a mixture of visual stimuli and materials as it is recast through Romina’s imagination. Romina proposes her own creative perspective on the world: nonindigenous houses are upside down, and connected by giant concrete paths that cross the town and connect the oversize buildings. The image partly reveals Romina’s bodily capacity to draw as a nine-year-old girl, who has certain abilities to coordinate visual stimuli, memory inputs, the nervous system and the hand that draws. But it can also be said to reveal something of the immediacy and
intensity with which Romina imagines the place, whereby imagining unfolds and is made manifest through a whole bodily and sensory action.

The drawing also suggests that when Romina imagines the nonindigenous world she sees cemento, ‘concrete’ as a dominant material. Concrete paths emerge as a constant and dominant feature in nearly all of the drawings of nonindigenous places that were made by the children. Whereas streets in Iquitos are made of tarmac, in Colonia Angamos there are no cars and only small paths made of concrete. However, the Matses make no difference between concrete and tarmac and they term both as cemento, the Spanish word for ‘concrete’, which in Matses signifies both ‘concrete’ or ‘tarmac’ as a material, but also translates as ‘concrete paths’ and ‘tarmac streets’.

In the village where I worked, there is only one small concrete path. It is badly constructed and weather-beaten, and was built a few years back by the local government of Colonia Angamos in an attempt to seek recognition from Matses people and gain votes for the following elections. Although the path is effectively useless and the local administration could have instead paid for malaria medication, Matses people love it, especially children. They often talk about how they would like more concrete paths in their village, like those in Colonia Angamos.

The frequency with which concrete emerges as a topic in children’s conversations with me, illustrates the extent to which it is a material that stimulates children’s imaginations and is seen as an essential part of the nonindigenous world:

Paloma. Camilla, is there concrete in your land?
Camilla. Yes, there is plenty of it.
Paloma. Oh, I see.
Camilla. Do you like concrete, Paloma?
Paloma. Yes! I love concrete! [cemento bunquioebi].
Camilla. Why do you like it?
Camilla. Is soil not good for walking?
Paloma. No. It’s painful. Concrete is good.

19 Elections for Colonia Angamos mayor are held once every four years and the Matses are required to travel there to vote. The regional government provides gasoline and offers them food once in Colonia Angamos. For what I could witness, the election system is extremely corrupt, disorganised and dysfunctional.
Paloma says she loves concrete but the literal translation of *bunquitoebi* is ‘I really want’. In her drawing of Iquitos at the beginning of the chapter, the most prominent features are giant black houses and concrete streets. She explained to me that in Iquitos even houses are made of concrete. The further away one moves from Matses territory, the more concrete is found. I once asked seven-year-old Matias, how he imagines my homeland. With no hesitation, he replied: ‘all made of concrete’.

The way that children imagine the world beyond Matses territory suggests that concrete is understood as a foundational element of the nonindigenous world and is a special *affordance* of nonindigenous settlements. The term ‘affordance’ has been most commonly used to understand the possibilities that the material environment offers to its living inhabitants, including animals, in relation to the type of body they have: ‘for example a tree offers movement to a squirrel but places of rest to a bird’ (Ingold 1987: 2). By extending the concept of affordances to the materiality of the imagined urban world, I suggest that children imagine certain possibilities for acting, dwelling and moving that are implied in a moral appreciation of nonindigenous places (‘concrete is good’). Children’s engagement with concrete happens at a distance and concrete is understood as being a property of faraway places beyond Matses territory. Concrete and nonindigenous places in general are imagined not because they are perceived as ‘not real’ but because such places cannot be reached. Imagining allows for a journey to such places and allows children to transcend the boundary of their everyday lifeworlds so as to engage with and encounter an elsewhere that is otherwise unvisited and unreachable. By imagining the concrete world at a distance, Matses children learn to place moral value on the affordances of nonindigenous environments and, moreover, yearn for them.

Children’s imagining and yearning for concrete is constituted in opposition to their forest-villages where this material is scarce or absent. The very term *cemento*, borrowed from Spanish, symbolises how concrete is a material that comes from the outside and is only found elsewhere. In their village, children live in houses made of forest materials and walk barefoot on the ground, full of painful thorns and stinging plants that always hurt children’s feet and which they complain about it. Harry, an eight-year-old boy, told me that walking barefoot on the ground is unpleasant because the soil is *mata-mata-pambo*, ‘all muddy’ (literally ‘painfully muddy’). The
drawing below, by nine-year-old Lily, shows the children’s village and how it contrasts with the city.

![The village. (Drawing by Lily, nine years old).](image)

Lily drew the village spontaneously one day when she came looking for me to ask for colour pencils and paper. Her drawing contrasts with that of Romina’s earlier one. The Matses houses in the village are much smaller than those in the nonindigenous town. They are colourful and not connected by concrete paths. A big tree stands in the middle of the houses and somehow gives a sense of the rich vegetation in the village.

Although houses in the Matses village are not connected by anything except soil, this does not mean that they are disconnected or isolated. To the contrary, as children made clear, the houses in the village constitute a sort of large block of dwellings.
Matses people are all related to each other, and almost every person in the village is able to relate to everyone else by a kinship term. The Matses are one large family and children in the village feel familiar with the place and feel at home (here, it is no coincidence that in Matses language there are no words for ‘kinship’ or ‘family’, while the very term *matses* means ‘people’). But in nonindigenous settlements, such as Colonia Angamos, people are not related to each other and they are all strangers. When Matses people travel to nonindigenous places they will often comment on their depersonalised character and will lament that they feel like outsiders in a world of unknown strangers whenever they are in the city. In the city they are not free to walk into anyone’s house on a whim, as they do in the village, and often feel alone. Whereas the village constitutes a large communal family, the city is a place where kin-unrelated individuals live in separate houses connected by concrete.

**Do forest children dream of electric light?**

![Figure 62. Chotac yacno. (Drawing by Emanuel, ten years old).](image)
Figure 63. Colonia Angamos. (Drawing by Billy, eight years old).
The drawings above were produced without any explicit instruction, instead I gave the children blank pieces of paper and asked them to draw anything they pleased. As such, the children were required to use their creativity and imagination in order to transform the blank sheets of paper into a drawing. As usual, they chose to represent the nonindigenous world, which reinforces how it constitutes an important element of concern in their everyday imaginations.

In the first drawing, Emanuel, ten years old, shows an unspecified *chotac yacno*. Three big houses stand in the middle, all connected by power-lines for electric illumination. The circles attached to the roofs inside the houses are internal lights. The power-lines are then linked to lampposts outside the houses, three on the left hand side and three on the right. At night, the *chotac yacno* is illuminated on both the inside and the outside.

In the second drawing, eight-year-old Billy shows a *chotac* man walking through Colonia Angamos. The purple base on the bottom of the paper is a concrete path. The huge purple building on the top right is a water cistern, which children often refer to when addressing Colonia Angamos, which has running water unlike their village. The big green construction on the left hand side is a lamppost and the circles attached to the houses are houselights. It is night-time and the man walks around the nonindigenous settlement fully illuminated by artificial light. Like concrete paths, lampposts, power-lines and houselights are recurrent features in children’s drawings of nonindigenous places and understood as constitutive of people’s lives there.

Children say that electric light is great and they often lament that there is no illumination in their village. Adults go to bed when it is dark, and at this time children from about eight years of age enjoy going out and meeting each other, walking together, playing, chatting and laughing. The nights in the forest are so dark that not much can be done; hence children often asked me whether amongst the goods I had brought with me, I had flashlights and batteries for them. Children love hanging out at night, which in nonindigenous places is facilitated by the presence of giant lampposts, as Billy shows in his drawing of a *chotac* man. Electric light, like concrete, can thus be understood as a particular affordance of nonindigenous places that opens up certain possibilities of dwelling, acting and moving: most obviously, electric light allows for the possibility of a different kind of social nightlife.
Billy’s drawing shows how electric light opens up a set of radically different possibilities for persons to engage with the environment and interact with each other. A chotac can not only walk on a concrete path, but can do so at night-time and look around at the city in which artificial light brightens up the darkness. The chotac man also wears shoes and long trousers: both are very expensive, extremely rare and much desired items by Matses children, as these can only be obtained through money which is always short. Therefore, Billy’s drawing also reveals an implicit awareness that the chotac are allowed different possibilities of action also because, unlike the Matses, they have money.

The previously blank piece of paper here becomes a material artefact in which a mixture of entities is brought into being and certain relationships between things are established. The city comes to life through its unique materials and different types of action: walking, concrete paths, shoes, clothes, money, the chotac, seeing at night, lampposts, nonindigenous residences, houselights. In Billy’s expression, these elements are not understood separately but mixed up and interconnected by mutual relations. The city means money, and through money, shoes and good clothes can be accessed; the chotac walk with shoes on concrete paths; and lampposts allow walking at night as well as in the day.

Here I suggest that drawing, rather than being a portrayal of ‘inner’ imaginaries, is instead a way of dynamically engaging with the city at a distance and bringing it into being on the visible surface of the paper. As such, drawing opens up imaginary journeys through the city beyond physical boundaries that are otherwise impossible to transcend. This is shown, for instance, in Billy’s drawing above or in Paloma’s at the beginning of the chapter, who has never seen Iquitos and yet shows herself and her mother in the city, travelling in a car. However, drawing and imagining are situated activities that cannot be understood outside of their specific spatial, temporal and cultural surroundings. Imaging allows for transcending an environment, but at the same time imagining always takes place in an environment; accordingly, children’s imagination of the nonindigenous world only makes sense in relation to their everyday lives in their material dwelling, whereby the city is understood as a tangible alternative to life in the village.
In his essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Simmel (1950) offered an account of city life and its implications (emotionally detached attitudes, close physical contact with strangers, and dependence on money, to name but a few) as recently emerged ways of being in the new, fast-growing metropolitan reality. Simmel’s analysis puts forward a dichotomy between urban as opposed to rural life, in which the city world is addressed in constant comparison with non-urban environments: ‘the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life’ (1950: 410). In a sense, the drawings I have shown publicly display the dichotomy between urban and rural life, proposed by Simmel, as the children imagine it. Drawing becomes a tangible manifestation of how young Matses come to know and address the city in continual opposition to forest-villages, whereby being-in-nonindigenous-places becomes a tangible alternative to life in forest settings. The contrast is tangible in Romina’s vis-à-vis Lily’s drawing, where the giant concrete paths in Colonia Angamos contrast with a tree in the forest-village. The sense of impossibility and distance from the nonindigenous world is especially vivid in children’s representation of airplanes, as I will now illustrate.

‘Airplane, take me with you’: the tangible implications of imagining

Airplanes, described by the Spanish term *avión*, are recurrent items in children’s collective expressions. The following image, drawn by ten-year-old John, shows an aircraft landing in Colonia Angamos. As usually happens, a crowd of people rush to watch the plane landing, including Matses children who are visiting Angamos with their families. A soldier in charge of security (flights to Colonia Angamos are operated by the Peruvian military) stands in front of the crowd with his machine gun.

Children not only see airplanes when visiting Colonia Angamos, but also from their home-village when military and international aircraft fly over the forest. When children hear the noise of an aircraft, they scream with excitement and look to the sky trying to spot it, often making jokes and shouting. For instance they scream to the sky, ‘plane, take me with you!’.

When I asked them where the airplane is going
to, the children would always reply, ‘it goes to your homeland!’ and they often added ‘Camilla, when you go away to your land, take me with you on the plane!’.

Figure 64. Airplane. (Drawing by John, ten years old).
Even though couched in humour, children’s exclamations reveal an implicit and shared feeling of desire and fascination towards the faraway world of cities. On one occasion I asked a group of boys what they would like to do when they grow up. John, the ten-year-old who drew the aircraft above, replied quickly ‘I want to make money’. I asked what he intended to make money for. ‘So that I can catch a plane’ he replied, ‘and go to Lima’, the capital of Peru, where probably less than ten Matses people out of a population of over two thousand have ever been. The other boys agreed with him and added that they will also travel to my homeland and to the United States, made famous amongst the children by Jean-Claude Van Damme movies.

My homeland, which is seen as being ‘all made of concrete’, represents the ultimate urban space. It is the place where concrete, electric light, airplanes, movies, telephones, money and manufactured goods originate and come from. Children are captivated by imagining this land, as well as by other nonindigenous places they have heard about, but they are also aware that such places cannot be easily accessed. Airplanes, which consistently inhabit children’s imaginations, emphasise the feelings of inequality between Matses children and the nonindigenous world. The airplanes can reach Matses-land, flying over their villages or landing in Colonia Angamos, but Matses children can never possibly reach the point where airplanes come from, even though, as their jokes suggest, they would like to be able to.

Between the children and the world of cities lies an impossible distance that cannot be fulfilled other than through means of imagining. Children are aware that certain people, such as myself, have the possibility to transcend the boundaries between the city world and forest-villages, but such a possibility is precluded to them. Drawing and imagining become the only ways to experience and appropriate nonindigenous spaces on an everyday basis. In a Heideggerian view of knowing and expressing knowledge as ways of being-amidst what is known and represented (cf. Dreyfus 1991: xi), I suggest that drawing nonindigenous places is an imaginary way of accessing urban life at a distance and attending to it through modalities of desire and fascination. However, by viewing imaginative expression as a way of developing knowledge and establishing relationships with the expressed entities, I argue that imagining the city and representing it through drawing or speech also reaffirms children’s perceived sense of inequality and impossibilities of moving and being.
Drawing as explicitly imaginative action openly displays and highlights the restrictions encountered in the everyday world: Paloma cannot travel to Iquitos and has never seen a car, and Billy has no shoes or chance to hang out with his peers at night-time. As Crapanzano put it,

‘What makes the inaccessibility of the hinterland terrifying is less its inaccessibility than its determining role in our perception of that which we take naively to be accessible: that which we actually perceive, experience, touch and feel. ... [F]or that which we perceive is always determined ... by that absence, that imagined presence’ (2004: 17).

Imagining the nonindigenous world and its opportunities at a distance means recognising the absence of such opportunities in the everyday forest-villages. The imagination has tangible consequences: the process of encountering the nonindigenous world and engaging with its affordances (not only physically, but also imaginatively) affects children’s understandings of their everyday ways of being in the village. When compared to the concrete paths in Colonia Angamos, the ground in the village becomes ‘painful’ to walk on. And, as opposed to nonindigenous places illuminated at night, the village darkness becomes restrictive and boring. It emphasises how Matses people are poor and cannot enjoy the opportunities and affordances offered by the city. The nonindigenous world is perceived as a place of prospects, opportunity and possibility, and children’s ways of knowing and representing it unfold through fascination and a desire to draw it on paper. Matses children learn that aspects of their everyday environment could be changed and improved: they would like more concrete, electric light, as well as a whole series of material goods that are only accessible in nonindigenous places.

The recognition of being poor is a recent phenomenon in Matses society, given that until a few decades ago the Matses did not have any money and no wealth based on individual possession and the accumulation of manufactured goods, as the elders themselves admit. In this sense, children’s self-perception of having no money and being unprivileged can be read as consequences of modernity, here intended as ‘what results from the diversified impact of capitalism on social formations across the world’ (Moreiras quoted in Wade 2007: 50). Accordingly, the children’s desires might be defined as ‘expectations of modernity’ (Ferguson 1999) or of ‘non-
indigenousness’, which following Ferguson, I define as the desire to gain ‘access to the “first-class” things of the world’ (ibid: 13) and more specifically to concrete, electric light, television, money, airplanes, and so forth.

At the same time, the children are developing a sense of what Ferguson terms ‘abjection’, that is, a feeling of being ‘thrown aside, expelled, or discarded’ and stuck into ‘the ranks of the “second class”’ (ibid: 236) within a world that opens up better possibilities for life but which are only accessible to more privileged people. Drawing and imagining become the only ways to experience and appropriate nonindigenous spaces on an everyday basis, but they also reinforce children’s awareness of their tangible, daily conditions and possibilities: as Crapanzano put it, ‘the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real on reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary’ (2004: 15).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to grasp children’s imaginative lifeworlds by looking at ‘what the imagination does’. By using children’s drawings as forms of expression through which imaginary journeys are carried out, unaffordable actions are brought into view and impossible distances fulfilled. In approaching imagining—as something brought into being through the tangible expression of making—I have tried to show it can be understood as a way of being-there with the entities that are imagined and represented. This means that by imagining, drawing, playing and talking about the nonindigenous world, Matses children actively engage with it, they turn the city into a tangible element of concern and preoccupation, and they place value onto nonindigenous affordances. As such the elsewhere of one’s imagination is intertwined with the here-and-now of everyday material life and shapes how people understand themselves and their possibilities of acting and being in the world.

Matses children imagine the nonindigenous world at a distance and attend to nonindigenous affordances through modalities of fascination, desire and longing. In doing so, the children learn to perceive themselves and their dwellings in terms of the lack of these imagined affordances and their impossibility of obtaining them. Matses children, I argue, are learning to understand themselves as poor and
unprivileged compared to the *chotac*, who so vividly occupy their imaginations. The *chotac*, including myself, ‘have plenty of money’, as they say, whereas their parents have no money and cannot buy clothes and shoes, build their houses with concrete or travel to the city.

Accordingly, children’s imaginations, like drawing and playing, should not be dismissed as ‘frivolous activity’ (James 1998: 104). Far from it, the imagination exerts a tangible effect upon children’s concrete experiences, and it impinges on children’s ways of knowing themselves and understanding their future horizons.

The nonindigenous world is imagined through feelings of desire and, therefore, it comes to occupy a special place in children’s hopes and aspiration for the future. The children are hoping they will be able to fulfil the physical but also socio-economic distance that separates them from the *chotac*; and not just through imaginary journeys, but by travelling to the nonindigenous world. When I interviewed Matses children about how they imagine the future, the nonindigenous world kept coming up as an insistent presence and concern. The children told me that they want to make money, buy clothes, travel abroad, and teenage boys and girls added that they hope to marry nonindigenous partners. Their imagination is ‘busy with’ this world, which occupies their speech, playing activities, concern and so forth; by so doing the children learn to place value on nonindigenous affordances and materials, while also learning to perceive themselves in relation to their restraints and limitations. In the following chapter I will explore this process further by considering children’s understandings of and encounters with money, and how these have an impact on children’s imagined futures and experiences of the present.
Chapter Six. Money on the margins of the senses and imagination: Matses children’s encounters with monetary economy

In this chapter I explore how children engage with and develop shared understandings of money in their daily life. I consider how Matses children come to know money through mutual exchanges with the adults and other children, and how they comprehend and creatively reinvent money by engaging with it through shared discourses, practices of play, and other imaginative processes. I argue that Matses children learn to invest money with value and attend to it through modalities of desire, while also acknowledging that money is short and largely unavailable. Therefore, the perception of money as desirable but scarce informs children’s ways-of-knowing the world and their place in it with regards to their denied access to monetary economy and exchanges.

Matses people are still adjusting to money, which was only introduced by the missionaries after contact in 1969. Authors concerned with similar ethnographic cases in non-industrialised societies have mainly focused on the impact that newly introduced monetary practices have upon established social orders and pre-existing forms of exchange. Money was originally theorised as a disruptive force that inevitably corrodes social values within non-monetary social economies ‘and reduces personal relations to impersonality’ (Bloch and Parry 1989: 6). Echoing Marx and Simmel (cf. ibid: 4-7) and to some extent Karl Polanyi (cf. Maurer 2006: 20), who generally agreed in understanding money as the inevitable propeller of individualism and the depersonalisation of social relations, these initial theories pointed out the culturally-disruptive effects of money in non-industrial societies (Bohannan 1959) and at people’s cultural strategies to resist such effects (Taussig 1980). Bloch and Parry (1989) were first to disagree with this view by advocating a culturally situated analysis of the meaning of money (similar conclusions were reached by Gregory 1997). They pointed out how money, rather than being a disruptive ‘cultural acid’, is domesticated by people in specific social contexts and integrated into previous systems of value and exchange, thereby often reinforcing the established social order rather than destroying it (Bloch and Parry 1989; for a critical review of their
argument, see Robbins and Akin 1999). A third line of inquiry attempts at a reconciliation of the previous theories, by insisting that the effects money has upon society are far more complex than either fully corroding, or simply reproducing, pre-existing social dynamics (see for instance Martin and Rasumussen (forthcoming) on money and emerging forms of social organisation in Papua new Guinea; or Verdery (1995) on ‘Caritas’ and changing conceptions of money in post-socialist Romania).

Robbins and Akin (1999) suggest that when referring to people not long-experienced with State currencies—such as Melanesians or, I might say, native Amazonians—the term money is problematic and has created confusion in economic theory. Their solution is to refer to ‘currencies’ rather than ‘money’ as this allows for a better fluidity in investigating Melanesian social economies, since money-like mediums of exchange, such as shells, were common in Melanesia even before the adoption of State currencies (ibid). In this article I address money as the Matses themselves define and refer to it: *piucquid*, which indicates paper notes and coins of Peruvian State currencies, the Nuevo Soles (where one Peruvian Nuevo Sol equals approximately 0.20 British Pounds). Moving from this ethnographically grounded definition, I suggest that money in Matses society cannot be understood without addressing its material essence, its everyday occurrences and sensorial dimension. By doing so, I respond to a lack of attention in the literature of money, including the theories mentioned above, to ‘the situatedness of money in time and space’ and the fact that it is embedded in material, contextualised practices (Gilbert 2005: 361). With a focus on children’s everyday encounters and dealings with material money, whether in its physical presence or imaginative occurrences, this chapter offers an initial attempt to fulfil this gap.

If authors have widely documented the presence of children in economic relations (cf. Zelizer 2002, Lancy 2008: 76-111, Montgomery 2009: 67-70), they have also largely neglected ‘children’s own experiences of economic change’ and their role as ‘active economic agents’ (Zelizer 2002: 377; see also Levison 2000). As a response to this gap, in the past decade or so new studies have been produced which take seriously children’s own viewpoints on economic matters and their active roles in them. These studies focus in particular on children earning money to support their family, including child prostitution in Thailand (Muecke 1992; Montgomery 2001, 2007), street-vendors Latino children in Los Angeles (Estrada 2012) or children struggling
with poverty and selling souvenirs to tourists on the streets of Cusco, Peru (Sinervo 2013). A different approach aims at integrating children in consumption theory (Cook 2008) through, for example, ethnographic cases of Finnish pre-school children and their understandings of monetary practices (Ruckenstein 2010) or children’s consumption of fashion clothing in Britain (Pilcher 2011).

This chapter contributes to the above debates by looking specifically at children’s understandings of money as a material and imaginative substance in a non-industrialised society relatively inexperienced with State-currencies. In doing so, I also expand upon the literature dealing with Amerindian societies, which has also largely overlooked children’s views of money and their active role in the economy in general. A few exceptions are Gow (1989) on how children’s desire and need for food define the giving-obligations of parents as food providers; Rival’s (2002) analysis of how schooling transformed children’s roles from autonomous food providers to pupils to be fed by parents; and in Overing and Passes’ classic collection of essays (2000), the occasional references to children’s presence in Amerindian moral economies and the transmission of values of sharing, generosity, and caring. Children, however, are never given sufficient attention in these analyses and are never addressed as direct respondents, so that their active role in the economy and their impact on economic practices are largely dismissed.

Drawing on children’s shared practices and lived experiences, this chapter contributes by providing an analysis of how children make sense of money (and of themselves in relation to it) by acknowledging and attempting to evoke children’s own perspectives. In doing so, I move away from anthropological theories that address money purely from a macro-perspective (as those discussed above) and follow Gilbert’s urging for situated analyses of money in its everyday occurrences by ‘paying closer attention to the common cents that pass through our hands day-to-day’ (2005: 360). In particular, the chapter tries to bring out children’s everyday dealings with money as a dynamic material and imaginative substance. Since money is a scarce resource in Matses villages and can therefore only occasionally be physically encountered, here I discuss how children deal with the substance of money on an everyday basis not only as this ‘passes through their hands’ but rather in a variety of creative ways which involve absence and presence, the senses and imagination, language and play.
In order to access children’s ways-of-knowing with regards to money I will focus on their actions, reactions and interactions with and around cash, whereby I assume that implicit understandings can be grasped to the extent they are made manifest through open expression (Polanyi 1965: 807) and in the way we relate to the world and others (Moran 2000: 235). I will also use visual methods of representation, specifically drawings, so as to grasp children’s perceptions of money beyond words and in ways that stimulate children’s imagination. However, I address drawings not just as objects of representation, as discussed before, but rather as active ways of developing meaning, engaging with the entities that are illustrated and bringing them to life. This will allow me to offer a glimpse of children’s ways of knowing and relating to monetary exchanges, and how these are mediated by relationships with adults and other children as well as embedded within specific social, material and sensorial environments. While demonstrating that children’s actions and ways-of-knowing are informed by tangible material and economic constraints, I will also bring out how children have an impact on these and actively contribute to directing the course of social life towards certain directions.

**Matses people and money**

While their subsistence economy is still largely based on hunting, fishing and horticulture, the Matses are dependent on a series of manufactured goods that can only be purchased through money, including cartridges, fishing tools, gasoline, metal pots, clothes and pharmaceuticals. Most of these goods and money itself were introduced by the missionaries after contact in 1969. The missionaries initiated the Matses into monetary exchanges by purchasing handicraft products, such as bows and arrows, and then selling industrial items to them, for instance pharmaceutical drugs, clothes, knives and pots. The Matses became progressively reliant on manufactured goods, although money only started circulating in wider amounts and with increasing consistency in the 1990s. People in their thirties and forties reported to me that in their youth money was not so relevant in Matses villages, and whilst today there is more of it; money remains a scarce resource for Matses people.
Even though scarce in its physical forms of coins and paper notes, money is vividly present in Matses everyday life as an imagined presence and an element of concern. People and especially young Matses are very much preoccupied by how to access money and they incessantly refer to it in everyday speech and dialogues, which suggests the growing importance of cash in Matses social and imaginative life. To some extent, people’s incessant preoccupation with money and frequent references to it were amplified by my own presence in the field as a chido ushu, a ‘white woman’. In their verbal utterances, the Matses associate money to the chotac and especially the matses ushu, ‘white people’, to manufactured goods they lament not being able to afford (cum piucquid nidbëdec, ‘I have no money’), to urban environments, and to the possibility of travelling outside of Matses territory. All my precious goods (nice clothes, good shoes, cameras, sound recorder, big bags, flashlights) inspired questions and conversations about money, where I frequently heard the phrase min piucquid dadpen icquec, ‘you (me and white people) have plenty of money’. People, most of all children, would often point at my things asking ‘how much did you pay for this?’, or interrogate me about my salary, my rent in Europe, and the financial state of my parents and my friends. I argue, however, that the concern with money was not just restricted to my presence: I frequently heard people mentioning money when talking to each other or publicly in community meetings; with elders pointing out that ‘the Matses, today, are all about the money’.

Matses children’s encounters with physical money are, therefore, very unusual. Besides being extremely limited, money is most frequently touched and handled by a few wealthy adults. Children can only occasionally catch a glimpse of paper notes or coins, of which they have nothing but fleeting visual encounters; moreover, while they can only rarely see money, they almost never get to touch it. Children, however, often think about and imagine money, which can be evidenced by how frequently it emerges in their everyday dialogues and play activities. Children mention money a great deal; they ask questions about it, they refer to it at school and in play activities: thus, children turn money into something tangible in their imagination and dynamically transform it into an imagined presence.

Through the use of three short ethnographic vignettes I will consider how children engage with money through physical and imaginative modalities. These are not intended to be exceptional or dramatic, but are small-scale vignettes indicating a
variety of ordinary contexts and shared experiences in which children encounter money and learn to place value upon it. Namely, the vignettes consider how children: (i) experience money visually by watching it at a distance, and thus learn to place value on it and understand themselves as peripheral participants in a ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wegner 1991); (ii) represent money through speech and drawings, and by so doing make their knowledge anew; (iii) make money accessible by recreating and appropriating it in play activities. The vignettes also suggest that money is never understandable in its own terms, but only in relation to the wider context within which it circulates and is exchanged (Gilbert 2005): most explicitly in relation to the nonindigenous world, to manufactured goods made by the chotac, and to social status and opportunities related to the possession of money. With a view of ‘knowing’ as a way of being-with what is known (Heidegger 1962: 89; cf. Dreyfus 1991: 44-5), I suggest how in all the following instances, the children—whether they see money at a distance, represent it in forms of expression or appropriate it through collective play—actively engage with money while also making sense of themselves in relation to it.

Glimpsing, knowing and understanding money

Figure 65. Boys looking through the window. (Photograph by Paco, ten years old).
The photograph above, taken by Paco (ten years old), shows four boys (from eight to twelve years of age) standing outside the house of Carlos, the village chief and schoolteacher, and three of them staring through his window. Inside the house Carlos is doling out money to people who have worked for him and receiving payments from those who have debts. Carlos sits on a chair at his desk, using a calculator to count the money owed and manage the payments; he writes his sums on a notebook to keep the count and speaks out loud his calculations. On his desk, next to the notebook, is a little pile of paper notes and coins: a rare view in Matses communities. At the entrance of the room stands a queue of people who wait to receive or hand in their money; they approach Carlos one by one, and stand next to his chair as he hands out the money. Both men and women receive and hand over money; they all move slowly and speak quietly, creating a strange contrast with Carlos’s confident manners and loud tone. Children are not allowed in the room. Only babies, or children under four years old who come in with their mothers are allowed access. But whenever payments are managed, a little crew of children rush to Carlos’s house and stare through the window at the money being handled by the adults. The children cannot say a word; if they make comments, laugh or talk loud Carlos will yell at them and force them to leave. Thus the children stand in silence, looking through the window.

In addition to being scarce, money is not equally distributed. The circulation of State-currencies in the past decades has increased alongside emerging forms of social differentiation, with very few Matses having considerably more money than others and the majority of the population having none at all. Whereas most Matses people make money irregularly, for instance by selling handicrafts and horticultural products during their infrequent visits to nonindigenous settlements, the most lucrative type of job is teaching in school, which guarantees a fixed and generous salary from the State. Accordingly, schoolteachers are the richest individuals in their communities, although they represent a minimal percentage of society (averagely two or three per community): the majority of Matses people cannot even afford to buy clothes for their children or a modest motor for their canoe. This is demonstrated
by the privileged status of the village chief Carlos, his *chotac* wife Consuelo and their son Cristiano. As previously mentioned, in addition to both Carlos and his wife working as teachers, Carlos regularly sells genipap juice to a North-American artist and he also set up a small store in his house to sell manufactured goods to other villagers; consequently, he is by far the wealthiest man in the village. As people say, he has a lot of money and owns precious manufactured goods. In the photograph above, Carlos is managing his genipap juice business and paying off the people who have processed the juice for him, using a calculator to count the sums. The children watch in silence through the window.

Children have no direct access to monetary exchange: they cannot enter Carlos’s room as adults do, touch money or even speak around it or the adults will make them leave. Inside the room, which the children watch through the window, what is being displayed is not just money in its material forms, but also the material and social affordances opened up by money and embodied in action. Carlos is a unique Matses; there is no other house in the village in which money, and so much of it at once, could be publicly handed out or piled up. Furthermore, the room where Carlos manages the payments also hosts his small store, where he keeps a mixture of manufactured items to sell to the villagers. Thus, in the very same room where money materialises in front of the children’s astonished eyes, a plethora of goods—clothes, knives, matches, candles, shoes, pots, flashlights and more—stand heaped up on shelves, amassed on the floor and hung up with nails on the walls. This mass of things, so abundant and new, is a rare sight in Matses society; such items can only be accessed through money, and money is scarce. Inside Carlos’s room—embodied in notes and coins, in the profusion of expensive items, in his calculator and his ability to use it, as well as in the hierarchical bodily position of Carlos himself sitting on a chair with a queue of villagers standing at his door, including the children’s own parents—money becomes visible together with the social opportunities that the acquisition of money can open up.

At the same time, by looking through Carlos’s window the children do not just learn to understand money as a scarce and desirable resource, but they also develop shared understandings of themselves and others in relation to social inequalities and
differentiation. Most children know that only a few Matses men, mainly schoolteachers, possess money and abundant material goods. But as wealthy Matses are relatively few, almost all the children I worked with are learning to understand themselves as being ‘poor’, a word that finds no translation in Matses. The closest expression is *cum piucquid nidbëdec*, ‘I have no money’, which the children themselves often reported to me while lamenting that they have no clothes and cannot afford to buy any. In their dialogues the children often pointed out how their parents differ from Carlos, reasserting ‘we have no money’ (*cum piucquid nidbëdec*).

By looking through the window, therefore, the children learn to perceive themselves as largely excluded from certain social practices and particularly monetary exchanges. Here I follow Lave and Wegner’s (1991) theory of ‘situated learning’, which considers the learning process not as a cumulative acquisition of notions, but as active involvement in a community of participants. With the expression ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (*ibid*: 29-44), Lave and Wegner indicate the position of apprentices who are not fully allowed into the practices of a community but are moving, through the process of learning, towards a full participation in it. The image of Matses boys standing at Carlos’s window, not allowed in the room and yet able to watch the scene from outside, epitomises children’s position within the wider community of practice. The children stand in a position of twofold marginality and learn to acknowledge themselves as: (i) peripheral agents who do not have full access to their ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wegner 1991: 29), as opposed to the adults; and (ii) economically underprivileged, as they and their family cannot access the same opportunities that Carlos and his family can.

Children’s peripheral position in the monetary economy of the village, however, should not be mistaken for a passive positionality in the world of socio-economic activity. Children’s marginality is instead a dynamic way of being that defines them as agents in the world. While watching monetary exchange at a distance, children actively learn about money and learn to place value upon it, whereby learning is understood not as passive receiving of information but as a way of directly acting in and onto the world (Lave and Wegner 1991: 49-52). This does not mean that learning should be viewed through an optimistic lens or seen as a process of moral growth. To the contrary, here active learning implies that the children develop some self-perceptions of being unprivileged and having no money. Understanding oneself
as poor is a recently emerging phenomenon in Matses society. For as the elders recount, when they were children and the economy was based on hunting, gathering and horticulture there was no such thing as social differentiation based on unequal distribution of material wealth and money. Through Carlos’s window, therefore, the children face an alternative possibility of existence, that of being a wealthy person, and learn to place value on this as opposed to their own ways of being (namely, of being poor).

Claiming that children learn to desire and place value on money entails a theoretical and methodological dilemma, given by the impossibility of accessing directly the children’s own views. However, I can experience children’s own understandings insofar as they find a tangible expression in children’s reactions and interactions (as suggested by Michael Polanyi (1965) and Moran (2000: 235), mentioned above). Namely, judging by the way they act around it I can suggest how money stimulates children’s curiosity in a way that few other materials do. The photograph above evokes how children, who cannot access Carlos’s room, can nevertheless stare at money and watch the payments through the window, and they rush over Carlos’s house and crowd up whenever money materialises inside the room. By contrast, when an elder is making an arrow, or a woman is skinning a monkey (and even though both these activities are not everyday events) the children will not display the same enthusiasm or attempt to crowd around the old man or the woman. In addition, children often talk about the new manufactured goods they have seen in Carlos’s room and often try to sneak into his house so as to stare closer at his treasure. Money seems to have a special aura and effect on children; it powerfully draws their interest and fascinates them. This fascination, I argue, suggests how children place value on money, view it as a desirable resource and are aware of the power of money in terms of social status and opportunities.

One day a young man came back from the city having brought bread to sell. He set up a store selling the bread in his house, imitating Carlos, and all the children were inside, staring at it. I joined them, bringing a ten Nuevo Soles note (equivalent to about two British Pounds) to buy some bread and give it out to the children. As I entered the house with the paper note in my hand, all the children expressed their amazement, screaming ‘oh, look! Ten Soles!’ and asking sarcastically ‘so what, are
you going to buy all the bread?’. I spent the money and distributed bread to the kids, and we all left the house.

The visual incarnation of money in a ten Nuevo Soles note provoked a reaction of amazement within the children which suggests that beyond the material substance of the paper note there is a level of implicit understanding about money already present in children’s worldview. This understanding is made explicit in the moment the children see the paper note and gestures towards the way money becomes viewed as a desirable and scarce resource, thereby evoking the value that children place onto money in both its physical forms (the paper note) and referential implications (money understood as allowances, in this very case the power to buy and therefore eat bread). Once again, the children can only watch money at a distance. Furthermore, they learn about a different type of social divergence: that between Matses people and the matses ushu, white people, who are rich and can easily access a range of social opportunities which only money can open up (in this instance, the satisfaction of buying bread). As when watching Carlos through his window, the children who are astonished at my ten Nuevo Soles paper note face an alternative way of existing from a peripheral position, and understand themselves in terms of (im)possible ways of being: in this case, the impossibility of buying bread.

The children’s amazement and astonishment at seeing a ten Nuevo Soles paper note offers an example of how knowing can be understood as a dynamic process that cannot be separated by our engagement within the world that is known, and which resides in the very act of encountering what is already known and making knowledge anew. Paraphrasing Heidegger (1962: 88-9), knowing cannot be understood simply as a process of storing up notions or images in our mind and then matching these stored-up images with the actual things that we encounter in the world. Knowing is instead a situated activity that unfolds through situated, sensorial and emotional modalities. So the children had an understanding of money from previous encounters; but as they lay eyes upon the ten Nuevo Soles note, they dynamically ascribe meaning to the note and encounter it through emotional modalities (made manifest through their open reactions to it) while also ascribing situated meanings to it. The children already know what money is; but in that very moment of being-there in front of a paper note, they grasp money in terms of what money does in that particular instant (allows you to buy bread) and what money is in terms of its situated, specific
purpose (a scarce and appealing resource that satisfies specific desires, such as craving for bread). Therefore, when the children see the paper note in my hand or indeed money handed out in Carlos’s house, they do not implement a fixed cognitive understanding whereby the materiality of money is associated with a single idea or definition stored up in the ‘mind’. Instead, through the physical encounter and witnessing of money their knowledge is made anew, money becomes known in a particular moment and situated meanings are ascribed to it.

I argue that only by trying to understand these situated, emotional and sensorial encounters with money in children’s daily lives is it possible to understand the value that children attribute to money and the consequences that this entails. The following vignettes provide further examples.

**Ekphrastic money: physical absence, iconic suggestions**

Figure 66. Matses people travel to Colonia Angamos. (Drawing by Edgar, ten years old).
Edgar, ten years old, drew the above images. They show Matses people going to Colonia Angamos on their motorized canoes. People in the first drawing are simple Matses, they have no name and average-sized motors. The person in the second drawing has a name: he is Tito, a Matses chief who obtained a political position in the local governmental administration of Colonia Angamos and worked in the city, becoming rich and famous amongst all Matses. In the drawing Tito is travelling in his big canoe with a Jonson motor, a type of motor that is very expensive, very big and very noisy, so that when he approaches a village everybody knows he is arriving. The image of Tito and his Jonson-motorised canoe are a recurrent topic in children’s’ drawings. When I show Edgar’s drawing to other children in an image-elicitation task, and ask them whom the drawing represented, they all reply ‘that’s Tito, and that’s his Jonson motor!’ I ask the children how Tito could be able to afford a Jonson motor and they all reply to me: ‘Tito has loads of money. He made money in the city, when he was working in the government. So he bought himself a Jonson motor’.

With the expression ‘ekphrastic money’ I refer to the verbal presence of money in speech. ‘Ekphrasis’, coming from the Greek ek- (out) and phrazein (to speak, to point at), presupposes a dialectic association between language and the visual. I apply the term to define the representation of visual and sensorial understandings of
money as evoked through the use of language. The relation between knowing, language and visual expression is brought out through drawing, which I already discussed as itself a particular type of (visual) language and creative communication through which children express and actively engage with certain understandings and imaginaries.

Important manifestations of ekphrastic money are the frequent references to money in children’s dialogues as well as the recurrent questions that they asked me about it. Money is an ongoing element of concern for children, who typically understand it in relation to its material allowances (i.e. things one can buy with money, as for bread in the instance mentioned above) and social differentiation. When money emerges in children’s speech, it for the most part relates to what children desire but cannot have because they have no money; namely clothes, packaged foods such as cookies, flashlights to walk around at night, radios, pocketknives, and so forth. Several times as they saw things I had brought from home, such as my camera and sound recorder, the children asked me ‘how much did you pay for it?’, knowing that money is necessary to afford outside goods.

Money in its ekphrastic dimension, as a linguistic expression in speech or drawings that bears iconic suggestions, does not only evoke the material shapes of money itself, but also all the implications and prospects it is related to. As such, when Edgar and other children mention money in relation to Edgar’s drawings they do so referring to the figure of Tito, the chief of a different village who is wealthier than all other Matses men and can afford goods that other Matses people could not even consider. At the same time, while engaging with money through speech or drawings children develop and reassert awareness of their (im)possibilities of being in relation to what money affords. Edgar is ten years old. His father Clemente is a man in his mid-thirties and a very skilled hunter. Clemente has spent time in the city, working in Colonia Angamos as a builder (one of the irregular ways in which Matses men can make money) and by so doing he learned to speak Spanish while becoming familiar with the urban world of the chotac. He was later invited to take part as a councillor in the regional municipality of Colonia Angamos, whose jurisdiction Matses villages fall under. Regional elections for the mayor of Colonia Angamos are held every four years and Matses people provide the majority of votes for it; therefore, chotac candidates always look for Matses representatives to include in their slates so as to
gain more votes, as happened with Clemente. However, given their inexperience with nonindigenous working environments and the high level of corruption in local municipalities, the Matses involved in political activities, likely end up with financial problems and legal charges. Clemente is one instance of this: the politician who had offered him work had then tried to steal money from his salary. When Clemente sued him, the politician corrupted the court and managed to place a legal charge on Clemente, accusing him of theft. Clemente returned to his village with no money, no goods bought in the city, no job, no wealth and a legal charge for theft to deal with.

Edgar is aware that his father does not belong to the restricted elite of wealthy Matses. When he showed me his drawing of Tito driving his big boat, he reported to me that Tito is rich and has a Jonson motor. I asked Edgar whether his father owns a Jonson himself. He replied that he does not, because *piucquid nidbëdec*, ‘he has no money’. At the same time Edgar, and children in general, asked if my father has a big canoe with a Jonson motor, assuming that my father, a middle-aged white man, must be able to afford anything he would like. (No need to mention the children’s astonishment when I replied that no, my father does not have a motorised canoe, but instead drives a car, one of those they have only seen in Jean-Claude Van Damme’s movies). This instance reaffirms how Edgar and the other children learn to perceive themselves as poor by facing the affordances open to a few rich Matses, such as Carlos and Tito, and to white people, such as myself and my father as they imagine him, whereby people’s understandings of their being are developed by being in the world with others.

At the same time, children look at acquiring money as a valuable goal and imagine ways of pursuing monetary wealth in the future. One day while I was working in school with a group of children—all between six and twelve years of age, both boys and girls—and the children were busy drawing, I asked them ‘what would you like to do when you grow up?’. John, a ten-year-old boy, immediately replied ‘I want to make money’. Other boys agreed with him, and they all mentioned getting money as a life goal. I then asked the same question to the girls, and they all replied that they would work in their cultivated fields and go fishing. I asked them whether they would want to make money as well, but the girls looked confused and smiled. Raisa, twelve years old, replied that when she grows up ‘I want clothes’. When I asked her who would buy her clothes, she replied ‘my husband’. Children, therefore, already
have a gendered understanding of money in which money-making is perceived as primarily a male activity. When I asked the boys how they were planning to make money, they told me they would sell handicrafts to tourists (they specifically mentioned the name of a North-American tourist who had just visited their community). Young boys do not have a clear idea of how money can be made, but they all agree that money is a desirable resource and thus place a high value upon it within their future horizons.

This provides yet another example to how children’s perceptions and possibilities in the present are influencing their imaginations of and expectations for the future. The lack of money together with the desire for clothes, packaged food and manufactured goods is not just informing children’s self-perceptions as poor, but also encouraging them to turn money into a tangible presence within their future horizons. While boys are claiming that they want to make money when they grow up, girls seem to already be developing hopes and expectations that their husbands will have money and buy clothes for them.

**Tangible money in children’s play and imagination**

As I am walking back to my house, I notice a group of children running around on the village football pitch. There are probably ten boys and girls. I approach them to see what was going on. The children are laughing, screaming, running around and chasing each other. Each child is holding a piece of crumpled paper (as shown in the first image), and all the children are trying to steal another child’s paper and accumulate as much as they could. The game is physically tough: in order to steal paper the children are pulling at each other’s shirts and hair, grabbing another child’s arm, pushing each other and fighting. Sometimes a few children will throw another to the ground in a brutal manner (see second image) and fight with the child to steal his or her paper, while the assaulted child tries to resist and explodes in screams of laughter. As they are running around, trying to grab the other’s paper, the children scream in a random manner ‘chinerita, give me your chinerita!’ as well as ‘gastauaic, gastauaic’. Although the game is physically aggressive,
with children pulling and pushing each other savagely, the children, as in all their games, are laughing their heads off.

Figure 68. Children playing with pretend-money. (Photograph by the author).
Children, who are not allowed to touch money, find creative ways to appropriate it and make it accessible through imaginative capacities. The children photographed above were playing and screaming ‘chinerita, give me your chinerita!’ and ‘gastauaic, gastauaic!’. As I asked the children what chinerita meant they showed me their pieces of paper and said ‘this is chinerita!’ Eventually a child added ‘chinerita, chinero’, which I understood to be the way the children were pronouncing the Spanish word dinero, ‘money’, which they then transformed into chinerita. I also asked the children what gastauaic means, although I was already aware of its meaning. Gastauaic is the Matses word for ‘spending’ (i.e., spending money), adapted from the Spanish verb gastar, ‘to spend’. As money was introduced in Matses society only forty years ago and integrated into their practices only recently, there are no Matses words to translate most of the concepts and terminology related to the monetary economy: terms such as buying, selling, borrowing, credit, debits, tabs and so on are all borrowed from Spanish. In Matses buying is ‘comprauaic’ (adapted from Spanish comprar); selling is ‘vendeuaic’ (from Spanish); and spending is gastauaic.

When I asked the children what gastauaic meant nobody could answer my question, yet they used the word while playing; although unaware of its exact semantic meaning, the children know that gastauaic has to do with money. From this instance it seems that like ‘language is not essential for conceptual thought’ (Bloch 1991: 186), so open theorisation and full conceptual awareness are not necessary for everyday uses of language and immediate communication of shared meanings. As Bloch argues: ‘that there is no inevitable connexion between concepts and words is shown by the now well-established fact that concepts can and do exist independently of language’ (1991: 185); and this also reveals that language works at an often implicit and shared level of awareness.

So whereas the children might be not fully able to explain and theorise the meaning of the Spanish-derived words they use, their implicit uses of languages rely on some equally implicit but shared assumptions about money. This is also revealed by the play activity reported above, which is an instance of how children appropriate the meanings and practices of the adults through play. The game can only work as long as it relies on children’s tacit but shared agreement on the value they place on money and its implications. The meaning of money is here embodied in the crumpled paper
as pretend-money, which like adult-money is a scarce, desirable means that is not equally distributed and people aspire to accumulate as much as they can. Without such premises, the game would not work: it would have a different meaning, say, if instead of money the children were trying to steal each other’s plantains, or manioc (two of the most common and easy-to-access products in Matses environments). The aim of the game is accumulating money, and the children who end up having the most are the winners.

As researchers of childhood insisted, children’s play must be taken seriously as an activity through which children negotiate power relations and act out their shared understandings of the adult world (James 1998, Hirschfeld 2002, Corsaro and Elder 1990, Corsaro 2003). Here play reveals children’s implicit understandings about money while also representing an instance of how children appropriate the activities and materials of the adults, which are otherwise precluded to them, and reinvent them in a creative and amusing manner. Corsaro (2003; see also Corsaro and Elder 1990) has focused specifically on this aspect of play, suggesting that playing allows children to enter a realm of action that adults keep them away from and which often involves money and other forbidden objects of the adults. He reports the example of a group of Italian children playing in nursery school, holding a paper box that the teachers had prohibited them to use and wandering around with it (Corsaro 2003: 130-40). In their game the box is a bank, but an itinerant one: the children walk around shouting ‘here comes the bank!’ and using stones as pretend money. Through play, children appropriate adults’ information and prerogatives (the access to banks and money) while pushing the boundaries of accepted behaviour in an amusing way (using a forbidden paper box and wandering around). For Corsaro, the pretend bank is an instance of children ‘using legitimate resources in devious ways to get around rules and achieve personal or group needs and wants’ (ibid: 140).

According to this interpretation, playing reveals the forbidden objects towards which children’s desire is directed and as such it allows us to grasp (partially) the children’s understandings beyond words. Matses children use an adult-exclusive affordance (money and its language) and through play-pretence transform money, which is unaffordable and untouchable to them, into a tangible material. At the same time they reinvent money in a way that is interesting and amusing: for Matses children playing is not fun if it does not involve physically challenging activities (climbing up
trees, running, fighting, boxing, wrestling) so they recast money, and the concept of money as a scarce but desirable resource, in terms of physical, dynamic action. The same is true for the linguistic descriptions of money, which children also appropriate from adults’ contexts of use. Children cannot pronounce words related to money, such as *gastauaic*, in the original modality (that of economic exchange) wherein they hear these words pronounced by adults (as in ‘I spent a lot of money’). Instead, the children appropriate this language and adapt it creatively: although only having partial insight into the meaning of *gastauaic*, the children nevertheless know it is somehow related to money and they scream it while trying to grab each other’s crumpled paper. They also agree on the use of the neologism *chinerita*, invented by the children and which in play makes sense to them as synonymous of money, *piucquid*. The use of a foreign-sounding neologism such as *chinerita* hints at children’s tacit awareness that money comes from the outside and is largely a privilege of the chotac.

When the game ended I asked the children where they had seen money (*chinerita*) and heard the words *dinero* and *gastauaic*. They all replied ‘at Carlos’s house’. There is thus a contrast between the photograph of the boys staring through Carlos’s window, watching money at a distance and unable to get inside the house (if children enter Carlos’s room when payments are made they would be yelled at); and the image of children playing with crumpled paper and screaming money-related words, appropriating materials learned from the adults and engaging with them creatively in contexts of play.

**Conclusions**

As money is not understood in its own terms but always in relation to the material-social opportunities it affords, while grasping money and its implications children also make sense of their own ways of being in the world with (and in opposition to) other people and materials. I have explored how Matses children learn to become aware of social differences and make sense of their (im)possibilities of being in relation to what they can and cannot afford.
Money is extremely scarce in Matses villages and most people lament not having any. However, in the past years the frequency and relevance of monetary exchange has grown significantly, as people started embracing monetary practices and relying on manufactured goods that can only be purchased through money. Money seems thus to constitute a growing element of concern and preoccupation amongst Matses people. Children, I argue, although occupying a peripheral position within monetary exchange, are actively involved in the social process of developing money as valuable. As they learn to understand money as a desirable resource, children position it as a goal within their future horizons; as suggested by John and other boys who admitted their will to make money when they grow up or by Raisa and other girls who express desire for a husband that will buy them clothes. By so doing, the children actively direct the trajectories of Matses social life towards the monetary economy.

My aim in this chapter was to explore the meaning and value of money as these are developed and negotiated by children through everyday speech, play activities and drawings, and to suggest that an attention to children’s lived experiences and everyday modalities of knowing can open up fertile ground for understating how money becomes an object of concern and preoccupation in society. By doing so, I have tried to address children as agents, even though on a peripheral position, rather than passive recipients of adults decisions to be ‘socialised’ into their world (James et al.1998).

At the same time I have argued for a view of knowing and learning not as passive internalisation of information (Heidegger 1962) but rather as a way of acting directly in the world (Lave and Wegner 1991) in relation to and opposition with other people and material environments. In this view, children’s understandings of money are not ephemeral, abstract conceptions. They are instead situated, creative phenomena that are continuously negotiated through bodily action, the imagination and mutual exchanges between children in their material and sensorial surroundings.

Accordingly children’s ways of knowing and expressing knowledge of money, whether as physical action or imaginative engagement, are not a fixed recollection and expression of information stored inside one’s own consciousness, but instead a material presence that bears socio-political consequences. Children, who manifest a
tangible concern with money in their everyday activities, are active agents who direct the course of social life into certain directions: in this case, towards a shared understanding of money as valuable resource.
Chapter Seven. Learning to sit still: exploring Matses children’s affective engagement and multisensory experience in the classroom

Figure 69. The school building and houses in the village. (Photographs by the author).
The above images put into comparison the school building and people’s houses. The school building is a unique structure in the village, made of special materials that do not originate in the nearby forest but are produced in the city. The building is coloured with paint and stands on a large, rectangular base of concrete, which also functions as the floor on the inside. Its walls are made of manufactured, wooden boards precisely cut to standard measurements, as opposed to house-walls which are made of tree bark and are irregularly shaped. The school’s windows and door are also manufactured, whereas most Matses houses have only small vents on the wall for light and air and poorly constructed doors. Lastly, the school’s roof is of corrugated iron and as such it contrasts with the house roofs made of tree leaves weaved together.

The school materials are provided and sent to the village by the Peruvian Ministry of Education, together with a sum of money to remunerate a group of village men who work on renovating the building. The Matses admit that they would also like to build their houses with concrete, corrugated iron and manufactured doors, if only they could afford these expensive materials. In the forest village, the school constitutes a material presence of the urban world and its affordances, some of which appeal not only to children, but to adults as well.

I so far demonstrated that Matses children develop ways-of-knowing the nonindigenous world through modalities of desire and fascination, and that such desires are informing not just children’s understandings of who they are (for instance poor, black, and unable to travel outside Matses territory) but also of who they aspire to be in the future (wealthy, married to a chotac, able to travel to the city, and so forth). The school is supposed to provide the children with the skills and knowledge that will help them succeed in the urban world and, as such, should offer them the key to accomplish their aims. Most children, however, are not successful at schooling and even parents and teachers seem not to take schooling too seriously.

In this chapter I will explore children’s understandings of schooling and their sensorial, emotional and bodily experiences in the classroom. By placing these
within an analysis of knowing as a situated activity, I will seek to bring out how children imagine their future and perceive themselves in relation to the possibilities opened up (or closed off) by schooling. As I will show, schooling leaves the children largely unprepared with regards to the world of the chotac, and also creates new ways in which children learn to perceive themselves and their (im)possibilities of acting.

**The problems of indigenous schooling**

The anthropological literature concerning indigenous people and schooling has often emphasised the clashes between native ways-of-learning and the requirements of schooling as an externally imposed system of education. While indigenous children across the world are often encouraged to learn through doing and by actively participating in adult activities (Lancy 2010, 2012b; Rogoff et al. 2003; Anderson-Levitt 2005), in school they encounter radically different parameters of education, such as the obligation to sit in silent attention and be submissive to the authoritarian ways of schoolteachers. These clashes often result in the children’s inability to meet the requirements of school learning, which not only leads to educational failure, but also actively prevents children from developing the skills and knowledge of previous generations (Lancy 1996, 2010, 2012b; Ohmagari and Berkes 1997). Anderson-Levitt emphasised that the introduction of ‘western’ models of schooling across the world ‘has partially displaced other socialization patterns, including ... the learning of local knowledge through formal or informal apprenticeship to elders’ while also introducing ‘new conceptions of intelligence and maturity’ (2005: 999). An ethnographic example is offered by Lancy’s work on ‘the insidious effects of Western schooling’ amongst the Kpelle of Liberia, where formal education provides children with only a poor level of academic preparation while promoting ‘the abandonment of cultural routines that are essential in transmitting Kpelle culture to the next generation’ (1996: 198).

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20 Similar conclusions were advanced by British studies on the relations between school education and social class, specifically on the failure of working-class students in school (e.g. Willis 1977, Connolly 2004, Evans 2006). These suggested that schooling contradicts the ways of learning and being of working-class children outside the classroom and such clashes lead to educational underachievement or failure.
Authors concerned with schooling in Amazonia portrayed a similar picture. Hern suggested that formal schooling has a disruptive impact on Shipipo children of Peru, since it ‘keeps them from learning their environment and own culture’ but also provides them with only ‘minimal skills for life in town’ (1992: 36). Rival (1992, 1997, 2002) similarly documented the disruptive effects of schooling in Huaorani society, Ecuador, including the shifting competencies of children from active food providers to pupils maintained by their parents. Following the introduction of schooling, Huaorani children have to ‘work mentally all day long and consume the products of the labor of their parents, who … become responsible for the villages’ agricultural production’ (2002: 171) and as a result the children are not developing skills necessary for subsistence. Lastly, Aikman worked with Harakmbut people of Peru and suggested that ‘with increased participation in schooling, girls (and boys too) have less time to spend with their elders’ to learn from them (2002: 43, brackets in original). At the same time, the poor standards of their schools fail in teaching the children the national curriculum of education (ibid: 46-47).

In order to work towards mitigating some of these problems, anthropologists have advocated the need for bilingual and ‘intercultural’ programmes of education so as ‘to promote and respect the cultural practices and bodies of knowledge of both indigenous society and national society’ (Aikman 1996: 153). In Peruvian Amazonia, nonindigenous researchers including Gasché (1997, 2004), Aikman (2002) and Trapnell (2003) have campaigned for revised programmes of education by collaborating with indigenous people, regional governments and the non-governmental Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDESEP). As Aikman explains, their efforts were aimed to ‘ensure that indigenous students received a relevant, quality education which reinforced ... the recognition of rights to land and way of life’ (2002: 45; for a detailed account of AIDESEP educational campaigns, see Trapnell 2003). A central point of this approach is that indigenous people should have a key role in rethinking the schooling curricula so as to promote strategies of self-development and decide for the futures of their own children.

These politically committed approaches attempt to take indigenous viewpoints and perspectives seriously; however, these are mainly the perspectives of indigenous adults rather than those of children. For although much is said about what and how
they should learn, children are never directly interrogated as research respondents, and their own experiences and understandings remain largely overlooked. Furthermore, Amazonian literature has mainly addressed the school in relation to State policies or educational curricula, but has paid little attention to the classroom as a lived environment and to the students’ active involvement within such spaces. Whilst clearly lacking in Amazonian studies, some of these issues have been explored in different parts of the world, including India (Benei 2008), the United Kingdom (Connolly 2004, Evans 2006) and Zambia (Simpson 2003), and I attempt to engage with this body of work here, in order to enrich debates around Amazonian schooling practices.

This chapter attempts to contribute by proposing an ethnographically-grounded analysis that takes seriously children’s participation in school. However, moving from my own participation in school I seek to bring to life the lived experiences of children and adults, including myself, in the classroom environment. In so doing I propose a discussion on the meanings and outcomes of schooling in an Amazonian society which moves from children’s affective encounters and multisensorial engagement in the classroom. I will demonstrate that Matses schools largely fail in their aim of providing the children with basic skills such as reading, writing and performing mathematical tasks and helping them succeed in the nonindigenous world. But in order to fully understand this failure from children’s perspectives it is necessary to take into account: (i) the physical dimension of schooling, including how children negotiate or refuse to adapt their bodily actions to the ‘body’ of the classroom; and (ii) how schooling is predicated upon certain assumptions and understandings of the future that often differ from those of other everyday activities in Matses life.

The chapter moves from my own teaching activity in the village school, which I compare to the lessons of regular teachers. I will start with an ethnographic vignette that illustrates my first day of teaching in March 2010, at the beginning of the school year and after two initial months of fieldwork in the village.
The first day of teaching in a Matses school

‘Inés, come down!!! Children, sit back on your chairs!!! Matias, stop it!!!’
I yell at them, but the children ignore me altogether. They are laughing, screaming out loud, moving frantically and, apparently, having a great time. I tell them (quietly, then more loudly, and eventually yelling) to return to their seats and quieten down. My knowledge of Matses is not very good yet, so I yell at the children in a mix of Matses and Spanish. But the children speak no Spanish and they just keep smiling at me while I tell them off. The chaos culminates in the children starting to climb up a mass of cement sacks piled up next to the classroom wall, so as to reach the classroom’s window and escape.

Inés, a seven-year-old girl, is one of the first children to reach the peak of the concrete-sacks mountain, overtaking the boys, with a naughty grin on her face. Matias, a seven-year-old boy, crawls up behind her and does not even look at me when I ask him to go back to his seat. The classroom is out of control and, clearly, I have no power to restore order. The schoolteacher left me here, asking me to ‘make the children draw’, and trusting me to keep them quiet and at task. I feel confused and lost, unable to undertake the role of authoritarian educator.

In the past few days (classes in the village have only started a week ago) I have seen the children in school with their regular teacher and I was struck by how extraordinarily well behaved, quiet, disciplined and obedient they looked. But now, in the turmoil of the classroom, I realise that in my presence the children are behaving with the same verve, dynamism and energy that they manifest when playing outside the school: screaming, running, jumping, moving and talking restlessly.

The situation changes drastically when Julio, a Matses man in his sixties, enters the classroom. Julio is one of the best hunters in the village. He can barely speak or understand Spanish, but I visit his house often, since I am familiar with his teenage daughters. Julio, probably attracted by the
joyful shouting coming from the classroom, walks in and stares at the children. As soon as they notice him, the children shut up and stand still.

Julio starts haranguing them in an aggressive tone, pointing his finger at them and yelling in a fast and vigorous manner. I understand that he is threatening the children with frog poison, the intoxicating secretion that Matses people apply ritually onto their bodies, and which induces nausea, a pounding headache, vomiting and diarrhoea. Receiving frog poison is painful and young Matses are terrifed by the threat of it.

The classroom has turned silent at Julio’s threats. The children stand speechless, lowering their heads and avoiding eye contact with him. Inés has dropped her naughty grin and now keeps her mouth shut. One by one the children descend the cement sacks and return to their desks, quietly. Matias, who is Julio’s grandchild, looks intimidated and quickly sits back on his chair. I thank Julio, who nods to me muttering something in Matses and leaves the classroom. The children and I carry on drawing for a little while, until I let them free and they run out, shouting and laughing again.

The vignette renders my difficulties in teaching, which I started two months after my arrival and carried on for a few months throughout fieldwork. Schools are currently established in every Matses village; they are State-run and follow the national curriculum of education (Fleck 2003: 35). Classes are run from March to December, with a three-week break in July. The Matses had no experience of formal education until after 1969, when they made contact with SIL missionaries who started teaching them how to read, write, perform basic mathematics and refer to calendar time. The Matses were easily persuaded by the importance of such skills which they understood as necessary to count money (itself introduced by the missionaries) and buy all the precious manufactured goods that the missionaries were bringing in. Schools started being State-run in 1983, when the Peruvian Ministry of Education established the first school in Matses territory with resolución directoral (i.e. under
Village schools currently provide education from kindergarten (entered at three years of age) up to secondary school (which should be completed at eighteen years of age).

The children I worked with were in primary school, which according to the curriculum should be entered at six and completed at twelve years of age. Primary school is divided into two big groups: level one, which is made up of the first, second and third grade of school, with children aged six to ten approximately; and level two, which includes the fourth to sixth grade of school, with children aged eight to seventeen. Although the first level of primary school should be completed by eight years of age, classes are heterogeneous in terms of age because many children do not attend school regularly and have to repeat years. In Peruvian school, each single grade of education receives classes separately and has a different teacher. But in Matses villages, which are relatively small in size, children are grouped up together as I described. This means that all children in level one attend classes together in the morning, taught by Carlos; and all the children from level two attend classes in the afternoon, which are taught by Carlos’s wife Consuelo. Carlos and Consuelo are the only two teachers in the village. Schoolteachers are mainly native Matses men (although the number of women seems to be increasing) who take a university course in Iquitos, and they teach almost exclusively in Matses.

Carlos facilitated my teaching activity and we agreed for me to work with his first-level primary school students as *profesora de dibujo*, ‘art teacher’. This was facilitated by the plethora of materials I had brought with me: felt-tip pens, coloured pencils, rubbers, paper sheets, notebooks and crêpe paper, which were given out generously and (as described in Chapter Five) were used as part of creative research methodologies, alongside the digital cameras and sound-recorder used for filming and photographic projects with the children. This is very unusual, since schoolteachers only distribute a few notebooks and very small amounts of stationery. The classroom to some extent revealed itself to be a useful environment for research, one where I could face all my young respondents together in a bounded space and apply creative methodologies such as drawing, group interviews, sound recording

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21 Matses schools are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education’s regional headquarters in Iquitos, the capital of Loreto department. On State policies of bilingual and Indigenous education in Peruvian Amazonia, see Gasché (1997) and Trapnell (2003).
and filming. Dealing with the children was nevertheless a struggle, as it became clear from my very first day of teaching.

When I was in the classroom the children enacted the same hyper-dynamic, lively, energetic and cuididi or trouble-making ways-of-being that they normally display when playing outside school, where, as mentioned earlier, they take great pleasure in running around, climbing up trees, swimming in the river, wrestling, chasing each other, and so forth. The classroom was dominated by a chaotic atmosphere and instead of sitting quietly and carrying out the tasks I assigned, the children would never stop moving, jumping around, shouting, throwing pencils in the air, climbing up their desks, laughing loud and being mischievous to me and to each other. They stole coloured pencils from one another, older children mistreated younger ones, boys and girls insulted each other, and boys engaged in wrestling actions. When I was in school the noise in my classes was so loud that everybody in the village could hear the children at a distance and guess I was replacing the teacher. As I started improving speaking Matses I could manage to better explain my tasks and stimulate children’s participation, but this did not stop the children from acting mischievously. My attempts to keep the classroom quiet, which varied from gentle warnings to yelling, were futile. The children ignored my scolding and would never sit down or concentrate on the tasks I assigned for too long, and on two occasions I had to deal with children crying after a quarrel with a peer.

When Carlos was teaching, the children changed radically and engaged in different bodily postures, facial expressions and different kinds of oral interactions. Their bodies seemed to shrink; they sat down quietly and did not move frantically, shout or laugh loudly. If addressed by the teacher a child would reply in a soft voice, lowering their head down and avoiding eye contact with him. Carlos assured me that, in his classes, children never cry and rarely attempt to be rowdy. With him, the children have to align their bodily postures and movements to the material environment of the classroom—constrained to their desks and forced to face the teacher.

Their different bodily behaviours with me vis-à-vis their teacher suggest how children develop different ways of knowing and encountering the classroom environment. The children confessed to me that they are dacuëden, ‘scared of’ their teacher. The Matses term dacuëdën indicates feelings of fear, terror, embarrassment,
intimidation, shyness or a mixture of all. Hunters may *dacuédën* jaguars, as in ‘be scared of’. Such feelings denote most of the children’s affective encounters in school and become manifest in the absence of noise, the children’s contained bodily postures, the heads facing down, the eyes avoiding the teacher’s look, and the hesitation in movements and gestures.

When I was teaching the classroom turned instead into a playground or a *childscape*, which I earlier defined as the children’s capacity to turn the material environment (whether the water of the river or the concrete and desks of the classroom) into a playful and amusing space. By suggesting that knowing unfolds through emotional modalities, here I emphasise that when I was teaching, the children engaged with the classroom through a ‘playing-and-laughing’ mood (where playing and laughing are both translated as *mamënec*) in a manner more similar to how they encounter the river than the classroom with their regular teacher.

I sometimes asked the children why they were not intimidated by me in the same way they are of other adults and teachers. They usually laughed and replied: ‘because you are good’. On one occasion I asked Sheila, Julio’s sixteen-year-old daughter, why the children were not shy around me or frightened by my threats. I pointed out to Sheila that I am still an adult and children are usually intimidated when adults yell or threaten them. When I asked this question, Sheila and I were with a crowd of young children, in a small house that Matses people had built for me in my latest part of fieldwork. Some of the children were drawing on the floor, which was covered in pieces of paper, and throwing coloured pencils at each other; others were running around, laughing and shouting; and a few children were climbing up the wall to walk on the ceiling’s wooden beams, in spite of my warnings to come down. Sheila looked around and replied, pointing at the children: ‘*mibi mamënshunanec*’, literally ‘because you make them play/laugh’ or ‘because you play/laugh with them’.

Sheila’s answer put into words the mood that characterised most of my encounters with the children: cheerful, recreational, fun, amusing. While in the morning I was teaching, outside school I engaged in the children’s own activities in the peer-group and shared their loud and dynamic ways of interacting. I played in the river with them, engaged in pretend-fight games, chatted with the children, engaged in verbal confrontations, and so forth. These activities were made more amusing by the goods
I had brought from outside, of which children had little or no experience prior to my arrival: cameras, water guns, inflatable toys to play in the water, crêpe paper, drawing material, marbles, and more. The time I spent with the children was mostly based on mamënec, playing and laughing, like Sheila pointed out, whereby I gradually became familiar with children’s everyday lifeworlds and shared activities far beyond the access usually allowed to adults.

This affective relationship extended into the classroom space. The children felt free to engage in verbal confrontations with me, ignore my commands and participate (or not) in the tasks I assigned as they pleased. With time, the children started referring to me with the Spanish term amiga, ‘friend’, whereas I referred to them as cum bacuëbo, ‘my children’. The term amigo/a, ‘friend’, is one of the few Spanish words that children know and finds no literal translation in Matses language. Every Matses person could potentially address any other by a kinship term and Matses children have often told me that they ‘have no friends’. Young Matses are aware that the chotac spend time with people they are not related to and call them ‘friends’, and they are very fascinated by this concept. My presence, being a chotac myself, always stimulated many questions about friendship and children often asked about my friends: if I have any, what they are like, what we do together, and so forth. By calling me amiga, the children found a place for me in their lifeworld and found a way to address my role as something in between a regular adult and a playing companion.

Matses adults, including Carlos, do not spend time with children in the same way as I did and never take part in peer group activities and playing. Adults often asked what I found so interesting in children and why I would want to spend time with them—not in a concerned or protective manner, but simply puzzled by my unusual interest. Regular teachers, therefore, are not addressed as friends but as authoritarian adults who stimulate different feelings in their pupils. The children admit that when the teacher addresses them in school they feel nattiec, ‘unable to do anything’ with embarrassment while blushing, feeling uncomfortably hot and unable to move. But school is also boring and the children often tend to yawn, stretch their arms, look around and get distracted, showing little interest in participating.
Negotiating the classroom space

The children’s moods in school are not given but continuously negotiated, and they can only be understood in relation to the classroom’s material environment, the situated uses that children and teachers make of it, and the tools they have at their disposal. The children’s playing-and-laughing mood when I was teaching was allowed by our familiarity as playing companions outside school, but also stimulated by the plethora of materials that I distributed so as to keep the children interested and enthusiastic. On the other hand, Matses teachers purposely stimulate children’s shyness and quietness by using different types of tools, namely verbal threats, mild forms of corporal punishments and frog poison, which adults recognise as ethically sound and necessary to keep the pupils quiet. When the children look distracted, misbehave and ignore their commands, the teachers will shout and threaten to hit them or even call in an elder who will force them to receive frog poison. The children’s reaction is generally to immediately quieten down and behave, especially if the teacher mentions frog poison as Julio demonstrated on my first day of teaching.

The Matses regularly apply threats and mild corporal punishment outside school in order to deal with misbehaving children, and these forms of discipline extend to the classroom with the approval of Matses parents. Several adults told me that teachers should yell at the children if they misbehave and regularly force them to take frog poison, which is painful and frightening but is thought to help them grow stronger and more willing to work. According to the adults I also should have threatened the children or they would have never listened to me and kept being mischievous. After initial concerns and reticence I eventually surrendered and decided to try out threats, worn out by the children’s wild ways in the classroom. On a very hot morning when the children were being louder than usual and the noise added to the intolerable heat, feeling exhausted I yelled out: ‘bacuëbo, mibi cuesembi’ (children, I’ll will beat you up). The classroom turned silent. They all stopped moving and shouting, and looked at me puzzled. I wondered what would happen now. But within an instant the children burst out laughing at my words that nobody took seriously, and they returned to their rowdy activities.

22 Here ‘mild corporal punishment’ refers to forms of hitting, slapping or ear-pulling that are not aimed at hurting the children but rather at scaring them off and show that an adult’s threats are for real.
The chaos in the classroom was intensified by a few older boys, who attracted by the materials and creative methods I used, often joined my classes and made them particularly hectic. These included Nelson, Sebastian and Diego who are renowned in the village for being great troublemakers and always tough to deal with. On one occasion Nelson joined the classroom and started trying to annoy me, in the midst of the chaos and uproar of the other children. I was standing at the teacher’s desk, collecting and tidying up the children’s drawings. Nelson stood in front of me, holding his head high in an upright and confident posture, as usual. ‘I am not scared of you, Camilla’, he kept saying in a confrontational mood ‘I am cuididi, mischievous. I’m not scared of you’. Since none of my attempts to shut him up had an effect on him, I eventually started ignoring his words and kept sorting my drawings. As Nelson was facing me and turning his back to the classroom entrance, he did not notice that Carlos had entered the classroom and was walking towards us, silently. Hearing his provocations, Carlos frowned and yelled at him, ‘Nelson, what are you saying?’ The boy jumped on his feet and turned around, facing Carlos. His posture changed drastically: he shrunk his shoulders, remained silent and became paralysed with fear. For a few moments he hesitated in front of Carlos, who was standing in between him and the door, but he eventually managed to sneak off to the side and left the school running. Carlos pulled a big smile and greeted me as usual.

Matses parents explained that my threats had no effects on the children because they were not scared of me, and encouraged me to hit them so as to prove my real intentions. Damita, twenty-three years old and mother of four children, advised me to slap my students so as to prove that my threats were serious. At my bemused reaction, Damita replied ‘not too hard’, and hit gently the back of my head to give a demonstration of an appropriate slap. Ramona, a woman in her thirties with five children, showed to me the spiky leaf of a stinging-nettle plant, which induces a dreadful itch if touched. Adults and especially elderly people threaten misbehaving children with this type of leaf and occasionally hit them with it. Ramona placed a tiny piece of the leaf on my finger to prove how painful it feels and she recommended taking the leaf to school to threaten, but also occasionally hit the children with it even if not too hard.

The parents illustrated the efficacy of corporal punishment by recounting an episode that happened in school, shortly before my arrival in the field. For a few days in a...
row the children had been lazy, not bringing to school the homework that the teacher assigned. Carlos warned the children that he would have to call Julio and asked him to put frog poison onto them, but the children did not believe him and kept being lazy with their homework. But a few days later, Julio did show up at the classroom door. He walked into the classroom holding a burning stick in one hand and frog poison in the other. The children were petrified. ‘Who is being lazy?’ asked Julio. ‘Everyone’, replied Carlos. One by one, Julio took the students by the arm and applied poison onto their skin. Carlos stood at the door, making sure that no child could escape. Soon all the children, the youngest ones being six years old, were feeling dizzy and nauseous. Carlos let them out, so that they could vomit outside. A few of them even passed out for a while. In the days following this episode, all the children brought their homework to class. This episode was recounted to me several times by children and adults: children told me that they felt very scared when this happened, whereas the adults recounted this event laughing.

Here I suggest that the Matses understand and perform corporal punishment not as a form of violence to punish or hurt the children, but rather as a practice with pedagogical aims as reported for different societies across the world (Montgomery 2009: 159-165; Morton 1996: 197; Lancy 2008: 178). Corporal punishment is specifically thought to help the children in developing bodily strength, dynamism and a will to work hard, which are crucial in carrying out vital activities such as fishing, swimming or canoeing. The enforcement of receiving frog poison is considered especially useful and beneficial, since the poison is thought to stimulate strength and remove laziness and thus increase the children’s capacity for daily subsistence tasks and survival. Therefore, outside school the children are educated towards dynamism and movement, whereby they develop vital skills through bodily practice and direct engagement in adult activities. But the children also develop a taste for this dynamism, to the point that the activities they enjoy the most are those that test their strength and physical ability.

Learning in school is instead predicated upon radically different parameters and modalities of developing knowledge and skills, as well as upon different possibilities of acting and moving. Here the body in movement is not crucial to survival and pushed to the extreme for self-satisfaction, but restrained so as to allow for intellectual work and to maintain order. Punishment and threats are still aimed at
teaching the children, but they limit dynamism rather than promoting it. If children are threatened by adults outside school or chased to be punished they will run as fast as they can, whereas in school they have to keep still and obey the teacher’s commands. The school can thus be defined as an institutional space aimed at creating what Foucault addressed as ‘docile bodies’ that are ‘constructed from discourses which inform the physical structure of the institution and the practices within it’ (Simpson 2003:4). The physical space of the classroom and the authoritarian teaching styles are aimed precisely at restraining movement while promoting quietness and stillness. The children are forced to sit down in silence, facing the teacher, with their legs trapped under the small desks and unable to turn around or they will be yelled at. The classroom is not as sensorially rewarding as other daily environments such as the river. It is instead extremely boring and frightening, as the children describe it themselves, and as such it discourages young Matses from participation.

Authors have nonetheless warned against portraying students as passively submitted to the teacher’s authority or as ‘being trapped’ within the school discourse (Simpson *ibid*, see also Collins 2009) and to instead acknowledge how they actively challenge the school order and find strategies to subvert it. When I was teaching, the children’s capacity for resisting schooling translated into a subversion of the classroom’s conventional structure through unusual behaviours and creative uses of space, with the children running around or climbing up the desks instead of sitting down, but also shouting and laughing loudly as opposed to remaining silent. With their regular teachers, the children resist schooling by not making much effort in the tasks, by refusing to carry out homework and by often missing school and going to play in the river instead. Matses parents openly admit that children should not skip classes, but they are not too vocal or concerned about it in practice. Whereas children are heavily criticised or hit if they misbehave or refuse to help with the housework, they are not punished as much for missing school to play in the river.

The refusal of schooling contributes to the children’s failure in developing the skills that formal education is supposed to equip them with. By age ten a child is expected to read and write proficiently as well as be able to perform basic mathematical tasks, but this is almost never the case. While teaching I noticed that many children aged ten could barely write their name and although there are individual differences, in
some cases even children aged fourteen could not read and write properly, let alone perform mathematical tasks. This led me to openly question: what is the point of schooling at all for Matses children and adults? And what should it be?

The value of schooling and children’s future horizons

When asked about why schooling is necessary, young children up to about ten years of age simply replied anquiadshun, ‘to learn’. Older children and adults gave more elaborate and recurrent answers: school is necessary to learn basic skills such as reading, writing and doing maths which will help the children deal with the chotac and do business with them when they are older. Adults explained that if the children cannot read or count, the chotac will cheat and take advantage of them. For instance Andres, a thirty-two-year-old father of four, once told me: ‘if my children will sell plantains to the chotac they must know how much they weigh. If they don’t know that this sack of plantains weighs two kilos, the chotac will tell them: this is one kilo! and give them less money for it. Or if the chotac cheat and under-pay them my children will not realise it, if they don’t know how to count money’. In this view, schooling is supposed to make available the possibilities opened up by the nonindigenous world and which young Matses attend to through desire and yearning: travelling to the city, dealing with the chotac, making money and purchasing nice manufactured goods.

As documented for other Amerindians, here ‘schooling is considered to be a key means of bringing about modernisation and economic development’ and which will help the children ‘later in their pursuit of livelihoods’ (Aikman 2002: 41). Matses children and adults address schooling as a fundamental part of children’s duties that will help them achieve better opportunities in the future, specifically with regards to entering the nonindigenous society and the market economy. However, the necessity of attending school and studying is not perceived with the same intensity as other daily activities in Matses life, such as fishing or cultivating the field. This is partly because, I argue, schooling and everyday subsistence activities are predicated upon radically different understandings and experiences of time and the future. Whereas most Matses activities bring results in an immediate or very near future, for instance...
if the children are hungry they can go fishing and generally access food within a short time, the outcomes of schooling are deferred in a distant future as in no other Matses activity. The children will not enter the market economy or travel to the city until much later in their lives, and this can partially explain why children and adults admit that schooling is important but are not overly concerned about it. If a family has gasoline, they will most likely travel to the Yaquerana River and spend a few days there fishing even if this causes children to miss school, and the children will be much happier with it.

Of course schooling is not a failure for everyone, and I described the case of Cristiano as an example. There are also differences between individual children, who achieve different results and levels of education in their own ways, and between different families who value the necessity of schooling to different degrees. But in general, I have never seen any child become enthusiastic about studying, to the degree that they do about playing—or even canoeing or fishing—in the river, and I never saw any parent reproaching their child for missing school, in the same manner as they would if a child did not help with housework.  

The best possible prospect that schooling can open is that of becoming a schoolteacher, the most lucrative type of job for a Matses person. Matses parents admit hoping that their children will become teachers and make a lot of money. Children, on the other hand, never express their wish to become schoolteachers and even those who achieve good results and attend classes more regularly do not seem to perceive teaching as a feasible, concrete opportunity for the future. Working as a schoolteacher requires completing secondary school in the village and then specialising in Iquitos and, therefore, requires the availability of money for covering studying and living expenses. Students are either funded through scholarships from the Ministry of Education or privately by their parents. Scholarships are very few and only granted to students with good grades, which most of them do not obtain (to my knowledge, no one from the village where I worked received one). Accordingly, most students who specialise to teach are funded by their parents and since the costs

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23 A relevant exception in the village is the family of schoolteachers Consuelo and Carlos and their son Cristiano, whose primary duty is studying rather than contributing to the family economy. Here I will not focus on Cristiano’s case partly because Cristiano attends secondary school and never participated in my classes; and partly because I discussed it thoroughly in Chapter Two.
are so high, the only people who can afford to maintain their children in Iquitos are schoolteachers themselves. In some cases schoolteachers pay for their children to specialise in Iquitos even if they are not talented students. While I was in the field the news spread about the seventeen-year-old son of a schoolteacher in a nearby village who is well-known and mocked for not being very bright, but was nonetheless supported by his father to specialise as a teacher in Iquitos just because, as people say, he has plenty of money and can afford to do so.

Matses children are thus becoming aware that the benefits of school education cannot be fully achieved if not supported through economic wealth, and since most of them perceive themselves as poor, the children seem not to expect much from schooling. Although all children express desire to make money, not even the most talented students seem to understand teaching as a possible means towards this goal. One of these talented students is Diego, who in spite of his confrontational attitude, lack of effort and pleasure in causing trouble, can read, write and count much better than his peers. The teachers told me that Diego is quick and clever, and it is a shame that he often misbehaves and does not really apply himself to schooling. During one of my classes I once asked Diego whether he wants to work as a teacher in the future. He replied he does not and he wants instead to make money through ‘coca’, i.e. trafficking cocaine. When I asked him what is coca he replied: ‘borrachoec’, a Matses term adapted from the Spanish verb emborracharse, ‘to get drunk’. Although, to my knowledge, no Matses person has ever tried cocaine or been involved in drug trafficking, the young ones learned about it from the chotac in Colonia Angamos. They know that drugs are dangerous and forbidden and they cause similar effects to drinking alcohol, which a few young men tried but described as painful and unpleasant. When I replied that drug dealers are dangerous people, Diego shrugged and said back: ‘I’m not scared’. Diego’s words might be read as one of his provocations and displays of naughtiness, but they also suggest an underlying awareness of having little resources to succeed in the world of chotac and that in order to succeed, he will have to find alternative ways of making money.

On a different occasion, when again I asked the children what they want to do for work when they grow up, seven-year-old Robin shouted: ‘as an airplane pilot!’ All the other children burst out laughing as if he had said the funniest and most absurd of things, and Robin laughed with them. Although I also laughed, I found it peculiar
that a seven-year-old boy’s wish to be a pilot should be taken as such an absurdity. Girls never gave similar answers but admitted that when they grow up they want to have ‘plenty of clothes’, which indicates both being wealthy and having a rich husband, although none of them expressed desire of continuing their studies in Iquitos.

If on one side children are yearning for the nonindigenous world and admitting that schooling would help them accomplish their aims, on the other they are actively rejecting schooling and realising that they will have to find different strategies in the nonindigenous world. This is partly because schooling is boring and frightening, and unlike other daily activities, it does not bring any immediate results; and partly because most children are acknowledging that even if they wanted to, they will not have the economic possibilities to continue their studies any further after secondary school, and many do not even complete the latter.

For the Matses as well as other indigenous peoples across the world, the introduction of State schooling seems to have ‘made more people aware of how “poor” they were, of how many wondrous things they lacked the cash to purchase’ (Lancy 1996: 199) while also failing to provide the children with sufficient academic preparation. As such, schooling leaves the children with scarce skills and resources for entering the world of the chotac. I will conclude by reporting the ethnographic case of a young man who failed to complete secondary school and searched for better opportunities of life in the nonindigenous society. The story shows what is likely to happen to young Matses who access the world of chotac with scarce competencies, little experience and no economic means.

**Chasing the nonindigenous dream**

*Steven is a young man in his early twenties and like his peers he plays football, works in his cultivated field, fishes and very occasionally goes hunting. In addition, Steven knows the nonindigenous world relatively well, having spent a good deal of time there. Steven joined the army when he was eighteen or so, as an increasing number of young Matses men have started doing. Joining the army is seen as the easiest solution*
for young men who are eager to explore the world outside of Matses territory but speak no Spanish, have no money and no skill to access such a world in any other way. Their hopes and aspirations are to make money, spend time in the city and ideally marry a chotac woman. But in most cases they fail on all counts. Steven returned to his village with no money, having seen little except for Iquitos and Colonia Angamos, and without a wife. That faraway world of opportunities and unique affordances left him with nothing much but one thing: Steven reportedly contracted HIV while enlisted in the army.

Once in the city, young men are generally unable to seduce chotac women and are too shy to even talk to them. They instead have no problem sleeping with prostitutes, who are legally authorised workers in Peru. As such, prostitutes undergo strict medical tests by law and if found to carry a sexually transmitted infection, have to immediately give up their job. In this case, some keep working illegally at a much lower rate. Matses men are attracted by the lower rates and have no clear understanding of the consequences of sexually transmitted infections; hence they are more likely to sleep with illegal prostitutes than others. Many cases are being reported of young men who contracted HIV in the city, and especially those who joined the army like Steven. Since soldiers are required to undergo periodic blood tests, results are subsequently shared with fellow Matses who also joined the army, and once back to the village, the news is quickly spread amongst others.

Upon returning to the village Steven took a younger woman as his wife, Alba, who is younger than him and did not want Steven but was exchanged by her brother against her will. Alba gave birth while I was in the field, but she also threatened to leave Steven and marry another man and she was said to have a lover. The Matses have very liberal sexual habits, and in most cases cheating is not addressed as a major offence or a shameful act. Although aware of contraceptive methods, using condoms is not even considered as an option for the Matses, who laughed and made jokes whenever I questioned them about it. If Steven has really contracted HIV in the city, the results could be potentially
disastrous for several people, who could not possibly access any medicines or medical care in their forest-villages.

Steven’s story reveals how urban perils are encountered once the city transforms from an enchanting and unreachable elsewhere into a tangible physical experience. Steven never received any explicit ‘health education’; he was never schooled on the importance of contraception or warned about illegal prostitutes, and he does not fully know what HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are or what they entail. Matses people have only recently started experiencing the urban world and are still largely unfamiliar with it. Steven’s parents spent their youth in the forest and are very much inexperienced with regards to nonindigenous places and practices, and are nowhere near as interested in the nonindigenous world as young people are.

Schooling should prepare the children to succeed in the nonindigenous world, but leaves them with little choices other than joining the army for men or working as housekeepers in Colonia Angamos for girls. As I discussed, young Matses women who choose to work as housekeepers are also hoping to make money so as to buy new clothes and ideally marry a wealthy chotac man, but most of them end up being underpaid and occasionally sleeping with men who treat them badly and leave them as they became pregnant. Like Steven, these young women were forced to return to their village with no money and having gained little benefit from the nonindigenous world, instead becoming single mothers and weighing heavily on their elderly parents for survival.

Conclusions

In this chapter I tried to bring out Matses children’s affective and sensorial experiences in the classroom environment, and argued that these must be taken in to account in any analysis of schooling that takes seriously children’s perspectives. I presented a contrast in children’s experiences with me vis-à-vis their regular teacher so as to argue that children largely refuse schooling because this is boring and frightening, and they actively resist the teacher’s authority by refusing to commit to
education. This refusal is partly given by a contrast between children’s informal learning outside school as it is predicated upon dynamism, movement and direct engagement in adult activities, and schooling that instead requires the children to sit still and be quiet, discouraging them from participation. Children and adults value school insofar as it should help the children succeed in the nonindigenous world, but I showed that they do not perceive the necessity of schooling with the same intensity as they value physical labour and skills necessary to perform subsistence activities; which, unlike schooling, bring their gains in a much closer future.

Schooling is, therefore, largely ineffective for the Matses as it is for other indigenous peoples across the world (Lancy 1996, 2012b; Montgomery 2009: 152-154) and in Amazonia, which is why authors have argued for the need to reform school curricula so that they will help ensure ‘the maintenance of indigenous identity in a multicultural society’ (Aikman 1996: 153).

Although I agree that the current model of schooling is largely ineffective for Matses people and should be reformed. I argue, however, that if educational programmes should teach the national curriculum while respecting Matses own ways-of-knowing the world, these should take into account: (i) not just the content of the curricula but the whole method of teaching, which should be redesigned so as to stimulate children’s participation; and (ii) children’s voices, desires and aspirations for the future. I argue that the teaching style should be reformed in order to respect the importance that Matses people place on the body and the satisfaction that children take in extreme movement and hyper-dynamic actions. The whole body of the school, intended as the material space of the classroom, could be transformed or used creatively so as to allow children’s movement and dynamism while stimulating their active participation in the educational project. In this way a solution might be found to the dysfunctional and largely unsatisfactory results of formal education, without challenging Matses ways-of-knowing and relating to the world.

At the same, the children’s will to engage with the nonindigenous world in the future should be taken seriously and the children should be taught about the dangers they might face within it. In my view, programmes of health and sex education should be of paramount importance. Although I tried to discuss some of these issues with the children, I realised that I was largely unprepared on how to approach the matter of
explaining HIV and AIDS, how to have protected intercourse, how to behave in the nonindigenous world, and so forth. The possibility remains open for further studies and research, and I hope to return to the field with better preparation and resources to engage in collaborative projects with Matses children, parents and teachers; in order to both help the children prepare for the nonindigenous world and also stimulate their participation and enthusiasm for formal learning.
Conclusions: a glance towards children’s future horizons

In this thesis I tried to offer a sense of the multiple possibilities of being and knowing the world as a Matses child. By doing so, I have intended to contribute to child-centred theories (James 1993, James and Prout 1997, James et al. 1998, Corsaro 2003, Goodwin 2006), by recognising children as dynamic agents capable of developing original knowledge and addressing them as primary research respondents. Since most child-centred research has been carried out in European or North American contexts (Corsaro 2011: 308), and often in school classrooms (Goodwin 2006: 3), this thesis has offered a contribution to this discourse by proposing an in-depth analysis of indigenous Matses children. The thesis has especially filled a gap in Amazonian anthropology, where despite the considerable demographic percentage of children in indigenous populations, childhood has mainly been addressed from the perspective of adults (even if indigenous adults) and without bringing out children’s own perspectives and lived experiences.

More specifically, my aim was to explore children’s relations with and contribution to ongoing processes of social transformation in Matses society by showing how children engage with and attend to the world wherein they dwell. The Matses—who until the end of the 1960s avoided navigable watercourses, lived itinerantly in the forest and had only violent contact with other peoples—are now residing along and moving closer to major rivers, using money and manufactured goods, travelling to nonindigenous settlements, studying in school, and so forth. I demonstrated that Matses children are not just caught in this process of change but are actively contributing to it. As I argued, this level of social agency is not attained through children having access to the same means of power as the adults in society (Solberg 1997) and therefore being able to make decisions alongside them; for example, Matses children do not openly suggest to their elders that they should dwell on the rivers, fish rather than hunt, and stop using medical plants. Rather, it is through developing new ways of knowing and attending to the world compared to older generations, that the children are making a change and having an impact upon the wider society.
I therefore found it necessary to frame my approach within a theory of knowing, which helped me understand how children become agents of transformation by coming to know the world in original ways. Drawing upon Heidegger (1962, Dreyfus 1991) and from recent theories that emphasise knowing as a situated activity which always unfolds in-the-world (Harris 2007, Marchand 2010, Ingold 2011, Downey 2011), I attempted to grasp the situated modalities through which children come to know themselves and the social environments wherein they dwell. I suggested that inherent to the situated, emotional, sensorial modalities of knowing are certain possibilities for social transformation, insofar as by coming to know the world in certain ways the children also develop a taste and preference for some aspects of it rather than others. For example, by coming to know the river through modalities of mamènec, ‘playing and laughing’, and by imagining the nonindigenous world at a distance through feelings of fascination and yearning, the children are developing affective relationships with these parts of the world while leaving others aside, first and foremost the forest. Matses children are actively refusing to learn about medical plants, hunting and trekking, thereby leaving behind forest skills, knowledge and practices. The elders, on the other hand, also engage with the river for transport and subsistence, but they do not enjoy it as much as the forest and still trek every day.

By dividing the thesis into three parts, I tried to bring out different modalities of knowing and types of action through which children make sense of the world and themselves and, in so doing, contribute to steering the course of social life towards certain directions. In Part I, I focussed on how children develop ways-of-knowing through action and movement in different types of environments, namely the river and the household. Chapter One considered ongoing processes of environmental transformation in Matses society, namely the movement from inland forest settings to riverine dwellings and activities, and children’s active participation in this. I discussed how children are developing affective relationships with the river environment but are not so keen on spending time in the forest, unlike the elders who also resort to the river for subsistence but prefer the forest to the river. By refusing to engage with the forest, children are therefore setting up the conditions for a future that is largely based on riverine practices, whilst simultaneously closing off the possibility of a social economy and lifestyle based on hunting and forest expertise. In Chapter Two, I showed how this process of environmental transformation is
intertwined with political and economic changes at the level of the household, and how such changes have an impact on shifting experiences and understandings of childhood. By comparing twelve-year-old Diego and Cristiano and their different families, I showed multiple possibilities of growing up as a boy within the household. Children are to some extent conforming to their parents’ expectations (for instance Diego is becoming a skilled hard-worker and Cristiano a good student) but also negotiating these and developing different forms of desire (whereas Diego aspires to become wealthy and marry a chotac, Cristiano has to negotiate his privileges so as to be accepted by his peers). The children’s struggles in negotiating between their desire and the material constraints of the present often result in a personal and inter-relational struggle, as I elaborated in more depth in the second part of the thesis.

I therefore started introducing a different type of knowing, which implies taking awareness of one’s impossibilities and constraints in relation to the multiple opportunities available in the world. This led me to Part II, which focussed on knowing as a process of existential questioning and self-interpreting. I argued that although anthropologists have often focused on what it means to be a person in cultural terms, for instance what it means to be an indigenous Amazonian (e.g. Overing and Passes 2000, McCallum 2001), less attention has been paid to what it means to be caught up in individual processes of questioning: i.e., what it means to be ‘me’ as opposed to be ‘you’. In Chapter Three I explored this line of inquiry in relation to Matses women and girls, showing how new models of womanhood coming from the outside push young women to question themselves and their possibilities of acting. By including a reflexive account of my positionality as a nonindigenous woman, I emphasised how Matses young women and girls created a discourse around our different bodies and recognised these as material expressions of our different ways of being a woman. Drawing on Moore (1994) and Butler (1990), I showed that young women are at once reproducing socially established forms of womanhood, while also setting up the ground for different possibilities in the future by developing new forms of desire. For example, girls are refusing to be tattooed, expressing the wish to marry chotac men and to have plenty of clothes, and so forth.

In Chapter Four, I applied my inquiry into questioning and self-knowing to the analysis of boys’ peer groups. I referred to theories of childhood identities (James 1993, Goodwin 2006) and social roles (Nadel 1969) so as to explore how boys affirm
and negotiate their positions in the peer group, but I also expanded on such theories by attempting to propose a more fluid model of being and by looking at the process of questioning through which the boys come to know themselves in specific circumstances vis-à-vis others. In particular, I looked at verbal attacks and confrontations as tools through which boys influence each other’s bodily experiences and define their ways of being in relation to their peers. By developing a mischievous and fearless attitude the boys are to some extent developing the *dadambo*, ‘truly manly’ forms of masculinity established amongst their elders. However, they are also developing understandings and expectations of boyhood and manhood, whereby the men they aspire to become are not just like their elders but also wealthy, have plenty of manufactured goods, are married to *chotac* women, and travel outside of Matses territory, and so forth.

Accordingly, some of the most relevant changes enacted by young Matses are informed by their knowledge of and fascination for the nonindigenous world, which constituted the main objective of Part III. This considered how children engage with the practices, materials and places related to the world of the *chotac*, and how they come to inhabit such a world at a distance through modalities of fascination and yearning. However, most children realise that certain opportunities will not be open or easily accessible to them, which has a tangible impact on their self-perceptions and experiences in the present. In Chapter Five, I focussed on how children develop ways-of-knowing the nonindigenous world through the imagination and proposed to access children’s imagining by looking at children’s drawings. I argued that drawing is not just a form of representation but a ‘being impelled towards’ (Taussig 2011: xii) the nonindigenous world and a way of engaging with actions and places that are not directly available in the children’s immediate surroundings. However, the inaccessibility of the nonindigenous world informs the children of their constraints and impossibilities of action, first and foremost their being poor and unable to travel outside because they have no money. Chapter Six focussed specifically on children’s encounters with and understandings of money, which is always scarce in the village and yet vividly present in children’s imagination and play activities. Children often refer to money in the material absence of it, and when they *do* encounter cash they express unordinary enthusiasm towards it, which they show for few other items. Therefore, children’s actions and reactions around money and their fascination with
it reveal that money constitutes a crucial element of concern and desire, whereby making and having money is one of children’s first and foremost aspirations for the future, although the children realise that making money is a difficult objective. Finally, in Chapter Seven I discussed children’s experiences of schooling, which is precisely supposed to help young Matses to attain better possibilities in the future, including making money and succeeding in the world of the chotac. However, schooling fails to do so and leaves the children with few resources and little preparation for the indigenous world. The chapter aimed at expanding on theories of schooling in Amazonia by taking into account children’s lived experiences and emotional involvement in the classroom, which have been largely overlooked in the regional literature.

In the thesis I tried to put forward a view of social change that takes into account not just an intergenerational comparison, in which transformation is identified by comparing the present to the past or the knowledge of children to that of the elders. I also pointed out the future as being constitutive of social transformation, and attempted to look at children’s future horizons in ethnographic terms. This means that while recognising that the future is unpredictable and open-ended, I considered how children develop certain desires and aspiration and act towards them within the political and economic constraints of the present, thereby setting up tangible conditions for certain future possibilities. An example is offered by twelve-year-old Diego, who is developing a dadambo masculine attitude like his father Raúl, the elderly hunter, but also the desire to become a different type of man to his father: wealthy, married to a chotac woman and able to travel to nonindigenous settlements. This desire is informing Diego’s ways of acting and being in the present, for instance when he opened a store with his older brother Mateo trying to follow the steps of Carlos, the village chief. But it is also influencing Diego’s ways-of-knowing himself, including the realisation that he is not as privileged as Carlos, the village chief, or his son Cristiano, and that he will have to struggle in order to attain his aims. A different example is that of Dolores, six years old, who is to some extent enacting socially established understandings of womanhood by performing the same daily acts as her mother, such as washing plates and cleaning the house; yet at the same time, Dolores expresses a wish to marry a chotac man and have plenty of clothes, unlike her
mother, who was herself left by a Matses man for a chotac woman as soon as she became pregnant with Dolores.

Accordingly, change is understood not just as sudden rupture in the flow of events, but rather as inherent to the flow of life which is itself always ongoing and transforming. This means that life always stretches from and is influenced by the past, as epitomised by Matses children dealing with a landscape in which fish have become scarce following environmental overexploitation of past generations, or by girls and boys performing daily acts that to some extent reproduce their elders’ understandings of gender. But human beings are always moving ‘beyond’ (Rapport 2013: 3) and life is projected towards future horizons. In the thesis I tried to explore these future horizons by looking at children’s desire and expectations, but I also recognise that the future is open-ended and life opens up for multiple possibilities.

As a way of concluding the thesis, I will try to offer a glimpse of some of these multiple, possible directions that Matses life is taking according to children’s perception and imagination. My aim is to conclude by suggesting that Matses children’s experiences are not solely fixed and limited to those I witnessed and shared during fieldwork, but always moving towards new horizons. In order to do so, I will present additional ethnographic material that I collected at the beginning of 2012, when I returned to the field one year after my first period of fieldwork to carry out two additional months of research. During this time I carried out a series of filmed interviews that I will term ‘The Future Project’, in which I asked the children how they imagine their lives as adults. The interviews were carried out with ten girls aged six to twelve and fifteen boys aged six to fifteen, most of whom had been my main respondents during the main body of research. I interviewed and filmed each child individually for about twelve minutes at a time. I asked the children to describe their imagined adulthoods at three age-stages, namely when they will be: (i) in their twenties-early thirties; (ii) in their forties; and (iii) in old age (sixty years old onwards). In the following section I will discuss their answers.
The Future Project: a glimpse towards children’s future horizons

Figure 70. Still frames from the filmed interviews (I).
Although interviewed individually, the children’s answers presented significant similarities and, as such, they revealed some level of agreement in their views and expectations for the future but also presented similarities in their experiences and self-perceptions in the present. Most girls told me that when they grow up they would like to:

- Contribute to the household economy by fishing and cultivating the field, like their mothers and grandmothers. None of them mentioned accompanying their husbands to the forest on hunting treks, like elderly women do now.
- Marry a man who has money and will buy them clothes. When I asked them how their husbands will make money, some replied that they will do this by logging, and many of them added selling horticultural products to the chotac in Colonia Angamos as another potential source of revenue.
- Make money themselves by ‘washing clothes’ for the chotac in Colonia Angamos, i.e. working as housekeepers for nonindigenous families, which an increasing number of teenage girls have started doing in recent years. Girls who do so hope to earn money to buy clothes and also hope to meet a chotac man who will marry them. However, most girls who worked for chotac families in Colonia Angamos ended up being underpaid, did not save any money or buy any clothes, and in some cases slept with chotac men who left them as they became pregnant. They therefore returned to the village with no money, no clothes and as single mothers, having a baby to feed and relying on their parents for help.
- Most girls openly expressed that in spite of their wishes, when they are older they will not have much money and not many clothes.

Most boys replied that when they grow up, they intend/wish to:

- Contribute to the household by fishing and cultivating their fields. Boys only mentioned hunting when I asked them how they imagine themselves when they are in old age, literally ‘like their grandfather’, which led more to a description of what their grandfathers do. When I asked them whether they have started walking through the forest now, the children replied that they have not because they do not want to.
• Travel to Colonia Angamos, Iquitos and Lima, the capital of Peru.
• Marry a chotac woman.
• Make money by selling horticultural products to the chotac in Colonia Angamos, but also by selling manufactured goods in the village like Carlos, the village chief does.
• Buy packaged food and manufactured goods like machetes, knives and flashlights in Colonia Angamos.
• Finally, almost every boy replied that they will work as loggers, which several adult men have done in recent years, including some of the boys’ fathers, who have worked in different regions of Peruvian Amazonia, (although when I was in the village, no one was away from the village logging). Most men describe logging as an exhausting and unsatisfying experience, for which they had to travel to a different area of the Amazon, a long distance away from their village, and labour night and day cutting timber with a chainsaw and processing the wood on the spot. They worked for a chotac man who paid them very little and required that they woke up at five and start working at six in the morning, when the air is freezing cold, working right through until six in the evening. Men who experienced logging say they will never do it again. But the boys openly wish to do so and I heard that several teenage boys in recent years have left secondary school to work as loggers in different regions of the Amazon, although I never witnessed any case of it during fieldwork.
• Most boys admitted that when they grow up, they will not have any money and probably will not be able to travel outside of Matses territory as they wish.

The nonindigenous world seems to occupy a paramount place in children’s future horizons. The names of Colonia Angamos, Iquitos and even Lima, the capital of Peru, kept emerging in the children’s answers, almost as if implying that life is moving downriver towards the chotac yacno, places where the chotac live. At the same time, their answers bring out an underlying sense of how the children perceive themselves, especially their awareness of being poor and having few resources to access the nonindigenous world they desire so much. None of the children mentioned teaching in school as a possibility of working to make money, reaffirming that they do not
really perceive schooling as a tangible means to pursue much better possibilities of life. Many of them mentioned instead selling horticultural products to the chotac in Colonia Angamos, as adults occasionally do, but also selling manufactured goods in the village similarly to how Carlos does (although those who tried, like Diego and his brother Mateo, were not successful at it).

I was particularly struck by the girls’ desire to work for nonindigenous families, since the girls are aware that girls who tried to do so were largely unsuccessful. I was even more surprised by the boys’ wish to work in logging, which I was hearing for the first time and left me with a rather bitter feeling. The boys know that logging is exhausting and un.rewarding, but they seem aware that in order to make money, they will likely not have much better possibilities. Most of the boys, unlike Cristiano and other children of schoolteachers, do not have wealthy families and realise that they will not have much support if they decided to travel to and look for better opportunities in the city.24

The children’s answers, however, cannot be read as objective and fixed plans or as accurate predictions of what will happen as the children grow up. The future is largely undetermined, and perhaps the girls will never wash clothes for nonindigenous families and the boys will never work in logging, and they will have prosperous futures instead. Their answers should nevertheless be taken seriously, for at least two reasons: firstly, because I have shown that children contribute to social change by desiring to be different from older generations, hence their desires and expectations for the future should be taken seriously; and secondly, because the answers also show what aspects of the world the children are most interested in—for example clothes, money and nonindigenous settlements—and how such desires influence their experiences and self-perceptions in the present.

24 When I returned to the village in 2012, I discovered that Cristiano had left the village and now lived permanently in a nearby village with his older cousins. I met Cristiano in Iquitos, on my way out from the village and back to Europe, since he was spending time in the city with his parents. He and his mother explained to me that Cristiano moved away because the boys in the village are too ‘childish’ and still enjoy playing like little children, whereas Cristiano is more mature and he did not enjoy their company anymore. However, the first questions that Cristiano asked me upon meeting me in Iquitos were ‘Have you seen Diego?’ and ‘How is he??’. I could not help but wonder whether Cristiano left because he did not enjoy the company of his peers, as he said, or because handling their continuous attacks and being unable to respond had become unbearable for him.
Figure 71. Still frames from filmed interviews (II).
What is emerging is that children are developing, paraphrasing Ferguson (1999), ‘expectations of non-indigenousness’, defined as the desire to achieve the opportunities opened up by the market economy and the nonindigenous world, which for Matses children are new clothes, packaged food, money, journeys to the city, marrying a chotac, and so forth. At the same time, the children are developing a sense of what Ferguson terms ‘abjection’ (ibid: 236), that is, a feeling of being left out, unprivileged and having limited possibilities in a world that can have the potential to open up for better livelihoods, but only for certain people.

Young Matses are recognising themselves as black, poor and unprivileged, and they put this into words themselves. Children and teenagers admit that in spite of their aspirations and desires for the future, such as marrying a nonindigenous person and travelling, they already know that piucquid nidbëdec, they will ‘not have any money’ when they are older. This self-perception is to some extent the product of the particular social and political-economic structure of the world wherein Matses children are growing up, a world that is not confined to the forest as it was for their grandparents but in which the city, money, concrete, clothes, electric light and television have become important parts of the structure of the universe. This does not mean that children’s ways-of-knowing are fully determined by social structure and that children are unable to challenge and resist it; but it is simply to claim that children’s ways-of-knowing cannot be understood unless in relation to the political-economic possibilities and constraints of the present, as well as the future horizons that the present conditions of life open up or close off.

For example, the children’s perception of ‘having no money’ is only made possible by being part of a wider society where resources (such as clothes) are accessed through monetary transactions. But the desire to make money, adding to the perceived lack of any better resource to attain this aim, leads the children to envisage logging and washing clothes for the chotac as feasible possibilities, which at the same time reinforces their awareness of being unprivileged. As elderly Matses recount, there was no such thing as piucquid nidbëdec, ‘having no money’ when they were children and lived itinerantly through hunting, gathering and basic-horticulture, owning no manufactured goods apart from old machetes and shotguns they stole through raiding and shared with each other and, therefore, knew no individual differentiations based on material and monetary wealth. The children are growing up
in a radically different world and have to make sense of it with the resources available at their disposal.

The ‘Future Project’ was intended to pose the basis for future research when the children grow up. As such, these conclusions are meant to offer not just a finish line but also a starting point that can open up new horizons of work while rendering the dynamic flux of life. The filmed interviews are intended to form an archive that hopefully will allow me to return to the field and carry out a comparative study, so as to investigate whether children’s aspirations and assumptions about the future will be attained and what directions their lives will have effectively taken. However, I also hope to engage in collaborative projects so as to help the children find better strategies to obtain their aims. This can be done, I argue, by respecting children’s desire and enthusiasm for change and especially for the world and materials of the chotac. For as six-year-old Paloma put it, cemento bunquioebi: the children ‘love concrete’.


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